

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | Nov/Dec 2020

Comfort and joy

Be family to persecuted
children this Christmas





 OpenDoors

STANDING STRONG LIVE

Prayer without borders

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL * THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER, 8PM

Join us for a special Christmas edition of our monthly webinar. Christmas may look different for many of us this year, and staying connected to our family is especially important. Let's take this opportunity to learn from and pray with our persecuted family, who have learnt how to celebrate in the midst of challenge. **Find out more and register today at opendoorsuk.org**

REGISTER TODAY

JOIN US FOR IDOP ONLINE

LET'S UNITE IN PRAYER FOR OUR PERSECUTED FAMILY!

Sunday 15 November | 7.30-8.30PM

Join us for a special online prayer event to mark this year's **International Day of Prayer (IDOP)** for the persecuted church.

This year, Open Doors is joining together with our friends at CSW, Release International and Evangelical Alliance for an evening of prayer and worship, featuring the latest news and prayer requests from China, India and Nigeria. Don't miss out on this unique opportunity to unite together in prayer for our persecuted family.

To register go to opendoorsuk.org/idop



What's your legacy?

Give a lifetime of hope to your persecuted family by prayerfully including a gift to Open Doors in your Will.

Find out more and order a pack at opendoorsuk.org/legacy or phone 01993 460015.

"Whatever you did for one of my brothers or sisters... you did for me." MATTHEW 25:40

Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide.

Open Doors supplies Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, livelihood support and advocacy services. We also mobilise the church in the UK and Ireland to serve Christians living under religious persecution.

If you have any questions about the work of Open Doors, or would like to reprint any of the articles in this magazine, please do get in touch.

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Cover image:

Celebrations at the 2019 Christmas gathering for Christian families from a Muslim background, run by Open Doors partners in Bangladesh.

Letter from Henrietta

A season of hope

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength" ISAIAH 40:31

Planning for Christmas will be different and difficult for many of us this year. We may not be able to gather with our families in the way we are used to. It's even more difficult for families like Daniela's and Sebastián's in Colombia, facing another year without their father. He was killed because of his faith – yet they are still holding on to God. You can read about this amazing family on p6.

In the same article, you'll meet Bijli in Bangladesh. Last year, I visited a youth camp being run by Open Doors partners in Bangladesh. The joy these young people felt in being able to worship, talk about Jesus and read the Bible openly was explosive and I found it truly inspiring. The camp gave them the courage to return home and continue to practise their faith in secret - they could be killed if discovered. Thank you so much for continuing to offer encouragement to thousands of believers in many countries, through your gifts and prayers.

And that thanks goes much broader, too. To say 2020 has been challenging for the world is an understatement – but Open Doors supporters have not forgotten the persecuted church. This year, your support – for North Korean believers, for persecuted women, for Christians who are denied food and aid during the pandemic – has been remarkable, and has kept hope alive for so many of our worldwide family – you can read more on p12. Thank you so much.

As we look to 2021, there is one event I am particularly excited to highlight. On 13 January, we will be launching the Open Doors World Watch List in Parliament. It's a vital opportunity for representatives of the persecuted church to share their experiences first-hand, and to raise awareness of the escalating persecution faced by our global family – particularly how Covid-19 and lockdown have given persecutors yet another weapon. Please do invite your MP to attend.

And thank you again for your generosity and prayerful support for your persecuted church family during this difficult year. I pray that, whatever your circumstances, you and your loved ones have a healthy and joyful Christmas.

With love from all of us at Open Doors,



Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

World Watch News

ERITREA 27 Christians released on bail

Twenty-seven Christians imprisoned in Eritrea because of their faith have been released on bail by the country's government.

The 19 men and eight women left prison in September. They had been detained without trial for various terms between four and 16 years.

"The cycle of arrest and release is not anything new," said an Open Doors

spokesperson. "But what makes this unusual is the fact that those released have been inside for quite long."

However, release was granted only after the Christians handed over property documents and signed 'some kind of declaration that usually includes a promise to cease religious activities', the spokesperson said.

Most of the Christians

were sent back into indefinite national service. This can often be in inhumane conditions and without enough salary to cover essentials.

