

June 2023 Prayer

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too . . . For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

–2 Corinthians 1: 3-5, 8-11

North Korea—Zhang Wen Shi (Deacon Jang) is a Korean believer who lived in China and worked with Pastor Han by reaching out to North Koreans who had crossed the border into China. Many North Koreans illegally cross into China to purchase goods or medicine. Deacon Jang often helped them by feeding them and giving them clothing, and he shared the gospel with them when he had the opportunity. Many of these North Koreans became believers and returned to him and Pastor Han for Bible training. However, in 2014, Deacon Jang was taken to North Korea and sentenced to 15 years in prison there, and then his co-laborer, Pastor Han, was stabbed to death. Deacon Jang is still in a North Korean prison nine years later, so please pray for divine protection and encouragement for him. Pray that he continues to be a light in this very dark country where even 2-year-olds are put in prison for the faith of their parents. Please pray that God would bring other prisoners to him to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Pray that he would be used as an instrument and an ambassador in the prison. Pray that God would fill him with strength, wisdom, hope, and peace while he suffers for Christ sake. (*Source: Voice of the Martyrs, International Christian Concern*)

China—Since July 2018 when the Guangzhou Bible Reformed Church refused to join China's Three-Self Church, they have been a banned church in China. From that, they lost their church building and have since had to meet in various locations, changing their venue week by week. However, at the beginning of May 2023, a simultaneous raid by police on five different locations of the church resulted in disrupting worship services, and the detention of numerous church elders, preachers, and staff. Despite pastor Huang Xiaoning contesting the legality of the police action, the raids persisted. Officials have also harassed and pressured landlords who choose to rent to this church and other faith-based organizations. Despite the persecution and the lack of a meeting place, the church has grown. Praise God for the growth of His church in China, for the perseverance and courage of these faithful believers, and for the Father's ongoing provision in providing places for believers to gather and worship, despite the constant antagonism and raids by officials. Praise God that all those detained in the raids were eventually released. Pray for the church in China that it would continue to grow and be strengthened. Pray for the officials of the state who seek to futilely quell the gospel. Pray that those who need to know the peace and joy of Jesus might come to have faith in him. (*Source: China Aid*)

Tajikistan—The Tajikistan government passed a law in 2009 that made all religious practices illegal, unless approved by the government. In 2020, the president signed an amendment that reduced prison terms for “religious hatred” charges to 10 days or a fine rather than the previous five years. In 2022, the government declared that they would no longer register any new churches, and that those under 18 would be prohibited from taking part in any religious activities. Clearly, Christians and those of other religions have been experiencing more and more persecution in this country. A 72-year-old man named

Shamil Khakimov was recently released after spending four years in prison (where he was denied any medical treatment for his illness) because he shared his Jehovah's Witness beliefs. As we pray for this man to find the truth in Jesus Christ, pray that people of all faiths would be free of harassment and abuses of their human rights in this country. Pray also that he would heal and recover from his prison experience. Pray for the strengthening of the church in Tajikistan, as they undergo harsher persecution than in the past. Pray that they will continue to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ and be protected from arrest and hate crimes. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

Ethiopia—In November 2020, armed conflict broke out in the Tigray region of Ethiopia that resulted in widespread war crimes, crimes against humanity, and a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Tigrayan population in western Tigray. Despite a truce established on November 2, 2022, Human Rights Watch and other NGOs have determined that the campaign of ethnic cleansing in this region persists. Not only have people who were forcibly removed from their homes been denied the right to return, more are being forced out of the area daily. While completely aware of the abuses happening in the region, the Ethiopian government has failed to appropriately investigate and prosecute commanders and officials implicated in these human rights abuses. Pray that real peace will be established in Tigray, that perpetrators of human rights violations would be brought to justice, and that those who have been victims will be restored to their homes and livelihoods. Pray that God would provide miraculously for those who suffer under these devastating circumstances, and that they would find the love, peace, and comfort of Christ. (Source: *Human Rights Watch*)

Myanmar—When Cyclone Mocha hit the coast of Myanmar, Abdul Hussein was huddling in his house with his family of 11. The water started to rise, so they ran to a higher area but were separated, and his wife and three of his daughters drowned. Now he and his surviving family are living in a shack that they made out of the remains of their house and he has started begging for food for his children. In addition to the flooding, there were winds that were 195 mph and devastated entire villages. More than 400 people died and countless lost their homes. Conflict and military troops that have been there since the coup in 2021 only complicated the problem. Please pray for the people of Myanmar, who are facing hunger, homelessness, displacement, persecution, violence, and poverty. The cyclone has made a dire situation even worse. Please pray specifically for those like Abdul who have lost family members in the disaster. As emergency food has started arriving with humanitarian aid, please pray that all who need it receive it. Pray that those who are lost in Myanmar would find the Hope of the world and turn to Christ. (Source: *CNN*)

