

The Strategic Prayer Initiative – Winter 2026

Praying for the Persecuted

- ☐ **1. Republic of Congo** – Pray for Kemi and her son, who have survived persecution by radical Islamists. Kemi, her husband, and several others were abducted in 2017 by radical Islamists. The militants killed most of the Christians, including Kemi's husband; however, they spared Kemi, but marched her into the forest and abused her. For nine months, she prayed that God would rescue her. One day, while fetching water, she was able to escape her captors. After living on wild fruit for three weeks, she finally stumbled onto a road, describing it as a miracle. Later, she learned she was pregnant, and her community rejected her and the baby. Kemi became depressed, and she had trouble sleeping and taking care of herself and her child. Praise God, she received spiritual and emotional care due to Voice of the Martyrs and a local counseling ministry. She can now sleep, work, and serve in her local church. Pray for spiritual and emotional care for others, who, like Kemi, have suffered for their faith. (Source: www.icommittoprayer.com)

- ☐ **2. Pakistan** – Pray for the safety of Christians in Pakistan. In August 2025 at 1:30 a.m., a group of armed men took a Christian family captive, threatened to bring blasphemy charges against the family, and demanded the family pay more than \$150,000 to prevent the accusations. They also threatened to destroy everything the Christians owned. "You will be the next Jaranwala," the abductors said, referencing a riot in August 2023 when Islamic extremists destroyed 26 churches and more than 80 homes in a Christian area after Pakistani Christians were falsely accused of destroying a copy of the Quran. This family escaped from their abductors but has since gone into hiding. "The threat of blasphemy is such a weapon," said a front-line worker with Voice of the Martyrs. "Threats and false claims that someone has committed blasphemy are being used against Christians all over the country. Please pray for all Pakistani Christians to be safe and have wisdom as they serve Christ." (Source: www.icommittoprayer.com)

- ☐ **3. Benin** – Pray for the safety of Christians in Benin. On Sunday, July 27, 2025, Islamists entered a church building in northeastern Benin near the end of the service and abducted its pastor and three elders. Persecution is prevalent in the northern part of Benin, where Christians are beaten and sometimes killed, and church buildings are routinely destroyed. A senior Beninese pastor requested prayer for the abducted church leaders and that Christians in Benin will remain bold witnesses to Christ amid persecution. - (Source: www.icommittoprayer.com)

- ☐ **4. China** - Pray for Pastor Li Juncai of the Yuanyang County Central House Church in Xinxiang, Henan Province. He was charged with embezzlement and obstructing government administration. He 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)

- ☐ **5. 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 them 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)

- ☐ **6. China** – Pray for Pastor Wang Xiaoguang, who was arrested again on August 7, 2021, on accusations of fraud. The Chinese Communist Party characterizes the collection of tithes in the church as fraud. Pastor Wang was detained for three years and eight months before being sentenced to nine years and seven months in prison. His wife, Rang Yongli, was also sentenced to 15 years in prison. Wang Xiaoguang's son reported that his father considered it "a great honor" to be put on trial for the Lord, and he used his time in court as an opportunity to share his faith. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)

- ☐ **7. Iran** – Pastor Naser Navard Gol-Tapath 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. Pastor Nasser previously served 5 years in the same prison on a 10-year sentence for charges that amounted to "action against national security" for leading house churches. Naser, a convert from Islam, is being held in Iran's notorious Evin Prison. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)

- ☐ **8. North Korea** – Pray that people in North Korea come to find Christ, like Min-ji and her husband, Kun-woo. He found Christ after he fled temporarily to China following the arrest of his wife for selling black market items. Kun-woo returned after Min-ji was released, but was arrested for becoming a Christian when neighbors alerted authorities. Min-ji spent six years in a labor camp because of her husband's faith. Upon release, Min-ji fled to China and was detained in China for trying to enter South Korea. In jail for 2 years, while China decided where to send her, she met Chinese women imprisoned for their faith who prayed for her. She was eventually allowed to go to South Korea and Voice of the Martyrs provided education and support. She became a Christian and now wants to continue her education to include theology so she can teach others. (Source: www.persecution.com)

