

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | November 2019



Shining with hope

Stand with your family in Syria
this Christmas



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"Whatever you did for one of my brothers or sisters... you did for me." Matthew 25:40



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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.

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Open Doors UK & I

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Cover image:

Abraham (FRONT LEFT) with other children from the church of Pastor Abdalla, an Open Doors partner in Aleppo (see p. 7).

Letter from Henrietta

Tree

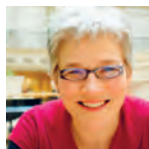
“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life” PROVERBS 13:12

For millions of families around the world, a tree takes centre place in the home at Christmas, with gifts, lights, angels, stars, all finding an echo in the story of Jesus' birth. This time last year, I had the privilege of being invited to Clarence House, the London residence of the Prince of Wales, where there was the most beautiful Christmas tree. Prince Charles had brought together senior church leaders from the Middle East to find out what help they needed and as I looked at their faces, I was humbled. Despite the suffering that they and their communities have experienced, they are still there, shining Christ's light in the darkest of places. They asked for help with three things: restoration, reconstruction and security. They wanted to offer their people hope.

Jina's story (on p. 7) from Syria epitomises that need for hope. It also demonstrates the double vulnerability of Christian women. When her husband was kidnapped by IS terrorists because of his Christian faith, she lost the love of her life, the father of her son, and the breadwinner of the family. Now she is in limbo, not knowing whether to grieve or move on. I would find it so hard to live with such uncertainty. Nevertheless, there is hope in her story. And it's the same hope that we find in Christ's birth: God is with us. Sin and death are not the end. There is resurrection – and we have the Holy Spirit's help. As we offer ourselves to Him, we, too, can offer hope to others.

Open Doors supporters are very special. I know how much you offer yourselves to the Lord in this way, and I am so thankful for every expression of support. For people like Jina, and thousands of others, it makes an enormous difference to receive ongoing prayer-led, practical help, month by month. In Syria – and Iraq – it has meant Open Doors has been able to resource churches to meet the needs of their communities, physically and spiritually, through Centres of Hope.

You, too, can be a centre of hope, for our persecuted family in Syria, Iraq and worldwide through your committed support. So, as you hang your decorations on the tree this Christmas, pray for Jina's family and share her story with others. Thanks to the goodness of God, we have been able to keep hope alive for His faithful believers this year – and that's something to celebrate.



Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

World Watch News

CHINA

China clamps down on religious minorities – and numbers of church leaders grow

The Chinese government continues to tighten its control over the church. But the result is an unexpected growth in church leadership.

“Since 2017 the government has been closing some large churches, monitoring and putting pressure on pastors to limit church growth,” said Julie*, a local Open Doors contact. China rose to number 27 on the Open Doors World Watch List this year, up from number 43 in 2018.

With the church splintering into smaller groups, more believers are taking on leadership roles. And despite the crackdown, people are still sharing the good news, according

to another local Open Doors contact, Josh*. “Young people are much better educated and computer-savvy, so the gospel is being shared digitally as well as through personal relationships ... and the number of believers continues to rise.”

HUNGRY FOR GOD

Julie also reports that pastors are not downhearted by the persecution.

“Over time, pastors have become more and more optimistic, because the sifting of believers now means they are left with a core group of believers who are hungry for God... In the past their time was often

spent dealing with relatively ‘trivial’ problems. Now they can spend their time on effective discipleship training, evangelism and church growth.”

Open Doors workers report that there is a greater emphasis on discipleship and evangelism among many groups. As Julie* says, “It’s like God is re-calibrating the foundations of the church to prepare for a new season of growth.”

In such circumstances the support and training that Open Doors provides is vital. Please pray for Chinese believers and for the Open Doors partners who are training them.

*Name changed for security reasons

ALGERIA

Another church closed down while government orders ‘harsh’ investigations

More churches are closing in Algeria, as the country’s authorities have ordered officials to clamp down harshly on ‘subversive’ Protestant churches in the country.

