

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | May/June 2022



A church filled with hope

How Christians in
Nigeria are finding joy
despite violence



OpenDoors
Prayer Webinar
 26 MAY | 8.15PM

Join our May prayer webinar to hear how God is restoring lives and rebuilding hope in Nigeria and Iraq.

Stand in prayer with our brothers and sisters who, despite rising violence and discrimination, continue to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

Find out more and register today at opendoorsuk.org



OpenDoors
STANDING STRONG
 ANNUAL GATHERING 2022

Saturday 24 September 7.30pm | In-person and online

Meet your courageous persecuted church family from the Middle East and Asia. Be inspired by their faith, and unite with them in prayer and worship.

We are also running in-person afternoon seminars. Book early to avoid disappointment.

For more details and to register, go to opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong

SAVE THE DATE



SEND A LETTER OF HOPE

Your letters make a huge difference to our persecuted family – and now you can write to more Christians with our latest letter-writing guide!

Order your copy – featuring believers from North Africa and Nigeria – at opendoorsuk.org/write

“By sending us these cards, it is proven to me that there are lots and lots of people thinking about us and praying for us. I thank them.” - TAHER* FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

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.

Contact us:

England and Wales
 PO Box 6, Witney
 Oxon OX29 6WG
 T 01993 460015

Ireland
 PO Box 873
 Belfast BT15 1WZ
 T 02890 751080

Scotland
 T 01292 800006

[E inspire@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:inspire@opendoorsuk.org)

Find us on:

opendoorsuk.org



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Cover image:

Members of Pastor Andrew's church in Nigeria - which was rebuilt bigger than ever, after an Islamic extremist attack

Letter from Henrietta

A spirit of resilience

“Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

2 CORINTHIANS 4:17

In recent months, the news has been filled with stories of people leaving their homes and belongings at a moment's notice. They've been forced to flee, traumatised, to escape violence and destruction.

Those are the terrible scenes we've seen in footage from Ukraine. But I could equally well be describing countless Christian communities in Nigeria and across West Africa. The spread of Islamic extremist violence is horrific and fast – and I find it both heart-breaking and frustrating that parts of the church and those in power often don't seem to recognise the scale of the situation. It's a hidden crisis. One in which thousands of our brothers and sisters are being killed. And, in much of the West, it's not even reported as news.

Pastor Andrew has seen this first-hand. One day, Islamic extremists descended on the small village in Nigeria where he shepherded a congregation. Everyone fled for their lives. The militants murdered believers, stole all their possessions and burned down almost all the houses. It's hard to imagine how devastating this attack would be. How would the church members ever feel safe to worship again?

But we have a lot to learn about resilience and hope from our persecuted family in West Africa. As soon as Pastor Andrew returned from hiding, he started rebuilding the church. “When we came back, we had to think of where we will be worshipping,” he says. “We brought all our burnt zinc together and made a place to worship. Come what may, I won't turn back because I know there is a reward that awaits me.” What an amazing man.

You can read Pastor Andrew's story, and how your gifts and prayers are helping his community, on p8. I hope you'll find it as inspiring and challenging as I do. Through prayer, support and speaking out, you can help ensure that despair can turn into hope in this world, and not just the next. I'm grateful that we have the chance to help our family in West Africa, and to share their stories with those in power. Let's wake up the world to this hidden crisis. Thank you.

Every blessing,



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
 CEO, Open Doors UK&I

*Name changed for security reasons

World Watch News

NORTH KOREA

Secret believers in North Korea discovered and killed

Several dozen believers from a secret church in North Korea have been discovered and killed, and some 100 members of their families sent to the country's notorious prison camps.

According to an Open Doors contact, these secret believers were gathered for a meeting and, once they began worshipping, security guards broke in and arrested everybody. This persecution is part of a major sweep against underground Christians in an area of North Korea that, for security reasons, we can't identify. It's believed that information about the time and place of the underground meeting was deliberately leaked to the authorities.

Despite everything, North Korean Christians continue to stand resolutely in their faith. "When we fall into fear, anxiety, worry and despair, He pours out His peace and joy, so that we can keep our body, hearts and spirits filled with peace and joy from the kingdom of God," says an underground church leader in a secret letter smuggled out of the country.

Please continue to pray for our North Korean family.

ARABIAN PENINSULA

Despite danger, the church is growing

The Arabian Peninsula can be a hugely difficult place to follow Jesus, but this isn't stopping amazing things from happening through God's people.

Church leaders from an area we can't disclose tell us how they must tread with caution when coming alongside those interested in knowing Jesus, because there could be people with ulterior motives who want to expose Christians.

But despite these dangers, and the risks entailed in becoming a Christian, people are giving their lives to Jesus – such as a lady from a Muslim background who is pictured getting baptised.

Give thanks for this wonderful moment. Ask the Lord to strengthen and protect all new believers in the region, and pray that leaders will be given wisdom and discernment in all their activities.