- ☐ **9. 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)
- ☐ **10. 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 is 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)
- ☐ **11. Eritrea** - Pray for Haile Nayzgi, who was arrested in 2004. He was the leader of Eritrea’s Full Gospel Church, which is comprised of 120 to 150 house-meeting groups. The church groups were closed by government decree at a meeting with a government official on May 15, 2002. At that time, the church groups were given an application form for government registration. The Full Gospel Church filled out the form and returned it to the appropriate offices, but no reply was ever received. Haile is married and has three children. He was previously an accountant with the World Evangelical Alliance. During his incarceration, Haile has been refused any personal contact with his family. When family and friends went to take food and clothing to the prison for Haile on August 24, 2004, they were told that he was no longer there. Mr. Nayzgi has been moved to various locations since his arrest, but the actual charges against him have not been released. After Haile Nayzgi’s wife was warned she might also be arrested, she and the children decided to flee. After an arduous journey, they reached another country, where they have been safely living for the past several years. Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) has been supporting them and visiting regularly. Some months ago, in a message from Haile smuggled out of Eritrea, he thanked VOM for the support of his family. It was encouraging for him to know they were well while he remained in prison. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)
- ☐ **12. 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 is given. He remains behind bars without charges and has been denied access to a lawyer. Pastor Joseph was initially arrested on June 30, 2020. He was released after a lengthy bail process in which prosecutors initially asked for around \$150,000 USD but later reduced it to \$100,000. 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, but thirteen months later, Pastor Joseph received a pardon and was released along with numerous other Christian prisoners during a general amnesty. Pray for the release of Pastor Shahbazian and for Christians in Iran. (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)
- ☐ **13. China** - Pray for Pastor Ezra Jin, an imprisoned Chinese pastor who is a prominent founder of the underground Zion Church. The family of Pastor Ezra Jin, an imprisoned Chinese pastor, is calling on religious freedom supporters to send Christmas cards and encouraging words to incarcerated church leaders in China who were detained during the Zion Church raid in October. Chinese authorities seized the assets of Zion Church. They forced the closure of its buildings in 2018 after the church refused to allow facial recognition cameras to be installed within its facility. Jin was also prohibited from exiting China. Despite the setback, the church didn’t give up and continued its ministry, “reaching as many as 10,000 people a day,” according to the Associated Press. Per CSW, Zion Church is one of the largest unregistered churches in China. In recent years, China has instituted the practice of Sinicization of Religion, in which the state controls churches and requires them to allow the state to dictate what is said during sermons. Authorities of the communist regime often require churches to include pro-communist rhetoric in their sermons, leaving many churches with a difficult decision: allow Chinese authorities to control their sermons and activities or go “unregistered” and risk arrest for illegally worshipping Christ and following the Bible. (Source: www.persecution.org)
- ☐ **14. 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)
- ☐ **15. Yemen** - Pray that God would use Majed, a Yemeni Christian who expects to be arrested at any time, whether outside or inside prison. May he continue to be a faithful servant during the coming days. Pray for his protection along with those who have not yet been exposed as Christians. May God give them the wisdom to handle the current situation. Pray that Christian prisoners and their families are comforted and encouraged by the Lord. Pray for their current state, for protection from pain and torture. May they feel that God is with them and near them. Pray that no more harm will be done to the church in Yemen. Pray that the country will indeed witness a revival where people's eyes and hearts are opened to accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Pray that broken hearts would be mended and that fear won't stop believers in Yemen from continuing their work. May fear not cripple the church and ministry in Yemen. (Source: www.opendoorsus.org)