Iran—On May 8, 2023, two Iranian believers Yousef Mehrded and Seyyed Sadrollah Fazeli-Zare were executed for their Christian faith on blasphemy charges. They had been detained two years prior in May 2020 for “establishing and participating in a Telegram channel called ‘Critique and of Superstition and Religion.’” Upon their detention, they were kept in solitary confinement for 2 months. They were denied family visits and access to legal representation for an additional 6 months. While harsh consequences and imprisonment are routine responses by the Iranian government toward those of other faiths, executions on blasphemy charges have been much less common. Pray for the church in Iran, undoubtedly shaken by this increased level of persecution. Pray for those who seek to oppress and even take the lives of those who disagree with them. Pray for the families of these two Christian men that they might find comfort in Christ and in the knowledge that one day they will see them again in eternity. (Source: *Jubilee Campaign*)

Nicaragua—When 222 political prisoners were recently removed from prison, lost their citizenship, and sent into exile in the United States, Bishop Rolando Alvarez Lagos refused to go. As a result, the government sentenced him to 26 years in prison for “unfounded charges of conspiracy and spreading

false information.” He has often criticized the government for human rights abuses under President Daniel Ortega, and the authoritarian government has been targeting people that are critical of its power. The president is gaining more and more control over the media and is taking out private radio stations and silencing other voices, often faith-based. Please pray for Bishop Lagos while in prison. In the past, when he was detained, he responded with singing and praying for his persecutors. Now he is being held in solitary confinement, so pray for miraculous strength, peace, and protection, and that he would cling to the Lord. Pray for the authoritarian government in Nicaragua to be stopped and for more democratic and religious freedom. *(Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide)*

Sudan—We continue in prayer for Sudan and neighboring countries as the unfolding situation of increasing violence has led to more death and destruction in recent weeks. Even as Western countries have attempted to evacuate their citizens, many are unable to reach the evacuation area. Such was the case of an 85-year-old British citizen who left his home in Khartoum in search of food and water, only to be shot by snipers. Despite being rescued by relatives, he was unable to return to his wife because of the fighting that had broken out in the area, and she subsequently starved to death. Similarly, places of worship have been attacked or seized, such as the Anglican cathedral in central Khartoum where 42 people were sheltering, including the archbishop and his family. The cathedral was seized as a military base, many of those sheltering there were physically assaulted, and all were forced to leave. Weeks later a mosque was bombed in El Geneina, West Darfur. In this region where fighting is particularly intense, it is believed at least 280 people have been killed, more than 160 injured, and entire villages have been burned to the ground. Christian Solidarity Worldwide and other humanitarian organizations are calling on the international community to increase their monitoring of the situation in Sudan and increase their efforts to ensure broad civil society participation in negotiations on a peaceful, democratic transition. Pray for peace in this country that has been plagued by war, conflict, and genocide for decades. Pray for the removal of despotic and power-hungry leaders. Pray for the protection of an innocent population. Pray for God's miraculous intervention and for Him to reveal Himself to many in the region that they may find an Eternal Rescuer. *(Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide)*

Burkina Faso—Eighty-eight-year-old Kenneth Elliott was released this month and returned to his family after being a captive of Al-Qaeda for more than seven years. He is an Australian surgeon who was living in Burkina Faso and had been running a clinic with his wife for forty years. The 120-bed clinic served the 2 million people in the area at no cost, and he was called the “doctor of the poor” because of his work. He was kidnapped from his home by the Al-Qaeda in 2016, and the clinic had to be shut down. His wife was also taken, but was released a month later. Praise God that Kenneth is now free and with his family again. Pray for his complete healing, and that he would experience the joy and peace of Christ. Please pray for protection for workers like him from terrorist groups. *(Source: BBC)*

Pakistan—Shahzad Masih was a 16-year-old working at a local hospital as a janitor in July 2017, when he discussed with a co-worker, someone he knew who had made derogatory remarks about people who include “Muhammad” in their name. Committing no crime himself, and through ridiculous hearsay, Shahzad was arrested and imprisoned on charges of blasphemy. He had been imprisoned for 5 years when he was finally sentenced in November 2022 with death by hanging. Even under Pakistan's penal code, Shazad's actions in no way constitute blasphemy. It is a further travesty that he has been sentenced to death as a minor. Pray for the appeal being filed by an ACLJ affiliate in Pakistan. Pray for the protection of Shahzad while he is in prison, for the success of his appeal, and for his release. Pray for those who would so cruelly and unjustly persecute a young boy for merely sharing an anecdote. Pray that many would come to find salvation in Christ through the witness of Shazad and others like him. *(Sources: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; ACLJ)*