ABOVE Please pray for our sister as she begins following Jesus

MALAYSIA

Celebration as four people baptised

Praise God that four people in Malaysia who attended an event led by Open Doors partners became Christians and got baptised (SEE BELOW!)

The partners in the east of the country joined with church leaders to run a three-day Standing Strong Through the

Storm programme for new Christians. The aim of it is to prepare believers for pressure and persecution they may encounter for their faith.

It was attended by 19 people (mostly youth) and included six non-Christians, four of whom gave their lives to Jesus.



Give thanks for the fruitfulness of this event in Malaysia, which is number 50 on the World Watch List. Please pray that all those who attended will be equipped, encouraged and empowered in their new faith.

UK

Parliament told that women from religious minorities will continue to be forgotten unless MPs raise voice

A parliamentary debate has recognised that the hidden, violent and complex persecution faced by millions of Christian women and girls 'is often overlooked by the relevant authorities' and that more needs to be done to address it.

The debate, which took place on 17 March, helped highlight Open Doors' *See. Change.* campaign, which seeks to honour the value and God-given potential of persecuted Christian women and girls.

Reflecting on the findings of 'The Persecution of Christian Women and Girls', a new report by Open Doors, Jim Shannon MP (DUP) opened the debate by urging the UK Government to take gender-specific religious persecution into account in foreign policy and discussions on trade and aid. (Gender-specific religious persecution, or GSRP, is where religious vulnerability is compounded by existing gender vulnerabilities.)

During the debate, Fiona Bruce MP – the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief – admitted that not enough had yet been done on the Bishop of Truro's fifth recommendation that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) undertake research on how freedom of religion violations relate to gender equality and use this to change policy (this was one of 22 recommendations presented to the FCDO by the Bishop of Truro in his 2019

report on the severe persecution facing Christians worldwide). Bruce added that the FCDO also needed to be bolder in calling out bad practices, arguing that generic or private remarks alone are not good enough.

Other contributors included Dr Lisa Cameron MP (SNP), who said, "If MPs from all parties do not raise our voices, then women from religious minorities will continue to be the forgotten women in the fight against gender-related violence."

Thank you to all of you who contacted your MP, asking them to read the report and attend the debate. It's also down to you that 22 MPs attended a panel event on this crucial issue held on International Women's Day (8 March) in conjunction with Aid to the Church in Need. Thank you for your invaluable support!

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Emily Buchanan (BBC journalist), Rahima Mahmut (Muslim Uyghur woman), Fiona Bruce MP and Hinna Maluch (Pakistani Christian woman) at the panel event on International Women's Day



Over £1,500 raised in Solomon's memory

A couple from Cambridgeshire has raised £1,580 for our persecuted family in memory of their son, Solomon, who was stillborn on Sunday 20 February.

"Solomon's diagnosis of Edwards' Syndrome meant that he was always likely to have a fragile and difficult life," share Mark and Ruth Jenner. "We wanted his legacy to be that his life lived in weakness might nonetheless be a conduit for God's powerful grace to be at work for our family of faith in different parts of the world.

"We do pray that Solomon's memory and legacy will continue to have a powerful effect in many lives as a signal of oneness in Christ, who makes the broken whole and promises new life to overthrow the darkness of sin and death."

Mark and Ruth have set up a Just Giving page for Open Doors in memory of Solomon at [justgiving.com/fundraising/solomon-jenner](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/solomon-jenner). If you'd like to raise money for our persecuted family in memory of a loved one, please visit [opendoorsuk.org/in-memory](https://www.opendoorsuk.org/in-memory)



INDIA Pastor killed amid wider threat against Christian leaders

A pastor in India has been killed following months of threatening messages about his ministry in the area. A further 26 local pastors have also been issued with threats.

In January, a series of warning letters were distributed along the road where Pastor Yalam lived. It asked people to follow local tradition and worship tribal deities, adding that anyone who sought to disrupt this should be opposed. The letters named 27 pastors, including Pastor Yalam, and said Christian leaders must

not engage in evangelism. Two months later, the pastor was found murdered outside his home. Local media suggest the perpetrators are Naxalites (a radical Communist group) or Hindu extremists.

“Christians in the area are so afraid”

“Christians in the area are so afraid,” shares a Christian leader from a nearby city. “However, they are still gathering for worship. They say, ‘It is difficult, but we know we

will have to face these things, and we need to be ready for this. This is God’s work and we will not deny Him. Please pray for us that we do not get discouraged.”

“The attacks against Christian leaders are increasing day by day,” shares Heena*, an Open Doors local partner. “Attacks are common and, even if they don’t kill in all the cases, they make it a point that the injuries are gruesome and long-lasting. The danger is imminent. All of us need to be on our knees for these pastors.”