Eight churches affiliated with l’Église Protestante d’Algérie (EPA) have now been sealed, with this latest closure affecting around 380 Christians. EPA churches have struggled to obtain registration in accordance with a 2006 law that requires all non-Muslim places of worship to be licensed. To complicate matters for believers, an order was issued earlier this year by Algeria’s interior ministry in which Protestant churches are portrayed as ‘subversive’ and pastors accused of spreading ‘destructive ideas’ with the support of foreign groups. The heads of security are called to ‘strengthen with all harshness’ investigations of church leaders’ financial activities.



Rehman Chishti MP has been appointed as the new Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. Dr Matthew Rees, Open Doors Head of Advocacy, recently met with Mr Chishti. He said: “It was excellent to meet with Mr Chishti and to see the energy he is bringing to the role. It was very encouraging to discuss creative ideas around how the envoy can work with Open Doors and civil society more widely to promote freedom of religion or belief across the world.”

Microloans help Iraqi Christians to start afresh



Faraydoun (LEFT) and Bashar (RIGHT) were both successful business owners when so-called Islamic State (IS) came to their regions.

"When IS entered in, they left us with nothing, no relatives, no houses – they took everything and kicked us out," says Faraydoun.

Both had to flee with their families, losing their home, possessions and community. It was heart-breaking. With your help, though, things have started

to turn around for these men and their wives and children.

When the fighting was over and they could return home, your support and prayers meant Open Doors partners could lend microloans. Bashar was able to open a shop in Mosul with his microloan. Escalating living expenses meant he couldn't do it without the help of Open Doors supporters: "I'm very thankful to the supporters: they don't know me, but they trust me."

Faraydoun now runs a fish

farm that enables him to provide for his family. "The microloan supported us, thank God. We've become more restful. Thank God there are good people like you."

Thank you for restoring hope to your brothers and sisters. Please pray that Open Doors partners can help more believers in Iraq and Syria to rebuild their lives.

> You can watch a video of Faraydoun and Bashar at www.opendoorsuk.org/iraq

INDIA

Harsh new anti-conversion laws

India's Himachal Pradesh State is the eighth state to pass anti-conversion legislation. Local Christians are worried that the new law will be misused to target them.

Part of the bill prohibits the 'offer of any temptation in the form of any gift or gratification or material benefit, either in cash or employment, [...] better lifestyle, divine pleasure or otherwise'. The last six words worry Himachal Pradesh's believers. An Open Doors local partner said: "This now means that anyone praying for others' healing will be accused." The proposed punishment is seven years in jail.

Please pray for our family in India, that they would be kept safe and steadfast as they seek to follow Christ under tightening restrictions.

Tears of Gold in Malvern

The Open Doors office has been a sea of fabric, with all the handmade petition squares sent in for our *See. Change.* campaign for persecuted women (see p.17).

Before sending their squares to the Open Doors office, supporters from the Priory Church at Great Malvern put them on display for all the visitors to see.

"Already many folk who have visited the Priory have commented on how inspired they have been," said Rosemary Webster, the Open Doors church representative.

To accompany the squares, the church also displayed *Tears of Gold*, a resource for churches and small groups which illustrates the stories of seven courageous women in Nigeria. You can find out more, and order your free copy, at www.opendoorsuk.org/tearsofgold

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





Shining with hope

STAND WITH YOUR FAMILY IN SYRIA THIS CHRISTMAS

When God came to earth as Jesus, He chose to do so as part of a family. Family was an important part of that first Christmas, and remains important for many Christians celebrating around the world. You may be looking forward to spending time with your family this Christmas, but one family who can't plan to be together is Jina's, in Syria. Her husband Rober was taken captive six years ago and is still missing.

HUSBAND KIDNAPPED

As Jina recalls, "Rober and I got engaged during the war in 2011. In that same year we got married. Abraham was born in 2012. In 2013 my husband got kidnapped." She calls her son 'Apo', the common shorter form of 'Abraham' for Armenian speakers. "We were very, very happy with our son Apo; we were dreaming about his future. My husband and I were only able to celebrate his first

LEFT Jina and her son Abraham (aged seven) live in Aleppo, Syria. Rober, shown here at his wedding to Jina, was kidnapped in 2013.



birthday in 2013 – after that Rober was kidnapped.”

He was abducted while travelling by bus to Qamishli, carrying a large amount of money. But the reason that he was taken wasn't the money – it was his Christian faith.