- ☐ **16. Eritrea** - Pray for Pastor Meron Gebreselasie, pastor of Massawa Rhema Evangelical Church in Massawa, a Red Sea port city, who was arrested on June 3, 2004. 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)
- ☐ **17. China** – Pray for Yang Rongli, who was arrested again on August 7, 2021, along with eleven other leaders of the Linfen Church for fraud (how the Chinese Communist Party characterizes the collection of tithes in the church). Yang Rongli was held in custody for almost four years before sentencing. On July 26, 2025, she received a sentence of 15 years in prison, which a front-line worker said was one of the harshest sentences dealt to a house church leader in at least two decades. In a letter to her son informing him of the outcome of her case, she described the sentence as “a great crown given to me by God.” (Source: www.prisoneralert.com)
- ☐ **18. Burkina Faso** – Pray for Christians in Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso is a nation in crisis, caught in the terrifying grip of expanding jihadism. Three extremist groups have taken control of 40% of the territory, displacing more than 1 million Christians. Extremist violence forces their families to flee, and children lose not only their homes but also their access to education. And adequate schooling can be a challenge at IDP (internally displaced persons) camps. After losing everything, 110 pastors and their families have been able to start rebuilding their livelihoods thanks to Global Christian Relief. From farming and weaving to goat breeding and chicken farming, these displaced pastors received the tools and training they needed to create income. Pray that agencies like Global Christian Relief will be able to continue to assist and advocate for the persecuted. (Source: www.globalchristianrelief.org)
- ☐ **19. Nigeria** - Pray for Christians, like Philip, in Nigeria, who was asleep in his bed when Fulani militiamen attacked him with a machete. He survived, but lost his **right eye**. Pray that the government and authorities of Nigeria, as well as international powers, will act carefully and wisely to address the violent persecution of Christians as well as other problems of insecurity that affect all Nigerians. Intercede especially for our brothers and sisters left bereaved, injured, displaced, and destitute by terrorists who target Christians for their faith. (Source: www.barnabasaid.org)
- ☐ **20. Libya** – Pray for eleven Christians in Libya who have been sentenced to 3 to 15 years in prison for practicing their faith. Members of the group, which includes 9 Libyan men, one woman, and one Pakistani national, were sentenced on several charges, including “insulting Islam” and “calling for the establishment of a banned group,” according to various reports. They also faced charges of apostasy for converting from Islam and could have been sentenced to death, but the court did not pursue that penalty. Pray that our imprisoned brothers and sister will stand firm in their faith amid the challenges of prison; that they will have opportunities to share the gospel with their fellow inmates; and that they will be released. Pray also for their families to experience God's comfort and provision. (Source: www.icommitoprayer.com)
- ☐ **21. 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 (Wengel Mermera) in the capital city of Asmara. Many other pastors and church leaders have been 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)
- ☐ **22. Iran** – Pray for God to miraculously reveal Himself to the people of Iran. Two years after placing her faith in Jesus Christ, Fareena still hadn't told a soul. Like most new Christians in Iran, she feared the backlash she would face if her family learned she had left Islam. Since doing so is illegal in the Muslim nation, new Christians are often imprisoned after going public with their faith. And many more are beaten for bringing shame to their Muslim family. Then, one day, she saw something that shocked her. “When I woke up and headed to the living room, my father was sitting on the floor reading a Bible thoughtfully.” He said, “I am reading an amazing book.” Iranian Christians had gone house to house, placing Bibles in mailboxes throughout the neighborhood. Each one included a note saying the book was a gift for Nowruz, the Persian New Year. To Fareena, the gift was a miracle. Using the contact information included with the gift, she learned how she and her father could join a house church. “God called my father into His family,” she said. “My father has been reading the book every day and talks about it joyfully.” (Source: www.persecution.com)
- ☐ **23. 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 his significant impact on 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)