ABOVE Family, friends and locals walk behind Pastor Yalam’s coffin on the way to his funeral

CENTRAL ASIA You’re helping secret believers to survive

A secret church leader in Central Asia says ‘you are an answer from the Lord’ as he shares about the ways your prayers and support enable local Christians to survive amid hostility to their faith.

Ruslan* has been involved in pastoral ministry for 16 years. He and a team of co-workers visit believers from Muslim backgrounds in rural, faraway regions. They usually spend three days with house churches, providing encouragement and support as well as preaching the gospel. They tend to arrive at night and worship times are noiseless – all to avoid detection.

“It’s imperative that, if you’re to open your house for fellowship, you are a serious, firm believer,” he shares. “You are opening your home at the risk of persecution.”

In one village, Muslim leaders stopped Christians from sending their children to school and accessing water for crops, as well as prevented their cattle from eating from the same grass used by Muslims. It made survival impossible, until the local church – with your support – provided water and tools to make a living. “What we cannot help with, you can,” he says.

“What you do is essential,” continues Ruslan, who has

worked with Open Doors local partners for 13 years and personally benefited from their support as his family has faced persecution. “You are not ordinary people, but an answer from the Lord. We know that we are not alone, but part of a large Christian family.”

Pray that Ruslan and his team will continue to have all they need to ‘abound in every good work’ they do (2 Corinthians 9:8). *name changed for security reasons

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

Speak out on freedom of religion or belief: here’s how

You have a great opportunity to show your MP how important the issue of freedom of religion or belief is to you. You can ensure that they hear about growing trends of religious persecution, and know how to respond.

The **2022 Freedom of Religion or Belief Ministerial (5-6 July)** is a key global summit taking place in London to inform and equip MPs about the violence, injustice and oppression facing persecuted Christians and members of other religious minorities around the world.

Open Doors will be hosting events on three important trends of religious persecution:



1 Islamic extremism

Islamic extremism is spreading and intensifying across West Africa – particularly Nigeria, where 4,650 Christians were killed for their faith last year. Christians and other religious minorities are at heightened risk of devastating violence.



2 Gender-specific religious persecution

Christian women often face persecution that is hidden, violent and complex – and intended to destabilise entire Christian communities. If the UK government recognises this specific persecution in policy, it can help our sisters see change.



3 Digital persecution

In China, India and elsewhere, digital persecution is the new frontier for human rights abuses. Technological advances have accelerated discrimination through surveillance, censorship and disinformation. This requires urgent political attention.



Enclosed with your magazine is a letter for your MP, inviting them to find out more details. All you have to do is...

- **Put your MP’s name on the front** (If you don’t know who it is, check out members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP)
- **Write a short message about why the issue is important to you**
- **Add a stamp and post it by 1 July**

Thank you so much. This is a real chance to help change the lives of our persecuted church family – let’s take it!

Please keep praying for the long-lasting impact of the ministerial. Want to hear how it goes? Sign up to advocacy emails for further updates at opendoorsuk.org/advocacy

LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION FOR WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR MP?

It’s most important that you write from the heart, sharing your care for the persecuted church. Here are a couple of examples:

Everyone should have the right to freedom of religion and belief without threat of persecution. Please do all that you can to defend this right by attending these Ministerial events.

The persecution of Christians is getting worse and increasing year after year. Millions of men, women and children around the world suffer for simply having a faith. As my MP, please attend the Ministerial to stand in support for persecuted religious minorities.



You're in your home. It's an ordinary evening. You've cooked and eaten your meal; all the work and chores for the day are done. The children have gone to sleep, though you have an ear alert in case one of them wakes up. Now you have a bit of time to chat, maybe read a few verses of the Bible or pray together. Soon, you'll go to bed yourselves.

In the midst of this normality, your world gets turned upside down in an instant. A gang of armed men suddenly swarms your community, your street, your house. Your life will never feel the same again. How do you prepare for something like that?

DEADLY ATTACK

Pastor Andrew (PICTURED) vividly remembers the attack on Guyaku, his village in Nigeria. "At about 7pm, the treasurer of my church ran to my house to tell me to run," he recalls. "Fire was consuming the entire

TURN DESPAIR TO HOPE IN WEST AFRICA

village. That was how they entered our community – killing one of my church members. Boko Haram are trying by all means to wipe us out."

Everybody fled. From a mountain hiding place, Pastor Andrew could see Boko Haram militants banging on the door of the church, and of his house. As he hid with members of his church, not knowing the fate of people he loved, Pastor Andrew prayed a specific prayer. It wasn't for safety. It was for faith. "During the time of the attack, my prayer for my church members was that God would strengthen their faith," he says. "And even if they are abducted, they should not deny Christ but hold firmly to their faith."

"Boko Haram are trying by all means to wipe us out"

In the morning, everyone left their hiding places and tried to find missing friends and family members. Not everybody could. Several believers had been killed, and all but six of the houses in Guyaku were burned down. Boko Haram had stolen their possessions, and what they couldn't take, they burned.