“They told Rober to convert to Islam,” says Jina. “Rober refused and said: ‘I have my God and that’s it.’”

When extremists stopped the bus, which was carrying many Muslim passengers, only Rober and another Christian man were taken.

“They knew the names of my husband and of Elie, the other Christian, and ordered them to come out of the bus. Both were taken by them.”

Elie was released when his family paid a large ransom, and

he is now living safely abroad. He told them that Rober was still being held because he wouldn't give up his faith. “They told Rober to convert to Islam,” says Jina. “Rober refused and said: ‘I have my God and that’s it.’” He was taken because of his faith in Christ, and that’s the same reason that he hasn’t been able to come home to his family.

“YOUR WILL BE DONE”

It's now been six years. Abraham can't remember his father. But Jina hasn't lost hope that Rober will come back – that's what she prays every day. “My faith in God is very big. I say to Him: ‘O Lord as you like, may Your will be done; O Lord, I just ask you to return my husband safe and sound.’”

It would be hard enough to grieve for a husband who had been killed, but Jina has to cope with not knowing whether or not Rober is still alive. As we read in Psalm 34, “The Lord is

close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Jina knows that God is her refuge and her strength. And He is using your support to provide Jina and Abraham, and others like them, with the vital aid they need to survive without their breadwinner. They are being supported by a church that operates as a Centre of Hope (see the box to the right) in Aleppo, run by Open Doors partner Pastor Abdalla. You might have read his story in our September 2019 magazine.

FOOD AND FUEL

Abdalla and his church can't guarantee Rober's return, but they can stand by Jina and Abraham while they wait. With donations from Open Doors supporters, the Centre of Hope is able to give food and fuel, as well as supporting vulnerable families in prayer. We know that Jesus promised to be with His people ‘always, to the very end of

BELOW Jina says, “I want to raise him righteously...I want to teach him to live as a Christian”





ABOVE Abraham and his grandfather go together to collect their food package that Abdalla's Centre of Hope is providing with your support

the age' (Matthew 28:20). Abdalla and his church are proud to be Jesus' hands and feet in Syria, praying with the persecuted and distributing essential aid to those who need it.

Jina receives regular fuel for heating and money that she can use to buy more. "They help us with the costs," she says, "and I also receive gallons of diesel." If it weren't for the church's help, she adds, she and Apo would suffer a great deal. These gifts sustain them while they pray for Rober's safe return.

STANDING WITH THE VULNERABLE

Jina can't get a job because, as a single mother, she needs to be there to care for Abraham during the day: "It's hard to raise our boy alone, very difficult. People keep telling me, 'Go, work – go work.' But where could I work? Where can I leave my son?"

With your support, many Syrians are now able to start rebuilding their businesses, communities and lives, but Open Doors partners are still providing necessities to people like Jina who aren't in the position to go back to work.

Often it is the most vulnerable who had to remain in Syria during the fighting, and are still in need of vital support now: the elderly whose children left Syria, the chronically ill, and families like Jina and Abraham's who have temporarily or permanently lost their breadwinner. This support is even more important during the hardship of winter.

Jina knows that she is particularly vulnerable as a single woman. When her husband was taken, Jina and Abraham went to live with her parents-in-law: "This was because of the shelling and bombardments, but also because of my reputation. I didn't want to stay on my own as a single woman with a son. My mother and my in-laws were worried about that. Something bad might happen to me."

In the Middle East, single women living alone or with children are often looked down upon and they run the risk of being harassed, or worse. In many countries of the world, Christian women are doubly vulnerable to persecution: both for their faith and for their gender.

What is a Centre of Hope?

A Centre of Hope is a place where Open Doors local church partners can reach their communities with hope and help. Some are hosted in church buildings, some are in low-cost, newly constructed sites and others are in repurposed buildings. All 16 centres across Syria have been established to help rebuild lives and support Syrians who need it the most.

Through Centres of Hope, Open Doors partners can provide vital relief aid (food, fuel, clothing), medical care, trauma care, children's classes, Bible training, business microloans and more. They meet Syrians in their place of need, offering the most appropriate help and support – whether that be to sustain people for another week or set them up for a self-reliant future. Each Centre of Hope adapts to the local context, demonstrating that the church is a place of hope for both Christians and non-Christians in the community.

