

## Prayer Diary – February 2017 – Trinity Churches

*This month's prayer diary focuses on the persecuted church. Open Doors, one of the leading supporters of people who suffer for their faith, produces a World Watch list of the 50 most affected countries. We follow some of them, day by day, from 28th position to 1st. May this prompt your own prayers, in thankfulness, or stimulate thoughts of that country's place in the world.*

**Wed 1** Djibouti: Islam is embedded in Djibouti's society. Tolerance towards the long-established Orthodox Church is decreasing and evangelistic Protestant churches continue to face severe persecution. **Pray that the violence in Yemen and the influence of radical Muslims in neighbouring Somalia will not bring further Islamic extremism to Djibouti.** *Pray for today's Radbrook Community Tea, Transforming Work course and the Trinity Men's Prayer Breakfast.*

**Thu 2** Jordan: Radical Islamic groups have been increasing activities and there were reports of Christians being interrogated by police, physically abused and abducted (often by family members). Large numbers of refugees from Syria and Iraq are a potential destabilising factor for Jordan, particularly if the jihadi violence from the region spills over. **Pray God would strengthen Muslim-background believers, who face challenges from both the government and their communities, so that they would stay faithful to Him.** *Pray for today's Windfall session, Communion in church, First Steps, Messy Church and Songs for You.*

**Fri 3** Central African Republic: Islamist rebel group, Séléka, took over much of the country in 2012, sparking sectarian violence between the rebels and the Christian-affiliated anti-Balaka militia. Though Séléka have mostly been driven out of CAR, violence against Christians remains high in the Muslim-majority north-east, where the rebels are concentrated. The war has left Muslims and Christians polarised, but many are hopeful following the election of Christian President, Faustin-Archange Touadéra. **Pray for Open Doors staff, providing emotional and physical relief to Christians targeted in the conflict.** *Pray for Charlotte, Fi and Hannah all on residential this weekend.*

**Sat 4** Brunei: After announcing the introduction of Sharia (Islamic law) in 2014, the government has now begun implementing the first phase of the new legal system. It is mandatory for all to attend Friday prayers, and propagating religions other than Islam has become illegal. A prosperous country, Brunei's sultan holds all major political positions. He supports Islamisation, particularly among tribal people, aiming to convert 2,000 tribesmen to Islam each year. Importing Bibles and publically celebrating Christmas are banned. **Pray for church leaders, many of whom are under constant surveillance by the authorities.** *Today please pray for the Cansdale family, Tracey and Phil, and Lottie, Hamish and Barney.*

**Sun 5** Palestinian Territories: Being neither of Jewish ethnicity nor of the Islamic religion, Palestinian Christians have faced challenges in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Christians in the West Bank generally enjoy religious freedom, despite the secular government. In Gaza, though Christians are largely tolerated by Hamas, their rights are neither upheld nor protected. In both areas, although the total number of Christians is generally decreasing, there is a growing number of Muslim-background believers (MBBs). **Pray for Open Doors partners supporting the church through biblical training, reconciliation work and trauma counselling.** *Pray for today's Meet Place Service and this afternoon's Baptisms at HTMB.*

**Mon 6** Burma/Myanmar: Myanmar's first fair elections for decades took place in November 2015, seeing the opposition party win a landslide victory, but already violence against Christians has risen. The Burmese army is influential in Myanmar's politics; Buddhist nationalists are known to attack Christian communities which are seen as a threat to Burmese-Buddhist heritage. Buddhist-background believers and Muslim-background believers face being shunned by their communities. **Pray that the new government will protect Christians and reverse the August 2015 bill that announced restrictions on religious conversion and interfaith marriages.** *Pray today for Trinity Tots, Causeway group and CTK, meeting for prayer.*

**Tue 7** Egypt: Both the indigenous Coptic community and Muslim-background believers face mounting pressure as Islamist groups become more violent. Elsewhere, unofficial 'customary law sessions' have seen Christians punished for crimes outside of a proper legal process; in June 2015, several Coptic families were expelled from their village after someone was found guilty of publishing pictures against Islam. Christian women are particularly vulnerable, often changing their Christian names to Muslim ones to avoid rape or kidnapping. **Pray that members of the families of at least**