"The persecution was so much that I never imagined we would come

together again to worship in the church," Pastor Andrew says. "We lost everything."

A TREND OF VIOLENCE

This is far from an isolated incident. Attacks like this – by Boko Haram, Fulani militants or other Islamic extremists – are growing in severity and in number. Last year, 4,650 Christians in Nigeria were murdered because of their faith – more than in the rest of the world combined.

On top of killings, there are abductions, assaults, sexual violence and widespread destruction of homes and churches – simply because of a community's faith in Jesus. Extremist groups like Boko Haram want to stamp out Christianity, and use any means available to destabilise and deter the church.

Nigeria is the epicentre of this trend of violence, but it's not the only place where it's happening. Neighbouring countries are also witnessing devastating attacks, and it's spreading across West Africa – with militants emboldened by the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. It's one of the main reasons that Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon and Niger are on the Open Doors World Watch List. These sorts of crises seldom make international news – but they can cause loss that impacts generations.



After the attack, Pastor Andrew immediately began rebuilding the church

REBUILDING THE CHURCH

Despite what he has seen, Pastor Andrew's faith stayed strong. Many Christians left for nearby towns, but Pastor Andrew and other church leaders stayed – to help the villagers who remained, to rebuild the community and to re-establish seriously the biblical command to 'rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances' (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Even in the initial shocking days, he was determined that the community of Christians would keep praising God.

"When we came back, we had to think

of where we will be worshipping," says Pastor Andrew. "I called the attention of some of the church members, and we brought all our burnt zinc together and some sticks to make a place of worship."

"I never imagined we would come together again to worship"

What a beautiful metaphor for turning destruction into worship! In the midst of devastation caused by Boko Haram, Pastor Andrew and his church chose to praise the Lord. His resilience and faith are inspiring.

**“BECAUSE OF YOU,
MY CHURCH IS
LIVING HOPEFUL.”**

PASTOR ANDREW, NIGERIA



YOU STEPPED IN

You were there alongside Pastor Andrew. As soon as Open Doors heard about the attack, local partners rushed to serve the church with emergency aid, as well as trauma counselling and support for the longer-term. Christians in Guyaku

“After the attacks, you were the first to come and help”

didn't just need to keep going for a few days – they need to survive for the next generations. And your gifts and prayers, and God's mercy and grace, mean that can happen.

“After the attacks, you were the first to come and help each family with food support.” Pastor Andrew says. “We received both spiritual and physical support from you. God brought you at just the right time.

“A lot who lost hope and had nothing were able to receive support and are back on their feet.”

That's what God does: turn despair into hope. “A crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” (Isaiah 61:3)

PRaise, NOT DESPAIR

If you go to Pastor Andrew's church today, you can see that in action. As you walk through the door of the church, you see a crowd of believers worshipping. But before you've even entered the building, you know a service of thanksgiving is taking place – the noise can be heard far and wide. There is loud singing, clapping, steel drums and joyful music. There is no doubt that God's



The church is now flourishing – the new building is bigger, to fit all the worshippers

praises are being proclaimed by this grateful, joyful congregation.

Boko Haram thought they were wiping out Christianity in Guyaku. But God had other plans. The exact opposite has happened: the church is growing and they've had to build a bigger place to worship. “Those who fled started coming back,” says Pastor Andrew, “since they saw that people had returned and were rehabilitating.

“If there were a word greater than thank you, I would have said it.”

Honestly, to me, these attacks brought a lot of positive change.”

Pastor Andrew has moved to a new church now, to share his skills and training with a new group of believers. He often visits his



“A lot who lost hope and had nothing were able to receive support and are back on their feet” – Pastor Andrew

previous church, and sees that it is a community of hope bringing relief and spiritual support to the most vulnerable in the community. Your gifts and prayers are equipping the church to demonstrate the life of Christ to those around them.

When Pastor Andrew is asked if the attack has weakened his resolve or made him fearful of following Jesus and leading his people, he gives a simple but powerful reply: “Come what may, I won't turn back because I know there is a reward that awaits me. Jesus promised He will not

leave me or forsake me – and I can testify to that.”

GOD'S PROMISE OF VICTORY

Attacks like this one will almost certainly happen again. If not to Pastor Andrew's village, then to others like it – across Nigeria and West Africa. Boko Haram and other Islamic extremist groups still want to wipe out the Christian presence in the region – but you can help stop them.

Your gifts and prayers will help maintain the resilience of so many churches like Pastor Andrew's. You

can play a vital role in ensuring that the next generation of believers in West Africa is able to persevere – with everything they need to survive, thrive and equip others around them. It's a battle, but it's one that God has promised His people will win. The worship of Jesus won't be stamped out – rather, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

Pastor Andrew knows his God is faithful, and he is moved and thankful that the worldwide church is standing with him and other believers like him. “My heart is filled with joy to express my gratitude,” he says. “If there were a word greater than thank you, I would have said it. But, because of you, my church is living hopeful, thinking of the kingdom of heaven.”