Sixteen centres have so far been established. Now our vision – with your support – is to open another 20 Centres of Hope across Syria. Together, we can help strengthen the church in Syria to reach even more people in their communities with the good news of the gospel.



ABOVE Thanks to your giving and prayers, Abraham can attend children's services at Abdalla's church. When he gets home he shares with Jina what he's learned from the Bible

"TO KNOW ABOUT JESUS"

After three years, Jina and Abraham returned to their apartment. It's obvious that Abraham is still affected by his father's disappearance, even though he has no memories of Rober. Abraham wasn't able to speak for three years after Rober was kidnapped. He clearly remains anxious. Each evening, says Jina, he tells her "Good night, I love you so much, but don't leave me."

When Jina hopes for the future, she naturally thinks first of her husband. She also wants Abraham to grow in faith. "I hope God will return my husband back safe and sound. Besides that, I hope that I can be proud with my son. I want to raise him righteously, so that he knows what is in the Bible, and I want to teach him to live as a Christian."

Thanks to your prayers and giving, Abraham is learning about the Bible in classes run by Abdalla's church. Jina is delighted that the Centre of

Hope offers these activities, and Abraham loves going to the classes.

"He often asks me, 'When will it be Friday?', the day of children's church. When I ask him why, he says: 'to know about Jesus'. He enjoys being

Each evening, Abraham tells Jina "Good night, I love you so much, but don't leave me."

there. He loves singing with the gestures. When he comes back home, I ask him what he learned today. He tells which verse they learned from the Bible."

HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

These classes can help raise the next generation of believers in Syria. The ultimate vision for the church, shared by Abdalla, Jina and all who worship at the church, is to be a witness for Jesus in Aleppo. The projects run with your support aren't

intended to end with the survival of a small, beleaguered Christian community. Rather, the hope and intention is that Centres of Hope will lead to resilient communities, resilient families and a resilient church. A church that is powerful and life-changing, flourishing across the Middle East and shining as the light of Christ in the darkness.

This won't happen overnight. The church has been significantly hit by the conflict in the region and Christians have been targeted in many attacks. The ideology of so-called Islamic State (IS) persists in the region, even though IS has largely been defeated in Syria. Christians know that they are still at risk, and they need the long-term support of the worldwide church so that they, in turn, can stay in their communities and be the hope for the Middle East.

And that could start with a parcel of food or a gallon of diesel for a family like Jina and Abraham.

Please give

Every £24 could provide ongoing medical care for a believer in Syria

Every £35 could provide a monthly relief pack for a family like Jina and Abraham's in Syria. This could include food, clothing, and heating during the freezing winter

A gift of £65* could go towards providing training and a loan, to enable a woman to open a small business so she can support her family and community.

*The total cost of this training and loan is £452 per person

Please pray

Pray for strength and encouragement for Jina and Abraham, and for the safe return of Rober. Keep praying for our brothers and sisters in Syria, for protection and hope and the opportunity to share the light of Christ. Thank God for the 16 Centres of Hope delivering help to vulnerable people in Syria through the local church, and pray that the vision of opening another 20 can be achieved.

Please encourage

You can send a message of encouragement to a Christian in the Middle East – they'd love to hear from you. Find out more at www.opendoorsuk.org/write

Please sing!

Don't forget to order copies of *Signs of Hope*, the Open Doors carol sheet. You can read more in the box, right.



Signs of Hope

Jesus is the greatest sign of hope that the world has ever seen. Now you can celebrate and pray for the people who are signs of hope in Syria as the country recovers from war. All while singing your favourite carols!

This year, your church can sing from our *Signs of Hope* carol sheet. As well as featuring nine well-loved carols, from 'Once in Royal David's City' to 'Joy to the World', you can use *Signs of Hope* to help your church learn more about the courageous faith of the church in Syria.

The carol sheet features inspirational stories of men, women and children who are bringing signs of hope to Syria, including Jina, Abraham and Pastor Abdalla. As you sing, you can share the challenging message about why people choose to follow Christ despite the cost.