Please pray that each released Christian will be protected from future persecution, and that all Christians still imprisoned in Eritrea will know with renewed assurance the reality of God's presence with them.

ETHIOPIA

Iris and Muluken rise from remorse and rejection with your support

Poverty and persecution have presented Iris and Muluken – a couple with two children from Ethiopia – with unimaginably difficult choices. At the height of desperation, they made a decision they have come to deeply regret. But thanks to your support, they are now rising again.

The couple come from an Orthodox Church background but are now Protestants. In rural Ethiopian villages, renouncing traditional beliefs can be costly – the couple have struggled for work.

When local Muslims guaranteed work and land if the couple converted to Islam, they agreed out of desperation – only to realise the promises were empty.

The couple have since boldly returned to Jesus. Life remains hard, and Covid-19 has worsened matters. There is no work, and whilst government aid is available, the authorities



Muluken, Iris and their sons

will not register their name – a familiar story for Christians across the world.

Open Doors partners have assisted Iris and Muluken in covering urgent expenses, including rent and food. More than 500 Christian families in Ethiopia who have

"You have reached out to us at the time of our brokenness"

struggled with intensified poverty due to Covid-19 have received support.

"You have reached out to us at the time of our brokenness," Muluken says. "I am very grateful."

INDIA

New bill to regulate NGOs is passed

On 28 September, the Indian government passed the Foreign Contribution Regulations Act, regulating how NGOs can work in the country.

The Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) believes the bill will make it virtually impossible for NGOs to function.

An Open Doors local partner in India, Heena*, shared, "Considering that most of the Christian organisations and churches are registered as NGOs, this new bill is targeted especially at Christian mission organisations which had been operating for a long time in coalition with international churches and organisations, and often get their funding from outside India."

Open Doors works through local church partners in India, and is therefore not directly affected. However, our partners continue to need our prayers given the new level of scrutiny this bill creates.

*Name changed for security reasons

60 challenges for 60 years!

Swimming at least 60 strokes in the sea off Southend, doing the Great North Run, a live reading of all chapters and verses in the Bible with 60 in them...

This is a sample of the 60 activities Adrian is completing to mark his 60th birthday and raise funds for the persecuted church.

"Yes, it is something that personally I will benefit from, learn from and be able to look back on," Adrian explains. "But it's much more about walking alongside those in North Korea, in Nigeria, in India and in many other places where they will never have the privileges and opportunities that I have."

He adds, "It seems quite daunting at times, but to know that it will make a real, practical difference to the lives of persecuted Christians makes it all worthwhile."

You can follow Adrian's journey at www.adrian60.com.



Adrian, walking The Pilgrim's Way from Winchester to Canterbury

IRAN

Little girl to be taken away from Christian parents

The Iranian authorities are taking two-year-old Lydia away from her adoptive parents, Maryam and Sam, because they are Christians and the biological mother is Muslim.

According to Article 18, despite the ruling judge initially acknowledging that Lydia felt an 'intense emotional attachment' to her adoptive parents, and there was 'zero chance' another family will be found for her because of her health, he later ruled against the couple. Lydia is now likely to grow up in an orphanage.

Maryam and Sam, who are unable to have a biological child of their own, have also been banned from employment within their specialist professions, whilst



Lydia, Sam and Maryam

Sam has been sentenced to a year's imprisonment and two years' internal exile – all because of house church activities deemed 'propaganda against the state'. They are appealing the decisions.

Please pray that Lydia will be able to stay with her adoptive parents, and Maryam and Sam's appeals will be successful.

UNITED KINGDOM

Prime Minister promises new Special Envoy 'in due course'

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said that a new Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief 'will be announced in due course', following Rehman Chishti's resignation from the role in September.

Chishti tirelessly advocated on the issue of freedom of religion or belief, including implementing or progressing 17 of the 22 recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the UK Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians.

The Prime Minister's

announcement means we can expect the UK government to find a replacement for what we know is a crucial and significant role.

Thank you for your prayers and to everyone who wrote to their MP about this matter. Please pray that a new appointment is in place for the World Watch List launch on Wednesday 13 January.