PLEASE PRAY

- For the church to stay faithful in praising God and sharing Christ
- That God's protecting hand would be over all Christian communities in West Africa
- For Islamic extremists to turn from their wicked ways and live (Ezekiel 33:11).

PLEASE SPEAK OUT

The rise of Islamic extremism in Africa is one of the topics that

Open Doors is alerting MPs to at the Freedom of Religion or Belief Ministerial on 5-7 June. You can send more details to your MP with your enclosed invitation – see p7.

PLEASE WRITE

You can write a message of encouragement to Pastor Andrew – he'd love to hear from you! He so appreciates the worldwide church family standing by him and his church, and a letter will help him know how many Christians are supporting them with prayer.

Find out how you can write to Pastor Andrew, and order a copy of the latest letter-writing guide, at opendoorsuk.org/write

PLEASE GIVE

- **Every £24** could train a church leader to better disciple their church community
- **Every £35** could help empower a West African church to give persecuted believers emergency shelter and food
- **Every £45** could help equip a church member to provide trauma care to believers in their community

You can give at opendoorsuk.org. Thank you.

Persecuted but not abandoned in Afghanistan

THANK YOU FOR CONTINUING TO STAND
WITH AFGHAN BELIEVERS



It's been nine months since the Taliban reinstated their control over Afghanistan. While the situation remains bleak, Afghan believers – both those who've stayed, and those who've fled – are grateful for your ongoing prayers and support, which are making a huge difference.

Hana* is an Open Doors partner in the region. She shares more of what the situation is like across Afghanistan: "These days, there is relative peace, but uncertainty reigns in the hearts of people as the days unfold. The economy is debt-ridden and completely dependent on foreign aid. Thousands have lost their jobs in the political upheaval.

"There's a huge humanitarian problem. Large numbers of families are living together in hiding – when the electricity goes, when something is broken, families in hiding can't ask anyone to help with the repairs."

The situation is especially dire for women and girls. Their education has ground to a halt; in March, the Taliban went back on their commitment to reopen secondary schools for girls. While some women in healthcare and essential services have been allowed to join the workforce, the majority are not allowed to work.

"You can take every last airplane in the world and take every last believer from that country, and people will still be having dreams and visions"

"Before, in the public sphere, believers could see each other – they may not be able to pray in public spaces, but they could meet up, they could go elsewhere. Now, with the new government, even those few, precious treasures have been taken away."

"YOU'RE THE ONLY GROUP WHO CAME TO HELP"

Life remains hard for refugees, too. Open Doors partner Miranda* visited several Afghan believers who had fled the country and listened to their stories. Two refugees were medical professionals who experienced the same thing – the Taliban wanted to recruit them, but they both refused. The Taliban sent them death threats in response, causing them to flee.

"Sometimes, we don't know what to spend our limited money on – food or rent or medicine, or if we should use it to renew our refugee card," said one mother. Another woman shared: "The Taliban took my husband away when we were crossing the border. My son, my three daughters and I made it here, but my daughter died from an illness."

"What hope do we have, for ourselves, our children?" said one woman, who worked as a schoolteacher back in Afghanistan. Pointing to a young girl sitting next to her, she said, "She finished her school education

in Afghanistan. She is supposed to be going to college. But she can't. She can't study. She can't work. What can she do?"

As well as prayer, Open Doors partners are able to provide practical relief aid and continue to offer fellowship. "You're the only group who came to help us," they said.

"GOD WILL CONTINUE GROWING HIS CHURCH"

In such circumstances, how do believers 'hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess'? The answer is, of course, 'for He who promised is faithful' (Hebrews 10:23). "I'm very hopeful," Hana says, "because the reason that there are believers that stay is not because of the intervention of any human being. It's the sole work of God, the sole work of the Holy Spirit.

"Open Doors teams are doing incredible things – they're being obedient, going to places looking, listening. Many times they go to places that are not safe for them to go and investigate... Our teams are there walking, serving, washing

feet. Raising the flag when abuse is present. Connecting to the church. And we are hopeful that when God looks at us and our teams, He would see the faithfulness of many men and women and He will bring more people unto Himself."

How can we continue to support our Afghan church family? "So the very first thing is to pray. Because prayer is not the inactive, passive thing that people think it is... It's really what drives us to the next step because it leads us. Pray that Jesus would lead us to what to do, and to give us endurance."

HOW CAN WE KEEP PRAYING?

"Pray for dreams and visions," Hana says. "Give thanks for them. God loves the people and the country so much. Thank God for being God and being sovereign in this country. Pray for the displaced who are separated from their families. Pray for those whose dreams are being snatched from them. They are women and they don't know what the future holds. Pray that they would know God's comfort at this time."

Hana is confident in the goodness of God towards the people of Afghanistan: "No amount of human effort can work against the powers and principalities working there. You can take every last airplane in the world and take every last believer from that country, and people will still be having dreams and visions. And there will still be persecution, but God will continue growing His church."