**12 Christians killed by Islamist groups in 2015 would feel God's comfort and healing.** *Today pray for TMAC, the Tuesday Coffee morning and Trinity Table.*

**Wed 8** Qatar: Conversion from Islam to another religion is punishable by death, and outward symbols of Christianity are illegal. The state religion is strict Wahhabi Islam, which allows only Muslims the freedom to worship in public. Around 90 per cent of the population are migrant workers. Muslim-background believers cannot openly practise their faith as they are seen as apostates, whereas expatriates (mostly from the West) and migrant Christians (predominantly from Africa and Asia) can practise under certain restrictions. **Pray that Christians who wish to share their faith would find a way to reach out to their neighbours without being at risk of imprisonment or deportation.** *Pray today for the 18-30's social. For John and Elise Fletcher in Bangkok, and their children Elliot and Sammy.*

**Thu 9** Vietnam: Although Christians are a minority in Vietnam, their numbers are growing, and the government is working to monitor churches and curb their influence. It's technically illegal to share about Jesus outside of a church building, but believers do - carefully. The government has plans to amend its law on religion, the notorious 'Law No. 92', and selected Christians have been invited to the consultation process, but little is expected to change. **Pray for strength for Christians from tribal backgrounds, who make up an estimated two thirds of Christians in Vietnam - they face pressure to return to their traditional faiths.** *Please pray today for Charlotte and Adam Gompertz and their children, Noah and Molly.*

**Fri 10** Turkmenistan: The personality cult around President Berdymukhamedov means he is supposed to give his people 'spiritual guidance'. Only state-run religious activity is allowed. While the Russian Orthodox Church has learned to work within state restrictions, other denominations are seen as 'sects' that want to destroy the political system. Muslim-background believers have been locked up, beaten and expelled from their communities. Women who leave Islam risk being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim. **Pray for provision for believers, who can be fired or have their businesses discriminated against if their faith is known, and often face heavy fines.** *Pray for Little Buds Toddler Church, meeting today.*

**Sat 11** Ethiopia: Although Ethiopia is traditionally an Orthodox Christian country, Christians are becoming increasingly vulnerable as Islamic extremism grows. Christians are harassed, denied access to communal resources and violently attacked, particularly in areas where Muslims make up the majority. Sadly, the church itself is also a source of persecution in Ethiopia, with some fanatical elements of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) attempting to undermine other denominations. **Pray for unity among the church, and that the hearts of fanatical members of the EOC would be changed.** *Pray today for Cafe Connect Prayer for Healing.*

**Sun 12** India: Persecution in India is extremely violent. More than 350 Christians were physically attacked, at least nine Christians were killed for their faith and at least three women were raped in the reporting year. Attacks mainly come from Hindu extremists, although extremist Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and Maoists have all targeted Christians. The Indian government, now led by Hindu nationalist party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is turning a blind eye to attacks against religious minorities. **Pray for religious freedom in India - many states have introduced anti-conversion laws, and the BJP would like to introduce these on a national level.** *Pray for today's Marriage Prep in afternoon, Messy Church at Radbrook and 'B' this evening.*

**Mon 13** Kenya: Despite the fact that Kenya has a Christian majority of 82%, violence against Christians is rising sharply. Historically, Christians and Muslims have co-existed peacefully, but in recent years the northeast and coastal regions have become hotspots of Islamic extremism. Some of this has spilt over from neighbouring Somalia, the home of militant Islamist group al-Shabaab. Over 200 Christians were killed in Kenya in 2015. **Pray for God to continue to work through Open Doors partners as they support bereaved Christians and communities.** *Pray for today's Dementia Cafe at Cafe Connect and for the Standing and Finance Committee meeting.*

**Tue 14** Uzbekistan: Uzbekistan is one of the harshest dictatorships in Central Asia. While the Russian Orthodox Church is tolerated, other denominations are viewed as sects that aim to destroy the political system. Government monitors religious groups with phone tapping and spies, house churches are raided and members arrested, and Christians can be fined for anything from owning a Bible to having a Christian song on their phone. **Pray for comfort for Christian children, who are**