For the latest news and stories of courageous faith visit opendoorsuk.org

GIVE THE GIFT OF **comfort & joy** THIS CHRISTMAS

Christmas is likely to look different for all of us this year. It's still first and foremost a time to remember the astonishing miracle of God coming to the world as Jesus – but you might have to celebrate without seeing those you love the most. Perhaps you've even lost somebody you love this year, and it's the first Christmas without them.

Daniela from Colombia is only 12, and she already knows how that feels. In August 2019, her father, Plinio, was murdered because of his faith.

PASTOR PLINIO

You might not think of Colombia as a place where Christians face a great deal of persecution. And

it's true that about 95 per cent of the country are Christians. But Colombia is also home to violent and powerful criminal groups and drug cartels. These gangs often recruit young Colombians to work for them by dazzling them with promises of a better life – if that doesn't work, they take children by force. And they



IMAGE Daniela (12) and her brother Sebastián (5).

don't like it when Christians try to stop them.

Plinio was a pastor in La Caucana. It's a dangerous part of Colombia. But Plinio knew that it was part of his ministry to his community to speak out against organised crime and help prevent young people being recruited. Daniela's mother, Alba, remembers the day that her husband paid the ultimate price for this ministry.

"I was working in the kitchen with some other women," Alba says. "Plinio had gone to church to pray. When he came back, he sat and watched the news. It was a very peaceful day." She pauses. "Suddenly I heard gunshots." Plinio was shot twice. Murdered in his own home.

"WHEN I THINK ABOUT MY DAD"

Daniela and her five-year-old brother Sebastián are among the 100 million+ persecuted Christians worldwide who are under the age of 18. In some ways, Daniela is like many girls her age. "I like to draw. I feel inspired when I look at the sky and the trees," she says. "When I grow up, I want to be an illustrator."

She's happy to share these things about her life, but when

she's asked what she finds most difficult, it's obviously harder to speak: "When I think about..." Daniela pauses, and her eyes fill with tears. She tries again. "When I think about my dad..." That's all she is able to say.

Alba has seen how much the tragic event has affected her children: "My son is very expressive. He cries and often says things like, 'I don't want anything to happen to you, because I'd be left alone.' On the other hand, Daniela is less expressive. She cries a little but doesn't express her feelings."

Children are often the forgotten victims of persecution. Even if they aren't directly targeted, the impact of having your parents threatened, attacked or even killed can last for many years. And times like Christmas can really bring home the loss.

"Christmas for me is being with my family," says Daniela, echoing how many of us feel. "I believe that celebrating the birth of Jesus is a moment of joy! Usually we celebrate together as a family; we'll cook and eat together. I also remember a Christmas that we spent with the church brothers and our family, simply enjoying and talking."

REPLACING ISOLATION WITH JOY

In 2019, Open Doors partners were able to take Daniela, Sebastián and Alba to a children's centre, run thanks to your support (see box). They could have a break, safe from danger and away from sadness and isolation, finding comfort

"I felt good for the first time in a long time"

DANIELA, COLOMBIA

and joy as they celebrated Christmas with other believers. When Daniela and her family arrived, all the staff and children were waiting outside with a big welcome home banner.

"I didn't expect so many people," remembers Daniela. "It made me feel so good. I was really happy to be surrounded by so many loving people."

They spent four weeks there. "I felt good for the first time in a long time," says Daniela. "I met many children and learned that, although there are difficult times in life, there are also times when Jesus helps us to overcome through people and prayer."

In other words, Daniela had



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Daniela and her family reading the Christmas story; Daniela and her family are given a warm welcome to the Colombia Children's Centre. The banner says 'Welcome home, your presence enriches our joy'; Daniela draws a star for Christmas. When she grows up, she wants to be an illustrator.

What happens at the Colombia Children's Centre?

The Children's Centre is a safe place for persecuted Colombian Christians to find shelter – either as permanent residents or, as with Daniela and her family, for a short period. It protects vulnerable children from being recruited by drug cartels – many of whom target pastors' children for this, as a warning or punishment. At the centre, children are given psychological and pastoral support, as well as education, community and fun!