*Name changed for security reasons

Silence for the Silenced is a brand-new prayer resource to help you, your church and your small group keep praying for our church family in Afghanistan, using stories, videos and a time of silent prayer around eight prayer stations. Download the resource for free at opendoorsuk.org/prayforafghanistan

She's glad to be back from Russia

WHERE YOU TALK PEOPLE INTO TROUBLE

Glad to be back in good old England turned from a 10-week tour of Russia with company.

ANN TERRY

BY WATCHMAN



And our best

When the holiday is over Ann will be off to Nice to start in a new show with the company, and then she hopes to go with them to the Far East, one of the places she has not yet seen.

Meanwhile she has a problem. "I was thinking of giving up skating after the Russian tour," said Ann. "But the trouble is I can't think of anything else I could do that wouldn't bore me stiff."

ANN TERRY

THE BIBLE SMUGGLER

LEAVING A LEGACY TO OPEN DOORS

ANN TERRY HAS ENJOYED AN ADVENTUROUS JOURNEY WITH OUR PERSECUTED FAMILY – AND, THANKS TO HER LEGACY, IT'S ONE CERTAIN TO CONTINUE BEYOND HER LIFETIME.

Ann Terry wasn't expecting a call from Open Doors, but when the phone rang one day, she immediately sensed from God that it was them. "Ann, we've been praying for you and believe you're meant to be the next person to visit the Soviet Union to smuggle in Bibles."

It was the early 1980s and on the phone was Alan Hall, then president for international development at Open Doors. The invitation was a two-week trip to deliver 20 Bibles to Christians in Russia and Ukraine – part of a bigger project to smuggle one million Bibles into the region.

SKATING IN THE SOVIET UNION

God had clearly been preparing Ann for the trip – even before she had become a Christian. In 1964,

she visited the Soviet Union with her prestigious ice-skating group 'Holiday on Ice' – and it proved an eye-opening experience.

"I could see a lot of awful restrictions," Ann recalls. "We saw a lot of cruelty with the way they treated the people." It was a marked contrast to other experiences on the trip, including a group dinner with Nikita Khrushchev, leader of the Soviet Union at the time.

AN ANGELIC ENCOUNTER

Despite her Christian upbringing, it wasn't until Christmas 1972 that Ann gave her life to Jesus. "God, I believe you've got a plan for me," she prayed on Christmas Eve, sensing God being behind changes in her life. Ann was so thirsty for God that it felt like 'I'd eaten loads of salt'.

"On Christmas morning, God sent an angel who pushed me

out of my parents' home and took me over the road to a little church," Ann continues. Struck by the joy and radiance of those present, she asked a lady what they had that she didn't. "We know Jesus. Don't you know Him?" By the end of the morning, Ann knew Jesus for herself.

Three years later, Ann went on a mission trip with YWAM to 12 countries, including Russia and Ukraine. Given her experiences in the region, Ann would often cry when watching news about the Soviet Union or reading about its believers in Open Doors literature – to the point that she wondered whether God had another trip in mind for her. And then came the call from Alan Hall.

"ADVENTURE AFTER ADVENTURE"

Ann was anxious to smuggle in Bibles, until she felt God

speak to her through Isaiah 52:12, with the final words – 'the God of Israel will be your rear guard' – ending up being especially significant. "This was very important, because I was given a coat with pockets at the back between the lining and the outside, to put Bibles in." It made for a heavy coat which Ann could not even take off on the plane.

"WHILE WE HAVE BREATH, WE MUST DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO EXPAND GOD'S KINGDOM"

The trip involved 'adventure after adventure', including visits to underground churches and secret meetings with believers to deliver the Bibles. Wherever Ann and her co-worker Ruth went, there was always the risk of discovery. Sometimes they'd have to put coats over TVs to cover potentially hidden cameras, or communicate in writing to keep meetings silent. On one occasion, they had to follow a little girl at a distance as she led them to her father who was also smuggling Bibles into the region.

Some 30 years on, the region again fills the news. Ann is heartbroken at the situation in

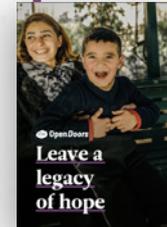
Ukraine and, like many of us, is praying for an end to hostilities.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Ann has seen what life is like for our persecuted family and felt immense joy at being able to help them not only stand firm in their faith but share it with others. It's here Ann's greatest passion emerges: people knowing Jesus. In Open Doors, Ann sees a kindred spirit, and it's why she's decided to leave a legacy for the persecuted church.

"Open Doors wants to see people meet Jesus," she shares. "They need as much money as possible – to share Jesus, give food and shelter, make things better for people, and share hope and joy.