There's even a Christmas craft activity. Once you've finished singing, there's a cut-out star to hang on your tree, to remember our persecuted family in Syria this winter.

Order your **FREE** *Signs of Hope* carol sheets at www.opendoorsuk.org/signsofhope





Brighter visions beam afar – thanks to your support!

It's getting colder, and the evenings may be drawing in, but we hope these stories and testimonies about how your prayers and support this year are helping and encouraging our persecuted church family to thrive against the odds will bring some warmth and light as Christmas draws near!



NORTH KOREA

“We thank you for your continuous love and concern”



Illustrative image used

Despite the intense food shortages in North Korea, believers there follow the practice of ‘Holy Rice’, whereby some of the rice they receive is set apart for use in God’s kingdom. This means they are able to help others in their community, which in turn leads to trust and opportunities to share the gospel.



In 2019, you helped provide over 60,000 North Korean Christians with vital relief aid, including emergency food, medicines and clothes.

One believer said, “We appreciate your ministry work. You help us to follow the path of Jesus Christ’s cross. We thank for your continuous love and concern. Thank you for taking care of our church believers who are in physical and spiritual needs. We dedicate ourselves again to help the other Christians.”

SEE. CHANGE.

“I have found new life”

In March, we launched the *See. Change.* campaign for Christian women around the world who are doubly vulnerable to persecution. Your response to the stories of women like Esther and Aisha has been incredible – over 12,500 people signed the handmade petition.



Thanks to you, Open Doors is able to support close to 2,500 women in Nigeria who have been traumatised by violent persecution.

This help includes trauma care, practical help for widows and training for church leaders to help them respond to the trauma that persecuted Christians in their community have experienced.

Ijanda (LEFT) received trauma care after she managed to escape Boko Haram, who had held her captive for four years. She says, “I found new life here... I learned to forgive those who have offended me and have forgiven those who mocked me, because they don’t know what they are doing.” To you, she says, “I want to say thank you. May God continue to open doors for you. May God continue to grant you wisdom to reach out to many others. I have been touched and I have forgiven.”

RIGHT Thanks to your support, women like Esther have received trauma healing in Nigeria



SRI LANKA

“The blood of the martyrs are the seeds of the church”

No one could have predicted the awful tragedy that befell Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday this year – but your response to our brothers and sisters in Christ who were affected in the three bomb attacks on their churches was phenomenal. Open Doors now has the means to continue to support believers in Sri Lanka for the foreseeable future, which is a lifeline

as families continue to grieve for lost loved ones and begin to pick up the pieces.

“God is good. God is great. My foundation is Jesus Christ”

Verl lost several family members as a result of the attacks, including his 13-year-old son, but his faith continues to burn bright. He says, “They are special people. They were not killed. They were sown. They are like seeds. And the blood of the martyrs are the seeds of the church... God is good. God is great. My foundation is Jesus Christ. I’m zero. Jesus is everything.”



Verl and his brother Nithan stand next to portraits of their family members killed in the Easter bombing, including Verl's son Jackson

BELIEVERS FROM A MUSLIM BACKGROUND

“God gave me wonderful relationships with new people”



Esther* was born into a Muslim family, but chose to follow Christ after she experienced healing through prayer. Esther's husband abandoned her, her in-laws cut her off, and her own siblings insulted and even assaulted her.

Open Doors not only supported Esther through trauma care, but local partners are helping to construct a house for her and her children. Esther says, “Knowing that there are people who love me and are concerned about me is very humbling. Thank you and may God bless you more and more... My children and I will continue trusting in Jesus.”



Thanks to your support, Open Doors is able to provide over 2,200 believers from a Muslim background in closed countries with training to equip them to withstand persecution.

We are also able to provide training to 2,300 additional believers to train them to share the gospel and serve their community.

LEFT Through your gifts and prayers, Open Doors partners helped Esther to build her house

“I have been encouraged in so many ways”



Sharda continues to serve persecuted Christians in India despite the danger she and her family face for their faith

In India, courageous believers like Sharda*, a local church leader and schoolteacher, are continuing to serve persecuted Christians despite the danger. Her son was almost killed by Hindu extremists, but your prayers and support made it possible for her to keep

“I am so thankful for [Open Doors'] presence; it made a lot of difference”

going. “This was the most difficult time of my life,” she says, “yet by God’s grace some Open Doors partners

encouraged me in so many ways. They stood by us, prayed with us and supported us practically. I am so thankful for their presence; it made a lot of difference.”