During the pandemic, the Children's Centre has adapted to make sure activities are safe, and Open Doors also hired a private medical service for everyone there, given the difficulties of going to hospital.

The centre is still hoping to hold a safe and socially distanced Christmas celebration this year. Please pray that it can go ahead.



the opportunity to be a child.

Daniela also saw the change in her family. "She saw that she doesn't have to walk through this time of grief alone," Daniela says of her mum. "She felt surrounded by other people. For Sebastián, it was the best experience he ever had! He likes to run and play football, so he invited the boys to play with him

at the Children's Centre."

MOVING DANIELA TO SAFETY

After seeing how dangerous the area was where the family were living, Open Doors arranged a new house for them in a much safer area. "This was only possible through the gracious prayers and gifts of our supporters," an Open Doors

worker says. "Alba wants to open a sewing workshop in her home. Daniela and Sebastián are at school and are happy. Through the trauma support, we can see that they are moving on with their lives, despite the painful loss they suffered."

"I worried about the safety of my children," says Alba. "Because bad people don't care

if my children live or die.”

Many families in Colombia are still in danger. In the region where they lived, two other pastors were recently killed by gangs for preaching the gospel. Drug traffickers see the church as threatening their way of life. Many pastors and their families are vulnerable and live with the fear of threats being carried out – or the tragic consequences, if they already have.

Open Doors helps these families by giving them pastoral and psychological support, financial aid and – in some of the most harmful cases – a permanent home for children at the Children’s Centre.

BIJLI’S STORY

Bijli* (10) has a very different life from Daniela. She lives with



her parents and brother in a tiny, isolated village in Bangladesh. There are only 50 houses. But, like Daniela’s family, Bijli’s also faces extreme opposition because of their Christian faith.

“My mother says that your family are infidels.” That’s what Bijli was told at school. In her village, being a Christian makes you an outsider. “My friends don’t want to play with me. They push me,” she says.

SHUT OUT BY THE COMMUNITY

Bijli’s father, Badol*, became a church leader after receiving biblical training through Open Doors partners. He was worried that his Muslim neighbours wouldn’t accept his family’s conversion to Christianity – and, sadly, he was right: “No one wants to talk, communicate or associate with us,” Badol says.

Sometimes Bijli comes home crying because her ‘friends’ have attacked her. “Bijli comes and says, ‘Mother, they have beaten me. They don’t allow us to join in with them,’” says her mother, Maya.*

Across Bangladesh, this is a common story. Christians who

have converted from another religion – usually Islam – suffer the most severe persecution. Often, they have to worship in secret, for fear of attack. Or, like

“We’ve come to celebrate Jesus’ birthday!”

BIJLI, BANGLADESH

Bijli’s family, they are ostracised when they choose not to take part in other religious festivals.

A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

Last Christmas, like Daniela, Bijli was able to find a safe haven for a short time. Open Doors partners accompanied them to a Christian centre, several hours from their village. “We’ve come to celebrate Jesus’ birthday!” said Bijli as they arrived. “I can’t wait for the singing and dancing!”

Around 100 Christian families came to the celebration, all believers from Muslim backgrounds (BMBs) from isolated, rural communities, like Bijli’s family. Many experienced being in a community of believers for the first time – and

what better time to do that than at Christmas? Bijli and her family had a wonderful day of food, festivities and, most importantly, fellowship. One moment was particularly precious, when one of the leaders spoke about ‘Emmanuel’ and God being with us all the time.

“Is He even with us in the village?” Bijli asked her mother.

“Yes dear,” she replies.

“Even when I’m at school?”

“Yes Bijli. Jesus is always with you.”

It’s clear that being able to come to this celebration, thanks to your support, means

Bring comfort and joy to persecuted children

Open Doors believes that every child persecuted for their faith should be protected, provided for and given hope for a better future. In many countries, Open Doors partners provide practical, spiritual and educational support to children – including the provision of Bibles, training and long- or short-term shelter in dedicated centres. This is crucial for the future of a resilient church.

We must stand with children who face danger and persecution every day because of their faith – particularly at Christmas, when they can feel especially isolated and vulnerable, but also for the long term.

