

The Strategic Prayer Initiative – Summer 2025 **Praying for the Persecuted**

- ☐ **1. Afghanistan** - Pray for the safety of Christians in Afghanistan. The radical Islamist Taliban government has increased its efforts to find and arrest Christians, especially leaders. "The situation remains very sensitive," said one Christian worker. "In recent months, the Taliban has visibly intensified the search for Christian converts and for house churches." When the Taliban took control, many Christians fled the country, but a few Christian leaders decided to risk their lives and stay in the country. Some of those have been discovered and detained; their whereabouts and conditions are unknown. They ask, "Please pray for the safety of all Christians in Afghanistan." (Source: www.icommittopray.com)

- ☐ **2. Benin** - Pray for Michelle, a college student, who refused to participate in a voodoo ritual; her family abused and rejected her. On March 18, 2025, Michelle was at church when her mother and sister came in and urged her to come home. Not knowing what they wanted, Michelle left with them and went home to find her father performing an occult ritual with a voodoo leader. The leader held a blade, covered with an allegedly magic powder to drive away a spirit of death, that he wanted to cut her with. The rest of the family had already performed the ritual, but Michelle refused and ran to her pastor's wife for counsel. When Michelle returned home, her father told her she was no longer his daughter and he would no longer pay her living expenses. He also beat her and forbade her from attending church. Church leaders request prayer that her family will turn to Christ and that Michelle and the Christians supporting her will have peace and wisdom. (Source: www.icommittopray.com)

- ☐ **3. China** - Pray for Pastor Li Juncai of the Yuanyang County Central House Church in Xinxiang, Henan Province was charged with embezzlement and obstructing government administration and is serving a prison sentence of 5.5 years with a \$7,000(USD) fine after protesting the government's attempts to remove the cross atop his church building in 2019. Pastor Li Juncai told the workers they should proceed according to the law and that he opposed the removal of the crosses. The Christians sang hymns and prayed while attempting to keep the authorities from taking the cross. Pastor Li and other Christians were beaten and arrested. Religious Affairs authorities removed signs from inside the church building and forced church members to fly China's national flag from the front of the church. Police removed at least 4,000 crosses from churches (including government-run) within a year. Smaller churches were completely shut down. Each week, this church served approximately 700-800 people. Pray for the safety and well-being of Pastor Li. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)

- ☐ **4. Eritrea** - Pray for long-term prisoner (since 2004), Rev. Gebremedhin Gebregergis, Head of Sunday School in the Orthodox Church, known for his humility and devotion, and significantly impacted the Eritrean Orthodox youth. He departed from tradition and taught the New Testament in the local language, resulting in thousands of young people coming to Christ. Pray for his 6 children (his wife passed away in 2022). (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)

- ☐ **6. Ethiopia** - Pray for the family and church of Ibrahim Mohammed, a Christian convert from Islam who was killed for sharing his faith with other Muslims in Ethiopia. In one year, he led 80 Muslims to Christ, and he devoted himself to discipling the new believers. Because of his bold witness, Ibrahim began receiving death threats from local Islamists; still, he remained determined to share about Christ. On May 15, 2025, he was witnessing in a rural area when someone wearing Islamic dress approached him, told him it would be his last time to evangelize, and shot him. He was rushed to the hospital, where he died from his injuries three days later. Pray also for God's kingdom to continue to advance in this area. (Source: www.icommittopray.com)

- ☐ **7. Iran** - Pray for Pastor Joseph Shahbazian, an Armenian-Iranian, who was rearrested in his home on February 6, 2025, and taken to Iran's notorious Evin prison. No reason for the arrest was given, and he has been denied access to a lawyer. Pastor Joseph was initially arrested on June 30, 2020. On June 6, 2023, Pastor Joseph was sentenced to 10 years in prison on charges of "acting against national security" for leading home churches attended by Muslim converts to Christianity. Iranian authorities view those who attend and lead house churches as "enemy groups." Pastor Joseph began serving his 10-year sentence on August 17, 2022, when his appeal was denied. In September 2023, Pastor Joseph received a pardon and was released along with numerous other Christian prisoners during a general amnesty. Throughout his time in prison, Pastor Joseph suffered from a medical condition. Pray that authorities will once again release Pastor Shahbazian and that God will protect and comfort him. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)