**often ridiculed, as lectures against 'sects' are given in schools every two months.** *Today pray for Holy Communion at the Ferns nursing home. For the work of Street Pastors.*

**Wed 15** Saudi Arabia: Converting from Islam to another religion is punishable by death in Saudi Arabia - but the number of Christians from Muslim backgrounds is growing. This is partly thanks to Christian satellite TV programmes, but also through dreams and visions about Jesus. These visions are sometimes experienced by Muslims on the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca. However, Saudi Christians must keep their faith completely secret. If not executed by the state, they risk becoming the victim of an honour killing by a family member. **Pray for God to continue to work through Christian TV, and to bless those who create these programmes.** *Today pray for CTK Vicar and wardens meeting. For Neville Willerton's work with Church Army.*

**Thu 16** Maldives: Officially, there is not a single Maldivian Christian. The constitution refers to the Maldives as '100 per cent Muslim' and being Maldivian is equated with being a Muslim; anyone who chooses to leave Islam is likely to lose their Maldivian citizenship. It is illegal to 'propagate any religion other than Islam'; punishable with two to five years in prison. Migrant Christians living in the Maldives can only practise their faith privately and are closely monitored. **Pray for comfort for isolated secret believers, and for them to find ways to safely make contact with other Christians.** *Pray today for Matt and Jenny Guilder and children, Ben and Abigail.*

**Fri 17** Nigeria: Thousands of Christians have been killed or displaced by Islamic extremists in Nigeria. Militant Islamist group Boko Haram continue to terrorise the north and have declared their own caliphate (Islamic State), although President Buhari's campaign against them has had some success. However, Islamic Hausa-Fulani herdsmen, who frequently carry out cruel attacks on Christian villages in Nigeria's middle belt, are being given grazing land by the government taken from indigenous Christian communities, depriving Christians of their fields and livelihoods. **Pray for the northern states that are majority Muslim; Christian communities are neglected and often left without clean water, clinics and roads. Pray for provision for them.** *Today pray for the Communion at Radbrook Nursing Home and tonight's 'WeROC' film night.*

**Sat 18** Yemen: The conflict in Yemen has allowed Islamic extremists such as al-Qaeda to take over large parts of the country, which makes being a Christian more dangerous than ever. Islam is the state religion of Yemen, and is a strong part of tribal life. Indigenous Yemeni believers must keep their faith a complete secret - if discovered they face banishment or honour killing from their tribe, or the death penalty from the state. **Pray for provision for the people of Yemen: the conflict has left 80 per cent of the population in need of humanitarian assistance.** *Pray today for the work of Valerie Pitt and Charles Ruxton.*

**Sun 19** Libya: Libya has descended into lawlessness since the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, giving groups such as the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) free rein to attack Christians. Libya is a deeply Islamic culture, so Libyan Christians must keep their faith completely secret; churches for Libyans and Christian literature in Arabic are forbidden. While migrant Christians are allowed to practise their faith in Libya, many have paid the ultimate price; dozens of Christians from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Egypt were kidnapped or killed by extremists in Libya in 2015. **Pray for ongoing peace talks between different ruling factions to be fruitful, and for a stable and safe Libya to be formed.** *Pray today for Gordon and Jane Lamb and their work on the Meole Estate.*

**Mon 20** Iran: While those considered ethnic Christians, such as Armenians or Assyrians, are allowed to practise their faith amongst themselves, ethnic Persians are defined as Muslim, and any Christian activity in the Persian language (Farsi) is illegal. Underground churches are increasingly monitored, and at least 108 Christians were arrested in the last year. Interrogation methods in prison can be harsh and sexually abusive. **Pray for wisdom for Christians to know who to trust, and for protection for secret believers and underground churches.** *Pray today for schools and half term school holiday this week.*