“We always celebrate Christmas as a family, and now we have to experience Christmas without Plinio,” says Alba. “This will be very difficult for me, and certainly for my children.”

This Christmas, you can be family to families like Daniela, Sebastián and Alba. Your support and your prayers will ensure that persecuted children know they are loved and they are not forgotten.

> Watch Daniela and Bijli’s stories at opendoorsuk.org

a lot. “Thank you to my friends and those who gave me the opportunity to come here,” says Bijli. “I want to give thanks to all of my ‘uncles and aunts’ who organised this programme.”

COVID-19

In 2020, support looks a bit different. While socially distanced gatherings are still an important encouragement for children like Daniela and Bijli, and are continuing in Colombia and Bangladesh within safe restrictions, the pandemic has brought up other urgent needs.

Bijli couldn’t go to school,

and Badol couldn’t work as a driver (which he does alongside being a church leader.) “I had no work for around two months and it was really difficult to meet the needs of my family,” says Badol. “We live hand to mouth, so no work means no food.”

Government aid was distributed by village authorities, but Bijli’s family didn’t get any. Thankfully, your prayers and support enabled Open Doors partners to provide the family with emergency aid. Badol says, “For the first time, I received relief. I am very happy!”

PLEASE PRAY

- That Daniela and her family will continue to heal from their trauma, finding peace, joy and forgiveness
- For strength and courage for families ostracised by their communities, like Bijli’s, especially during the Christmas period
- That children’s centres run by Open Doors partners will be equipped to offer refuge and Christ’s love.

PLEASE GIVE

A gift of £42 could provide a Christmas present for a persecuted child to let them know that their church family loves them.

Every £70 could help the Colombia Children’s Centre provide protection, care and education to a child of a persecuted church leader.

PLEASE WRITE

This year, you can send comfort and joy directly to Daniela and Sebastián! (RIGHT) We’re delighted to say you can send

a letter to them – or to any of the children at the Colombia Children’s Centre. They’d love to hear from their worldwide family.

Could you send a card or postcard with a drawing and a short message (in Spanish or English)? Maybe your children or youth group could get writing?

You can find writing guidelines and the names of all the children at the centre at opendoorsuk.org/write

*Name changed for security reasons



LEFT Bijli attended a Christmas celebration for BMB families with your support; BOTTOM Bijli joins in singing ‘Happy Birthday’ to Jesus, next to a giant birthday cake

A thrill of hope!

The weary world rejoices...

In the face of an incredibly challenging year, your prayers and support have continued to strengthen the persecuted church around the world – thank you! Read on to see the huge difference you are making and the true encouragement you are to our persecuted brothers and sisters.

* NORTH KOREA

“I’m so glad you remember me”

In February, we shared the incredible story of Eun Hye* (PICTURED BELOW), who escaped from North Korea and holds onto her faith regardless of what she faced. When Open Doors got in touch with her recently, she said, “I’m so glad you remember me! I’m so grateful for all the people who

have prayed for me.”

Your prayers and support have provided vital aid, including food, medicine and clothing for 90,000 secret North Korean believers, through networks in China – thank you. Eun Hye puts things into perspective. “Now I realise that I shall not be in want because

God chose me and saved me from the shadow of death so many times in my life.

“I thank you who have been praying for me and my family. I feel much better physically and psychologically. Please pray for the two Koreas and especially North Korean believers who are suffering.”



* SEE. CHANGE. FOR PERSECUTED WOMEN

“My heart is filled with joy”

Abigail*, in Nigeria, was widowed in April when her husband was killed in a raid by militant Fulani herdsmen. That same raid displaced her and her one-year-old daughter to an internally displaced people (IDP) camp. She wasn’t sure how she and her daughter would survive. But thanks to you, not only has she received vital aid, but she has been able to return home! Open Doors partners have also been able to provide Abigail

with farming equipment to help her long-term livelihood.

“I am really happy!” she says. “I usually have sleepless nights thinking where my next meal, and money for fertiliser, would come from. Then God made a way. I received it today!”