- ☐ **8. Eritrea** - Pray for Pastor Kidane Weldou who disappeared and is presumably detained by Eritrean security forces. He is a senior pastor of the Full Gospel Church and has been a leader in the church for many years. Weldou is married and has four daughters. Pastor Weldou is also a member of the executive committee of Gideons International in Eritrea. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)

- ☐ **9. Laos** - Pray for Kard and other Christians in Laos. In May 2013, a pastor prayed for her and led her to faith in Jesus Christ. She says she was released from the spirits' control that her people worshiped. Though she kept her new faith a secret, other villagers noticed her healing and asked questions. She started to share the gospel, and 21 people eventually placed their trust in Christ through her testimony. Government officials threaten these new believers, most of whom recanted in 2023. Kard, however, refused to recant. "I have found the true God, the God who can save me, the God who freed me from the spirits," she told them. Officials have warned Kard against future evangelism, but she has grown strong in her faith and continues to witness. Pray that Kard and those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ through her witness will be strong and courageous in the face of these threats. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **10. Maldives** - Pray for Christian workers in the Maldives who often encounter significant challenges in sharing the gospel and discipling new believers without drawing persecution from fundamentalist groups. Pray for "people of peace" who are open to engaging with them to give others the possibility of experiencing the gospel. Pray for Mary, one such potentially influential person of peace, who shared that she and her husband have suffered traumatic losses as they have tried to start a family. Christian workers were able to pray with her, so please pray with them that Mary would be able to have a child and that her experience will turn her heart to not just know the gospel herself but to use her connections to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the islands. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **11. Middle East** - Pray for Wahid who was persecuted by his family to the point of mental instability, but still seeks Christ. A former Muslim, Wahid had a cousin who became a follower of Christ and shared the gospel with him. On hearing the gospel explained, Wahid became convinced of its truth and placed his trust in Christ. But when Wahid's family discovered his conversion, they locked him inside an unused tomb, causing him to lose his sanity. When he emerged, they forced him to deny Christ, which he did, and afterwards fell into a coma-like state. But contacts have reported that Wahid speaks aloud occasionally. They have heard him ask the Lord Jesus to speak to him and place him back on the right track. Pray for Wahid to experience healing and to be renewed in his commitment to Christ. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **12. Nigeria** - Pray for Aliyu Abubakar, 23, is a new Christian in Nigeria and has already suffered and escaped from persecution. He is a member of the Fulani, a nomadic people group across West and Central Africa. Some Fulani groups are militant Muslims who attack Christian communities, and when Aliyu accepted Christ, he was locked in a room for days with little food to separate him from the friend who had brought him to Christ. He escaped by being smuggled from his village. Aliyu said he likes Psalm 23 because it encourages him to continue with his walk with God, knowing that God is his shepherd. He requests prayer for his family to come to know Christ and to receive him as their Lord and Savior. He also asks for prayer that he will stay firm in his faith and live in peace with others. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **13. North Korea** - Pray for long-term prisoner Zhang Wen Shi, also known by his Korean name, Deacon Jang, an ethnically Korean Chinese citizen who lived in Changbai, China, a town on the border between China and North Korea. He worked alongside Korean-Chinese pastor Pastor Han Chung-Ryeol, ministering to the North Koreans who crossed the border into Changbai. In November 2014, Deacon Jang was kidnapped from China and put in a North Korean prison. Fifteen months later, Pastor Han was lured from his home and brutally stabbed to death in Changbai. Deacon Jang was sentenced to 15 years in prison for his ministry to the North Korean people. Pray for safety, hope, and encouragement for Deacon Jang. Pray that his ministry to fellow inmates would be fruitful. Pray that many would write to the North Korean Ambassador to the UN asking for Shi's release. (Because North Korea does not participate in the international postal system, it is not possible to send letters to North Korea.) (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)
- ☐ **14. Pakistan** - Pray for Waqas, a Christian who worked at a paper factory, who was attacked at work for refusing to reject Christ. When a Muslim supervisor asked him to renounce his faith and embrace Islam as the "true religion," Waqas responded, "I do not need to change my religion. I have the living God." Waqas was told that if he converted, his life would be easier, but his mother encouraged him to stand firm. "You have Jesus, who is the truth and the life. Therefore, do not worry and just focus on your work," she said. On March 21, 2025, the man who tried to convert Waqas attacked him with a paper cutter, slicing his jugular vein. Waqas barely survived and is currently unable to speak. The attacker now claims that Waqas was destroying Islamic texts, and Waqas' father, who worked at the same factory, was also fired, so the entire family has lost their income. They request prayer that Waqas will fully recover and for the strength to stand firm in their faith. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **15. Eritrea** - Pray for Mussie Ezaz who was arrested in September 2007 when Eritrean authorities came after him for his work as a youth minister with the Kale Hiwot (Word of Life) Church. Described as a kind, generous and gifted leader, he worked as an evangelist for 14 years and served with Youth for Christ before developing a ministry to youth at the Kale Hiwot Church. Mussie was taken to a small village prison staffed by young soldiers. He managed to escape and tried to flee the country with the aid of fellow Christians. Authorities caught up with him and he was rearrested. For a long time, his family had no idea where he was and had no information about his health. Eritrean believers feared he'd been killed or left alone in a remote prison cell somewhere in the desert. Recent reports indicate Mussie is located at the maximum-security crime investigation unit (Wenjel Mermera) in the capital city of Asmara. Many other pastors and church leaders are and were imprisoned there. As with other Christians imprisoned in Eritrea, Mussie has never been tried or charged. His family has no idea whether he will ever be released. Mussie is married and has three children waiting for him to come home. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)