**Tue 21** Sudan: Islamic law is the foundation of Sudan's legal system, and leaving Islam is punishable by death. This means that Muslim-background believers must keep their faith completely secret. Those from Christian backgrounds can be more open about their faith but face increasing pressure. Twelve Christian girls were arrested by the Morality Police for not abiding by Sharia dress codes, and two churches were demolished by the government. **Pray for churches that have lost their buildings to find ways to keep meeting together.** *Pray today for the church office. For the work of Shrewsbury Ark.*

**Wed 22** Somalia: If a Christian is discovered in Somalia, they are unlikely to live to see another day. Just the suspicion that someone is a Christian can lead to a rushed beheading. A Christian man was shot dead in Bosaso in February 2015 because sheikhs (Islamic leaders) suspected him of 'propagating Christianity'. The militant Islamist group al-Shabaab has declared it 'wants Somalia free of all Christians'. **Pray for believers in Somalia who are isolated and lack resources to build their faith - pray they will receive the support they need to become strong followers of Jesus.** *Pray today for the ministry of the Trinity Centre.*

**Thu 23** Pakistan: Christians experience more violence in Pakistan than almost anywhere else. Blasphemy laws continue to be abused to settle personal scores, particularly against minorities including Christians. A pregnant woman and her husband were thrown into the kiln where they worked and burned to death after being accused of blasphemy, orphaning their four children. An estimated 700 Christian girls and women are abducted every year, and often then raped and forcibly married to Muslims. **Pray for comfort and courage for Christian children, who are often bullied at school and sometimes even banned from using the same water fountain as other students as they will 'defile' the water source.** *Pray for Cafe Connect and its staff and customers.*

**Fri 24** Syria: Christians are specifically targeted by Islamic extremists for attack, abduction and murder. The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) attacked 35 Christian villages in February 2015, abducting over 250 people and driving 3,000 others from their homes; militants later executed three Christian hostages. **Pray for strength and protection for brave Open Doors partners and church leaders who are choosing to stay in Syria to shine the light of Christ in their communities, despite the risks.** *Pray for the present and future ministry of Christ the King on Radbrook.*

**Sat 25** Afghanistan: All Afghan believers are secret converts from Islam. Leaving Islam is seen as apostasy, which brings shame on the family and community. Those suspected of converting to Christianity will be arrested. Buildings suspected of being used by the underground church are closed down or damaged. The few remaining expatriate Christians are at risk; three South African Christians, were working for a relief organisation, were killed when their guest house in Kabul was attacked. **Pray for wisdom for Christian parents, who do not wish to send their children to a madrassah (Islamic school) for fear of being revealed if they share their faith with their children.** *Pray today for Judith Clarkson and all our children's work.*

**Sun 26** Eritrea: Eritrea has been dubbed 'the North Korea of Africa'. The nation is under the control of an absolute dictator who sees Christians as 'agents of the West'. Some believers are kept in metal shipping containers in scorching temperatures, others are forced to work long hours doing manual labour. **Pray for the thousands of refugees who risk the dangerous journey to Europe - especially women and children, who are particularly vulnerable to human traffickers.** *Pray today for the Dedication service today for Thomas Haigh. For baptisms this year.*

**Mon 27** Iraq: There has been a church in Iraq for 2,000 years, but today it's on the verge of extinction. Thousands of Christians were forced from their homes in 2014 to escape the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) - remaining in IS-controlled territory as a Christian is effectively a death warrant. Even in parts of Iraq free of IS, the law is based on Sharia (Islamic law) and forbids Muslims from leaving Islam. **Pray for protection for women and girls - IS gives its fighters permission to rape women they capture.** *Pray for the work of Severn Hospice.*

**Tue 28** North Korea: North Korea has been the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian for 14 years. Christians face arrest, torture, imprisonment and death for daring to believe there is a higher authority than the nation's leader, Kim Jong-un. Parents often don't even tell their children about their faith for fear they will be revealed. Thousands are trapped in horrific labour camps. But despite the risks, North Koreans are still choosing to follow Christ. **Pray for protection for secret believers, and wisdom for them to know who to trust.** *Today pray for Carol Booles ministry through pre-school work and for Pam's sewing class.*