“My heart is filled with joy! I am grateful to the people God used to provide for me. May He open more doors for them... May God bless them.”



* SECRET BELIEVERS

“We want to give people hope”

For believers from Muslim backgrounds in North Africa and the Middle East, knowing where to turn with questions about the Christian faith or discipleship is difficult. Many are asking their questions online – and your prayers and support are enabling Christians like Mariam* to reach them with the answers they’re looking for.

In the spring, together with her team and the support of Open Doors partners, she started a series of daily devotionals addressing different fears related to Covid-19, such as that of losing a loved one or the fear of isolation, to help believers understand the situation with a proper theology

of the loving God. Mariam says: “We have already been in touch with around a hundred people, having deep conversations, and so far nearly 3,000 people from several Arab countries have subscribed to this series.

“We try to help people discover that God loves them. Yes, it is a big crisis and it is normal to be afraid. But we want to give people hope.”

*Names changed for security reasons



TOP LEFT Abigail celebrates with her community; ABOVE Secret believers are continuing to connect despite Covid restrictions.



✳ INDIA

“Thank you for providing all the things we need”

The coronavirus pandemic has sent shockwaves around the world, and persecuted Christians are amongst the hardest hit by nationwide lockdowns. In India, many church leaders were left on the brink of poverty and

starvation.

But, thanks to you, Open Doors partners were able to deliver vital aid and stand with them in prayer. One church leader, Bala*, says, “There is no income from the church, but God has been providing

for our day-to-day needs. Last week all our groceries were finished and we had no option but to wait for God’s provision. In due time, God has enabled your team to help us. Thank you for providing all the things we need.”

76,000 Christians in India have so far been provided with coronavirus relief aid, thanks to your prayers and support.

✳ CORONAVIRUS RELIEF AID

“You filled our starving stomachs and empty kitchens”

Persecuted Christians are among those who have been hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic; the lockdown measures put in place have meant that many have gone without work and wages – which means food has also been scarce. But, thanks to you, thousands of Christians around the world have been kept from the brink of

starvation and poverty.

Devi* is from Asia. He says, “We were in such a bad and hopeless situation, but your team came forward and filled our starving stomachs and empty kitchens. Even now, my relatives do not care about our wellbeing because we have embraced Christian faith. We thank you for your kind help to all of us.”

*Name changed for security reasons



ABOVE 14,750 Christian families have received vital aid thanks to your support in India; BELOW RIGHT Open Doors partners distribute supplies in Malaysia; BELOW LEFT Relief packages to be distributed to 104 families in Vietnam



NEW YEAR, NEW HOPE – STAND WITH THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Thank you so much for making hope visible for our persecuted church family in 2020. They will need your prayers and support more than ever as we enter 2021. If you haven't already, why not consider giving a regular gift? Or sign up for our weekly email to get the latest prayer requests from our persecuted family. Visit opendoorsuk.org or call 01993 460015 to find out more.



Connect with your persecuted church family this Christmas



A CHRISTMAS MEAL WITH A DIFFERENCE – FOR A CHRISTMAS UNLIKE ANY OTHER!

It's going to be a very different Christmas this year for all of us: so why not share a very different Christmas meal? *Finding Family* features persecuted Christians in Bangladesh who were able to join together for a Christmas dinner of daal, curry and rice. They also shared a birthday cake – to celebrate Jesus' birthday!

So, if possible, why not have a *Finding Family* curry evening? Enjoy your very own Christmas curry, share Jesus' birthday cake and use *Finding Family* to pray for your persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.



Who knows what Christmas is going to look like this year? Will we be able to worship together? Will we be celebrating in groups of no more than six? Will we be allowed to go socially distanced carol singing or will we be carolling together online?

It's certainly a challenging time for all of us. But it's also

a time of unique identification with our persecuted brothers and sisters. For them, Christmas is a time of celebration, certainly, but also uncertainty and even risk.

That's what the *Finding Family* suite of Christmas resources are all about.

The core of *Finding Family* is a Christmas service sheet. This takes you through the Christmas story, with Bible readings and carols. But it also introduces you to another Christmas story – the story of

a persecuted Christian family in Bangladesh, rejected by their community, but who find a place to celebrate.