- ☐ **16. Tajikistan** - Pray for a Christian in Tajikistan who has been penalized for sharing the gospel with children. In Tajikistan, teaching children about Christ is illegal, but Christian parents and pastors continue discipling children. One church leader was caught trying to bring Christian children's books into the country and now faces expensive fines and multiple court appearances. "This restriction is a hard one, especially on parents," said a front-line worker. "Their kids cannot go to church on Sundays, but they are taught Islam on the streets. It's really hard to go against the flow without a church family supporting and encouraging children." Christians in Tajikistan request prayer for increased opportunities to discuss Christian faith with their children without interference, and for the Lord to help them be good role models. They also request prayer for the church leader facing penalties for importing Christian materials. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **17. Turkmenistan** - Pray for Batyr, a house church leader who regularly faces persecution as he travels throughout Turkmenistan to train and encourage leaders and their small congregations. He has been followed by police, harassed, and detained several times. Government officials recently held him overnight, and guards prohibited him from answering his phone as his worried wife called repeatedly over several hours. After that incident, Batyr met with front-line worker and shared his stress and the struggles he faces as a ministry leader with a young family. "What do you tell your wife when you travel somewhere dangerous, and she doesn't want you to go there?" he asked. The two spent time in prayer, asking the Lord to guide them and watch over their families as they serve. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **18. China** - Pray for Pastor Wang Yi, influential leader of Early Rain Covenant Church (one of the best-known house churches in China), who has been imprisoned since his 2018 arrest and serving a 9-year sentence, charged with instigating subversion of state power" and "illegal business management". Before leading his house church network, Lawyer Yi was a well-known intellectual who abandoned his old life to become a pastor. Wang Yi was vocal about how the church should be separate from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and regularly called upon Xi Jinping and his regime to repent. In 2018, he wrote a declaration signed by hundreds of Chinese pastors, which includes a statement of Christian beliefs and a call for an end to persecution; it also recognizes the Chinese government's authority. It is suspected that he is held in a cell by himself and he cannot meet or talk to any other prisoners, except two heavily sentenced criminals. Prison guards have given him 10-year-old moldy rice to eat. The hospital inside the prison uses expired medicines to treat prisoners and has medical staff without any certification. Early Rain Church leaders continue to face relentless persecution from the CCP—interrogations, harassment, surveillance, and detentions. However, they remain resolute in their faith. Pray for his wife and children. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com and www.chinaaid.org)
- ☐ **19. Eritrea** - Pray for long-term prisoner, Dr. Fitsum-Berhan Gebrenegus, an Eritrean pastor and psychiatrist, who was arrested on November 18, 2004, due to his involvement in the Mekanehiwet Medhane Alem Church, a renewal movement in the Eritrean Orthodox Church. Before his arrest, he served as the most senior doctor at St Mary Psychiatric Hospital in Asmara and was the only psychiatrist in Eritrea. He is believed to be held with other Christian leaders at the Wenjel Mermera Central Criminal Investigation interrogation center, a notorious maximum-security prison in Asmara. He remains incarcerated and cannot communicate with the outside world. Dr. Fitsum is married and has one child. His wife went home to be with the Lord while he remained imprisoned. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)
- ☐ **20. Iran** - Pray for long-term prisoner, Pastor Naser Navard Gol-Tapath, who was rearrested on February 6, 2025, and is being held without charges or a reason for his arrest. Naser immediately began a hunger strike in protest but suffered a debilitating stroke on March 17. While he reportedly has received some medical treatment, he remains behind bars. Pastor Nasser had previously served nearly five years in the same prison on a 10-year sentence for charges amounting to "action against national security" for leading house churches. Naser, a convert from Islam, is being held in Iran's notorious Evin prison. Pray for Pastor Nasar to be released soon and be protected by God. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com) (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)
- ☐ **21. Laos** - Pray for Vanh, a recent convert, who has faced backlash from her family since becoming a Christian. Vanh came to faith in Christ in January after local Christians invited her to Christmas activities. When her husband and adult children found out, they forbade her from returning to church, saying they would cut off all support for her if she did. After the next Sunday service, one of her sons angrily smashed her dishes, saying it might be her who gets smashed next time. Her children took her phone so that she would not be able to listen to Bible texts and Christian teaching, and the next day, her husband prepared divorce papers. "I have hope, and I believe only God can help me," Vanh said when she came to faith in Christ. Pray that she will hold fast to her hope in Christ as she experiences rejection from her family, and pray that the body of Christ will become for her a loving refuge. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **22. Nigeria** - Pray for Abdulmasi, a Christian convert from Islam who chose to stay in his community despite being opposed for his Christian witness. Abdulmasi studied the Quran in a renowned Muslim university in northern Nigeria but came to faith in Christ through dreams he had. Since giving his life to Christ, Abdulmasi has experienced opposition in his community. People in his village refuse to eat with him; he has been beaten and poisoned; and a majority of his harvest was taken by other villagers. Amid this persecution, Abdulmasi remains faithful to Christ. He decided not to leave his village but to stay and share the love of Christ, and he said that people have been asking him questions about his faith. Pray for Abdulmasi as he shares the gospel in his village, and pray that those who persecute him will repent and place their trust in Christ. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)