"Don't hesitate, go for it!" says Ann, asked what she'd say to anyone considering leaving a legacy to Open Doors. "When you sow you reap a harvest. God can do so much with what you give. I don't have very much to leave, but when you leave this world, you can leave something so important behind. While we have breath, we must do everything we can to expand God's kingdom."



Would you like your adventure with our persecuted family to extend beyond your

lifetime? You can find out more information and order a legacy pack at opendoorsuk.org/legacy.

The site includes details of *Farewill*, a quick, easy and free service for you to set up a Will. If you have any questions, please email helen@opendoorsuk.org or call 01993 460015.

OPPOSITE Ann Terry was a prominent ice-skater and her 1964 visit to Russia was the focus of a newspaper interview BELOW Local believers (L) and Ann (R) in Kyiv during the Bible smuggling trip in 1982





VOICES OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Pastor Gideon from Eritrea



ABOVE Pastor Gideon shares his story (he is disguised to protect his identity)

It seems impossible that anyone could experience moments of happiness in a prison cell. But for Pastor Gideon*, who has spent over six years detained in Eritrea's inhumane prison system, such moments did happen – and it all stems from seeing God at work amid persecution.

This spring marks 20 years since the Eritrean government restricted religious expression to broadly four groups: Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox Christian and Sunni Islam. Illegal gatherings of believers bring the acute risk of arrest – as many Christians can testify.

REFUSING TO DENY JESUS

“Starting from that moment, believers were repeatedly arrested and freed,” explains Pastor Gideon. “Sometimes they stay in prison for a year, sometimes for a month. Some high-level church leaders have been imprisoned for over 20 years.”

During his detention for involvement in a denomination not allowed by the government, Pastor Gideon experienced mental and physical torture, including forced labour, heavy beatings and a shortage of food. “We were treated as slaves,” the pastor recalls. But it was the

monotony he found hardest. “You just sit there. The pain that you feel internally ends up traumatising you.

“They ask you to deny your faith and to hate it. There were times when the temptation to deny Christ was very real. But with God's help we persevered and said, ‘No.’ Had we said yes, they would have freed us earlier.”

JOY AMID PERSECUTION

Despite the awful conditions, there were moments of joy as inmates and even guards became Christians through Pastor Gideon and others. “Some of the happy moments during my time in prison were when I met people who accepted the Lord,” he shares.

“When we were in this suffering, we truly searched for God's face,” he adds. “We prayed.”

Now released, Pastor Gideon observes that his faith and ministry have grown. “The power and grace God gave me after prison is better than before prison.”

But he serves knowing he could again end up in prison. It's the same for many Christians – a reality he is unafraid to highlight. “We tell people that being a Christian does not only mean accepting Jesus. Rather, we tell them that there are also prison and challenges.”

It feels a sombre note to sound, but for Pastor Gideon it's all part of a far more hopeful tune. “What makes us happy is that the gospel is spreading. Now more than ever before. People, especially young people, are coming to Christ. Persecution has not stopped the church.”

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH?



READ

“Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.” – Philippians 1:12-14



REFLECT

Reading through Pastor Gideon's and the apostle Paul's accounts, spend some time reflecting on the similarities between them, and how God used both their experiences.

Why does God use persecution to 'advance the gospel'?

In what ways have the difficult moments in your life served to grow your faith and ministry?



RESPOND

Telling others about Jesus can be a scary thing to do. Paul says that his imprisonment made others bolder to 'proclaim the gospel without fear'. The same can be true for us as we reflect on his and Pastor Gideon's experiences. This week, consider looking for opportunities to share your faith, and asking God to embolden you when the moment comes to speak.



HOW YOU CAN PRAY FOR ERITREA WORLD WATCH LIST #6

1 PRISONERS

Hundreds of Christians have been arrested over the last 20 years. Some leaders have been imprisoned for over a decade. Even once released, the ordeal can have damaging long-term effects on believers.

Heavenly Father, sustain all Christian prisoners spiritually, physically and emotionally. Provide joy in the suffering, and bring about their release. Heal those seeking to move on after being in prison. Amen.

2 GOVERNMENT

Despite the persecution many of them face from the government, Christians ask that we do not pray for the

government to be replaced, but that they will come to repent and seek God's wisdom and counsel in all decisions.

Holy Spirit, move in the hearts of the Eritrean government. Open their eyes to the value and role of all Christians to Eritrean society. May President Afewerki and his officials have life-changing encounters with You. Amen.

3 CHURCH

As the gospel spreads, churches are faced with the challenge of effectively discipling believers amid the threat of pressure and persecution. Leaders are especially vulnerable to arrest and stress-related illnesses.

Lord Jesus, provide fellowship and discipleship for all Christians. Strengthen, protect and sustain church leaders. Amen.