But that's not all. We've also created some other key resources to accompany the service sheet. So whatever your situation this Christmas, *Finding Family* can offer you ways to connect and pray with your persecuted family.

FINDING FAMILY IS SPLIT INTO FIVE SECTIONS:

Roots - the journey to Bethlehem and the importance of families

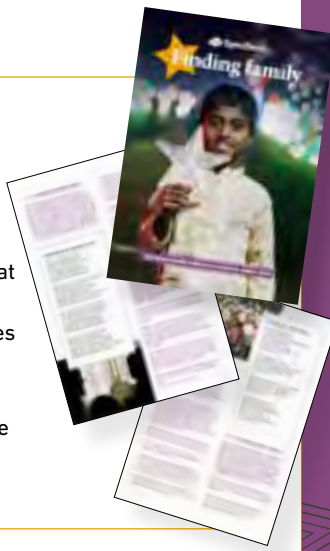
Outcasts - the shepherds and how Jesus' birth is good news for marginalised people

Threat - Herod's reaction, and how Jesus' arrival is always a threat to kings and dictators

Joy - the visit of the Magi and how there is joy in the hardest places

Return - the journey back to Nazareth and the reality of sharing the gospel in everyday life

For each section, there is a Bible reading, a carol, a story about the family in Bangladesh, and a brief reflection and prayer. You can find accompanying videos at opendoorsuk.org/findingfamily.



THREE MORE WAYS TO FIND FAMILY THIS CHRISTMAS

* FINDING FAMILY SMALL GROUP GUIDE

The *Finding Family* Small Group Guide will help you to use the service sheet as the basis of a small group or house group session. For each part of the story there's background to the Bible story, additional information about the persecuted church, a suggested activity and/or questions for reflection, video links and prayer topics.

* FINDING FAMILY ADVENT ADVENTURE

The *Finding Family* Advent Adventure is a four-part Advent resource designed especially for children and families. You start by making an Advent wreath. Then, each week in Advent, you light a candle, read Scripture, find out about a persecuted Christian family and pray. And there are also a range of activities from stars-spotting to making a crazy Christmas meal. It's a great way to help children explore the meaning of Advent – and the difference that following Jesus makes to our own family, and families around the world.

* FINDING FAMILY YOUTH GROUP SESSION

An interactive session that youth leaders can use with their groups (online) that uses the Christmas story to explore how, as followers of Jesus, we're connected to a global church family. Including games, videos, Bible discussion, prayer ideas and stories of young people from Colombia and Bangladesh.

You can download or order all of these resources from opendoorsuk.org/findingfamily, where you will also find videos that you can use in church services, and other online resources.





KINDLING FIRES OF WARMTH Reaching the neglected in Myanmar

Christians in Myanmar have sadly grown used to discrimination, harassment and attack. This year, Covid-19 has led to them feeling even more alienated. But thanks to the generosity of Open Doors supporters, believers are not just being fed, but warmly strengthened in their faith.

Mocked and disowned, even put in jail for a day, all because he became a Christian. To his staunchly Buddhist family and community, U Myint Aung* had betrayed their ethnicity.

He became a Christian in 2017. A year later his wife, Daw Merry Win*, made the same decision. With their three children, they formed a new Christian family, despite hostility from their respective parents.

U Myint Aung was a daily wage labourer in road construction – until he lost his job because of Covid-19. He's been unable to find a new job and, as Christians in a Buddhist community, the family have been

deliberately overlooked in the distribution of government aid. He says that it left him feeling 'depressed and hopeless'.

Thankfully, Open Doors partners could visit the family, and bring both food and the warmth of Christian fellowship.

"When I receive this kind of help and encouragement from my fellow Christians, I realise that our God is one who cares for us and never forsakes us," U Myint Aung shares. "Thank you so much!"

"God is looking out for me through His people."

NO WORK, NO PAY

U Myint Aung is far from the only Christian in Myanmar who has been severely impacted by Covid-19.

The closure of factories and shops has meant many Christians have lost their jobs, making it a struggle

to provide two meals per day for their families.