- ☐ **24. 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 of 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 and 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 the University of Chicago. 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 that 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)
- ☐ **25. Mexico** - Pray for Mauricio and Christians like him who are being persecuted in Mexico. Mauricio says that his suffering started when he accepted Lord Jesus. The authorities in his community tried to take away his land title. They took away his certificate so that he could not work his land, they imprisoned his wife and him for 24 hours, and finally, they took away their drinking water and public services. Although the majority of Mexico's population is Christian, many believers live in danger of persecution, particularly from criminal gangs, drug cartels, and indigenous groups. In many parts of the country, the presence of criminal groups is growing. Christians who bravely speak out against their activities, or who are involved in community work or evangelism (especially with youth, drug addicts, and migrants), are deemed a threat. That makes them a target. In some cases, Christian children or the children of church leaders are singled out. In some Indigenous communities, those who decide to leave ancestral and traditional beliefs to follow Jesus face ostracism, fines, incarceration, and forced displacement. Given that indigenous leaders are those who administer justice in such areas, believers have no one to turn to investigate wrongdoing and protect their religious freedom. These families can also face harassment from the community, such as property damage, restriction of access to schools for their children, and threats. Mexico is a strictly secular state, and hostility toward Christian faith and values has increased in general, while public expressions of Christianity face increasingly strong legal scrutiny. There are believed to be around 150 active criminal groups throughout Mexico, with at least one operating in each state. Persecution is a real risk for any Christian living in these areas who is deemed a threat to cartel activity. (Source: www.opendoors.org)
- ☐ **26. World** - Pray for the many organizations that support the persecuted, including ChinaAid, Voice of the Martyrs, International Christian Concern, Global Christian Relief, Open Doors, etc. (Sources: www.vom.org, www.persecution.org, www.persecution.com, www.globalchristianrelief.org, www.opendoors.org)
- ☐ **27. World** - Pray for God to intervene and protect the 300 million Christians who are oppressed, though **direct attacks** or **indirectly** through discrimination, because they follow Jesus. International Christian Concern identifies four sources of this persecution: **Evil** - (Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."); **Marxism** - (In communist countries like Cuba, China, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea, Christians are targeted because of their allegiance to Christ instead of the Marxist regimes.); **Radical Islam** - (Fundamentalist Islam is intolerant toward other faiths, and Christians suffer greatly in radical Muslim countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Indonesia.); and **Cultural** - (Christian persecution occurs because of social and cultural discrimination. Human beings in general are afraid and intolerant of that which is different.) (Source: www.persecution.org)
- ☐ **28. World** - Pray for Christians who are attacked because of **religious nationalism**, where a dominant group denigrates anyone affiliated with something else. Pray for Christians in places like Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh, India, where radical Hindus strive to eradicate Christianity. Pray for believers in parts of the Middle East where it's illegal for someone to leave Islam and pursue Christ. (Source: www.persecution.org)
- ☐ **29. World** - Pray for Christians who are attacked because **government leaders** see religion as a threat to their national interests. This occurs in places like Cuba, China, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea, where the government views Christianity as a threat and a product of the West. Christians are targeted because of their allegiance to Christ instead of the Marxist regimes. It is extremely risky to own even a page of a Bible in North Korea. Those who show any interest in the Scriptures are considered enemies of the state. Evangelists risk their lives to smuggle Bibles. In China, there is only one officially recognized church, which the Communist government controls. Authorities have closed hundreds of unregistered churches and detained pastors and church members. Millions of facial recognition cameras are used to monitor Christian activity. (Source: www.persecution.org)
- ☐ **30. World** - Pray for Christians who are attacked by **Islamic extremists** or because they converted from Islam. Fundamentalist Islam is intolerant toward other faiths, and Christians suffer greatly in radical Muslim countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Indonesia. In Iran, where it is illegal to leave Islam or own a Bible, Christians constantly face the threat of imprisonment. Those who are detained are beaten and tortured to give up information on other believers. Throughout northern Nigeria, nomadic Islamic extremists regularly attack Christian communities, killing believers and destroying homes and churches, and seizing their livestock and farmland. In Somalia, where Christians must meet in secret, it is illegal to convert to Christianity or evangelize. When Christians are discovered, they are immediately killed. (Source: www.persecution.org)