Thanks to your support, Open Doors partners are able to provide ongoing practical help to thousands of believers in India who have been persecuted for their faith. This help could include legal assistance, food, medical care, access to a safe house or permanent shelter.



Continue your journey with the persecuted church



Thank you so much for all of your prayers and support this year. As you can see, they make such a huge difference in the lives of Christians around the world who continue to be salt and light in some of the most dangerous places to follow Jesus. Ongoing prayers and gifts enable Open Doors to continue to walk alongside our persecuted brothers and sisters for as long as they need us and make a lasting impact on the life and mission of the church for generations to come – if you don’t already, will you consider committing to give and pray regularly? Visit our website www.opendoorsuk.org or call our Inspire team on **01993 460015** to find out more.

*name changed for security reasons

You are making the INVISIBLE VISIBLE

The handmade petition is going on display! Over 12,500 of you spoke out for your persecuted sisters by adding your names to the handmade petition this year, and we're delighted that Westminster Abbey will host a free public installation of the petition in Chapter House from 17-24 November. Each square, each name, says "I see you" to women who are doubly vulnerable – persecuted for both their gender and their faith.

The handmade petition saw thousands of people from around the world write, paint, draw or embroider their name on a square of fabric, alongside the words "I see you" and any other message of encouragement. Families created their petitions together, church small groups devoted evenings to adding their names, and we loved meeting many petition-signers at summer festivals. Now thousands of squares have been sewn together into a unique banner that calls for persecuted women to have their dignity, identity and hope restored. We think of it as a tapestry of prayer.

Petitions came from all over the world. More than 250

Christian women who have themselves been persecuted chose to add their names – you can see pictures from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East among the photos on the page to the right.

In the week of 17-24 November, it will be presented to the UK Government at the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) conference. We are asking the government to recognise officially that faith can make a woman more vulnerable. Women are targeted not just because they are women but because they are Christian women.

And you can see the full petition yourself! If you're in London between 17-24

November, we'd love you to visit it and use the petition as an inspiration to pray for our vulnerable sisters and for the outcomes of the PSVI conference.

PLEASE PRAY

Open Doors is calling for a week of prayer from 17-24 November for the presentation of the petition and for its display at the PSVI conference. Please join us in praying that parliamentarians would be influenced and that women who are persecuted for their faith would be recognised in PSVI policy. You can find specific prayer points in the prayer diary enclosed with this magazine. Thank you so much for praying for your persecuted sisters.

The petition will help Aisha, Charity and the other women you can read about in the *Tears of Gold* church resource. It includes seven portraits and seven self-portraits of women who are being persecuted for their Christianity, as well as guides for holding a service, a small group or an exhibition to raise prayer and support for these courageous women.

Order the free *Tears of Gold* resource for churches at www.opendoorsuk.org/seechange or call Inspire on 01993 460015.





Below are some of the people and groups from around the world who have contributed to the handmade petition:

TOP ROW Rachel Gardner, President of Girls Brigade England and Wales; a Christian woman supported by Open Doors partners in Mexico; Great Malvern Priory
 SECOND ROW A believer in the Middle East; Leader of the Liberal Democrats Jo Swinson (with Alan Donald, pastor of Woodhill Evangelical Church); Open Doors (OD) supporter Jonny, UK
 THIRD ROW OD supporter Jess, UK; Bangladeshi women at an Open Doors project; Arianna Walker, CEO, Mercy UK
 BOTTOM ROW Holy Trinity, Cheltenham; Krish Kandiah, Founding Director of Home for Good; Rubi, Nigeria

BE A Sign of Hope

FOR CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA

In the countdown to Christmas, personal prayer, worship – even Jesus – can get crowded out. To help make Christmas more meaningful for you and your family, why not read Jina and Abraham's story (p8), and choose a day to walk and pray with them using our new *Be a Sign of Hope* resource?