The difficulties are greatly exacerbated by the open discrimination many Christians face when trying to access government help.

Steve*, an Open Doors partner, explains, "The government has provided some groceries, but feedback by local Christians is that distribution is insufficient. It was done in only a few areas and Christians were mostly discriminated against even in those limited distributions."

Steve met a widow who said, "I thought I was all alone as I was neglected by everybody, but you came to help me. I never expected this. Now I know I am not alone. God is looking out for me through His people."

Thanks to your support, Open Doors partners have delivered aid to over 4,000 Christian families in Myanmar (some 20,000 individuals).

LAND-GRABBING, BULLYING AND WAR

There are around 4.3 million Christians in Buddhist-majority Myanmar – some eight per cent of the country's population. Discrimination against Christians is nothing new. The pandemic has simply added another cruel layer to it.

Land-grabbing forces many churches to meet in homes or businesses, whilst Christian children face discrimination by teachers and bullying by other children. Churches are monitored and church leaders targeted. Christians in 'Buddhist-only' communities are stopped from accessing water.

Myanmar is also the scene of the longest civil war in the world. It is centralised in Christian-majority states, such as Kachin and Shan, rich in commodities like jade and timber. Christians are vulnerable to persecution by insurgent groups and the army.

RISKS AND JOY

Delivering aid is fraught with challenge. May and June is the wet season, making for muddy terrains. "Grocery distribution can take anything from two

or three hours to four days of travelling," Steve explains. "It might mean a couple of hours on the bus followed by several hours in boats, followed by several hours on a motorbike



and then a few miles on foot."

Surveillance is a problem. The government is wary of food being delivered to insurgent groups, which can mistakenly

lead to the arrest of pastors. Meanwhile, insurgent groups are hostile to Christians receiving help.

"There are times when we cry tears of joy with

"Discrimination against Christians is nothing new. The pandemic has simply added another cruel layer to it."

the families who receive packages," Steve adds. "When we see their happiness and strengthened faith, we thank the Lord together and that compensates for all the trouble taken to reach them."

This includes Daw Naw San*. "I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all my brothers and sisters in Christ for remembering and helping us," she shares. "For a Christian living amongst Buddhists, it can feel really lonely and isolated; yet your helping hand has kindled the fire of warmth and family in Jesus Christ."

*Name changed for security reasons

INVITE YOUR MP TO THE OPEN DOORS WORLD WATCH LIST LAUNCH

On Wednesday 13 January, the World Watch List will be launched in Parliament. MPs will hear first-hand from representatives of the persecuted church, with particular emphasis on how local church leaders can be key partners with the UK government in supporting some of the world's most vulnerable people.

As Covid-19 is another weapon in the hands of people who persecute Christians, this event is more important than ever.

Last year, 123 MPs from across the political spectrum came to the World Watch List 2019 launch, and many told their constituents what a valuable experience it was. It was encouraging to see so many MPs engage with the issue of Christian persecution, and continue to do so throughout the year.

Please invite your MP this year, using the enclosed postcard or via opendoorsuk.org/advocacy





Bring **comfort and joy** to a persecuted child with a Christmas gift.

THIS CHRISTMAS, 12-YEAR-OLD DANIELA KNOWS HER FATHER WON'T SHARE THE CELEBRATIONS.

"Christmas for me is being with my family," says Daniela in Colombia. It may be a mostly Christian country, but Colombia is also home to ruthless drug cartels. Including the one that murdered Daniela's father, Pastor Plinio, because of his faith.

"It's hardest when... when I think about my dad," says Daniela. That's all she is able to say.

Your gifts and prayers can give much-needed refuge to a persecuted Christian child. Just as importantly, it can show them they are loved.

Will you bring comfort and joy to a persecuted child like Daniela with a Christmas gift today?

A gift of £42 could provide a Christmas present for a persecuted child to let them know that their church family loves them.

Every £70* could help the Colombia Children's Centre provide protection, care and education to a child of a persecuted church leader.

To make your gift, return the enclosed envelope, phone **01993 460015** or visit **opendoorsuk.org**.

Thank you.

*It costs the centre £165 per month to provide everything a child needs.