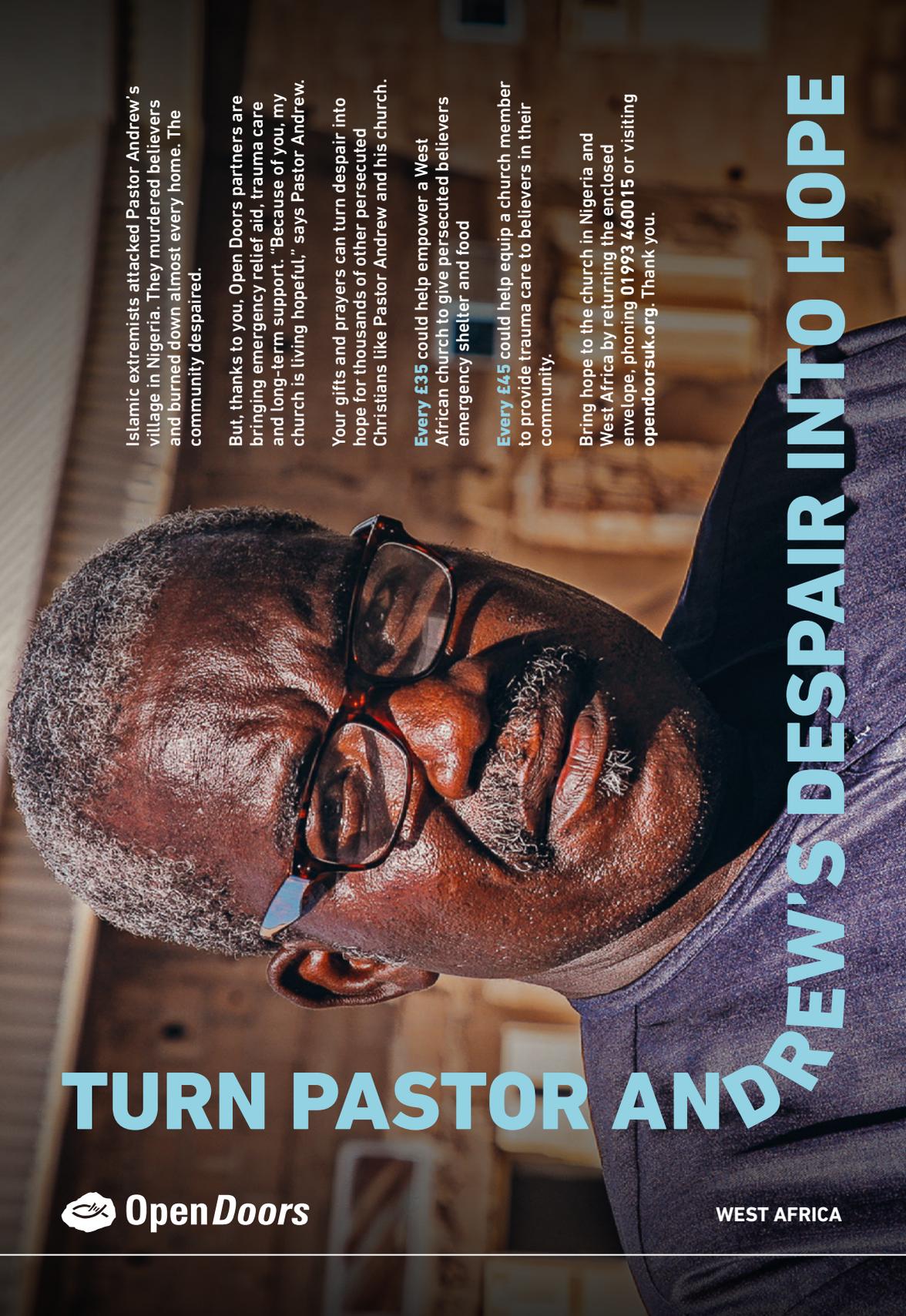
“How would the persecution be if Christians from abroad had not prayed for us? We remained standing because they prayed. What would have happened if they had not prayed? We believe God heard their prayer and we stood because He hears prayers”

– PETER*, ERITREAN CHRISTIAN

*name changed for security reasons



Read more stories of courageous faith and get overviews of the 50 countries where it's hardest to follow Jesus with your free *Open Doors World Watch List Top 50* booklet. Order today at opendoorsuk.org/wwl



TURN PASTOR ANDREW'S DESPAIR INTO HOPE

 **OpenDoors**

WEST AFRICA

Islamic extremists attacked Pastor Andrew's village in Nigeria. They murdered believers and burned down almost every home. The community despaired.

But, thanks to you, Open Doors partners are bringing emergency relief aid, trauma care and long-term support. "Because of you, my church is living hopeful," says Pastor Andrew.

Your gifts and prayers can turn despair into hope for thousands of other persecuted Christians like Pastor Andrew and his church.

Every £35 could help empower a West African church to give persecuted believers emergency shelter and food

Every £45 could help equip a church member to provide trauma care to believers in their community.

Bring hope to the church in Nigeria and West Africa by returning the enclosed envelope, phoning **01993 460015** or visiting opendoorsuk.org. Thank you.