- ☐ **23. Pakistan** - Pray for Christian workers in Pakistan who report that the level of brutality against Christians has been increasing in recent months. "In my 65 years, I have never seen these kinds of things in Pakistan," said one worker. On March 27, 2025, a Christian couple was stopped in the Faisalabad district and robbed at gunpoint by two masked men. When the men learned the couple were Christians, they tied up the husband and sexually assaulted his wife. Local police have arrested the attackers. Pakistani Christians request prayer for the survivors' recovery, for justice, and for courage to stand firm in their faith amid intense persecution. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **24. Eritrea** - Pray for long-term prisoner, Rev. Dr. Tekleab Mengisteab, a medical doctor, ordained priest, and well-known theologian, who was abducted by security forces along with his colleague Dr. Fitsum on November 19, 2004. At the time of his arrest, he was working as a diabetes specialist in the National Referral Hospital, which was close to the church where he served. Dr. Tekleab was known for his theological teaching written in the appealing Tigrigna language that made it desirable to read. Dr. Tekleab wrote many books and articles in various magazines, including Mekane Hiwot magazine, of which he was the editor-in-chief. Despite being watched by the government, Dr. Tekleab continued to write and teach spiritual messages until his arrest. Pray for his wife and children who must live in exile. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)
- ☐ **25. Laos** - Pray for TuYang, a 32-year-old tribal Christian in Laos, to remain firm in his faith despite persecution from his family and village. When his older brother, a police officer, found out that TuYang and his wife had come to faith in Christ in 2021, he became angry and began a campaign of persecution. He encouraged his extended family and the village to cut off TuYang, his wife, and their children. Even so, TuYang and his wife have brought nine families to Christ. They continue to worship the Lord and invite other Christians to join them for worship in their home. Village authorities have begun to threaten these Christians not just with excommunication but also with imprisonment for leaving their animist ancestral religion. Pray that TuYang, his family and the new believers will stand firm in their Christian faith despite these threats. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **26. China** - Pray for long-term prisoner, Pastor Zhang Shaojie, of Nanle County Christian Church in Henan Province, who is currently serving a 12-year prison term for "gathering a crowd to disrupt the public order". Zhang, 49, when he was arrested, served as the local head of the China Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Twenty church members were also detained. Zhang's daughter, with her husband and baby, fled the area to avoid arrest, and she later told China Aid that she'd received more than 10 phone calls threatening to "wipe out her entire family" if she continued to speak out about the church. Zhang was sentenced to 12 years in prison on July 4, 2014, and his appeal was denied. Pray that he can sense God's presence with him and that God will protect him. Pray that he can be a light for other prisoners. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)
- ☐ **28. Eritrea** - Pray for Pastor Meron Gebreselasie, who was arrested on June 3, 2004, and was the pastor of Massawa Rhema Evangelical Church in Massawa, a Red Sea port city. He was also an anesthetist at Massawa Hospital. Meron was arrested shortly after Pastor Tesfatsion Hagos of Asmara, who was arrested on May 27, 2004, while visiting Meron. On his way to return Tesfatsion's belongings to his home in Asmara, Meron was detained at a checkpoint. He has been in prison ever since. He was held for two months at Asmara's 2nd Police Station before being moved to the maximum-security Wengel Mermera Central Criminal Investigation Interrogation Center, where many of Eritrea's prominent Christian leaders arrested after the 2002 religious crackdown are believed to be held. None have been charged, tried, or given prison sentences. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)
- ☐ **29. Sri Lanka** - Pray for continued healing for Rebecca, who survived a 2019 bomb attack on her church in Sri Lanka. With burns and injuries that have continued to affect her even as she has joyfully pursued a ministry of music and evangelism. She is undergoing surgery to restore some movement in her hands, and her doctors also found a brain tumor that has resulted in more surgery and treatment; even so, doctors say the tumor could return. Christian workers say Rebecca, who married and had one son after the bombing, expressed her faith in God and requested prayer for her total healing from these physical challenges. (Source: www.icommitopray.com)
- ☐ **30. Eritrea** - Pray for Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel, a leading figure of Full Gospel Church of Eritrea, founder and senior pastor of Southwest Full Gospel Church and member of the executive committee to the Full Gospel Church of Eritrea, who was arrested on May 23, 2004. He was taken from his home in Asmara Gejeret, at approximately 5 a.m. Dr. Gebremeskel was a mathematics lecturer, department and faculty head at the University of Asmara until 1999, when he became a full-time pastor at the Southwest Full Gospel Church. He has a Ph.D. in mathematics from Chicago University. His wife and four children have not been able to visit him. About 2,000 Eritrean Christians are believed to be under arrest because of their religious beliefs, held in police stations, military camps and prisons in 12 known locations across Eritrea. Dr. Gebremeskel is one of the 28 clergymen being held. Jailed Protestants are routinely subjected to physical beatings and severe psychological pressure to deny their religious beliefs. Police and military authorities continue to demand the prisoners return to one of the three "official" Christian denominations recognized by the government. But even the legally recognized denominations--the nation's historic Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran churches--have come under government disfavor, incurring threats and even jailing by security police officials. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)