Despite the huge upheaval in their lives as a result of the conflict in Syria, Jina and Abraham have been strengthened in their faith with support from their local church through Open Doors. *Be a Sign of Hope* describes what life is like for Jina and Abraham and includes the following six suggestions to help you and your family 'spend a day' with them.

Breakfast time

Kneel with your family and thank God for one another. Pray for God's protection



over Jina and Abraham and ask for Rober's safe return.

Coffee time

Read the

Christmas story

together and make a nativity scene with toy figures. Pray that Jesus will give Jina and Abraham hope this Christmas.



Lunch time

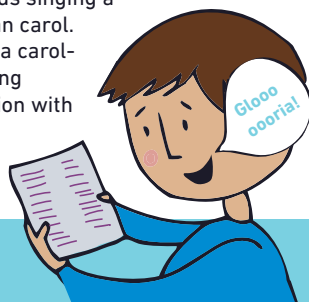
Find out how

Jina, Abraham and other Christians in Syria are surviving by watching the video. Pray that God will supply all their needs and give them faith for the future.



Afternoon tea time

Watch Abraham and his friends singing a Syrian carol. Plan a carol-singing session with



friends, using the *Signs of Hope* carol sheet.



Dinner time

Cut out the star from the *Signs of Hope* carol sheet and write a prayer or message of encouragement to share with Syrian Christians. Take a photo of it and share with Christians in the Middle East by sending it to inspire@opendoorsuk.org

Bed time

Listen to the Lord's prayer in Arabic and Armenian and say the Lord's prayer together at the end of the day.



BE A SIGN OF HOPE FOR JINA AND ABRAHAM

To spend a day with Jina and Abraham, follow these three easy steps:

1. Download the new *Be a Sign of Hope* resources and videos from www.opendoorsuk.org/signsofhope.
2. Pick a day to remember Jina and Abraham.
3. Enjoy the time together, hang their star on your tree – and share their story!

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHURCH TO BE A SIGN OF HOPE THIS CHRISTMAS

Our new resource *Be a Sign of Hope* is great for churches, too. Why not offer it as a free takeaway after an Advent service or family event this Christmas?

To download *Be a Sign of Hope*, go to www.opendoorsuk.org/signsofhope where you'll find even more fresh new *Signs of Hope* resources, including:

- 'Stories of Hope' to tell while lighting the Advent candle
- Video of Abraham and friends singing carols
- Videos of Christmas Bible readings in Arabic
- Audio of the Lord's prayer in Arabic and Armenian
- Written prayers for Syria.



Glad tidings of great joy: Announcing the Word in a refugee camp

When life gets difficult, it can be easy to take comfort from the things around us: our homes, our relationships, our possessions – all good things. But where do we turn when those things are taken from us? From where do we draw our strength?



A camp for internally displaced persons in Central African Republic

Pastor Zoundji from the Central African Republic (CAR) has been living in a tent for six years now – for the most part, without even the bare essentials, like soap. Returning home is not currently possible. And he has around 200 Christians under his care as part of the church he leads, all of whom are Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) like him.

An IDP camp may look like an impossible place for the gospel to flourish, and yet Zoundji feels called to preach the love of Jesus no matter the cost. “We know we must announce the Word,” he says. “In hard times, we shouldn’t be looking back.”

‘THERE IS NO MONEY’

Just six years ago, Christians in the centre of CAR lived in peace with their Muslim neighbours. But that peace was abruptly destroyed one day in May 2013 as Muslim Seleka forces descended on their town and destroyed state properties before turning on churches and Christian schools. Zoundji’s

home was looted; he gathered his family and took them to his farm, and they hid out in the wild for nearly five months before they made their way to the IDP camp in Bria. Now, six years later, they remain trapped in the camp.

Outside the camp, several rebel groups continue to cause chaos. They charge illegal tolls, extorting everyone they come across. Food and soap are scarce. “People survive on what NGOs provide,” says Zoundji. “It is hard to get soap and even salt. Sometimes we sell the food we receive to buy a little soap and salt. There are two main markets in Bria. Everyone has the right to sell without restriction. But you will find very few Christians there, because there is no money. They have no resources. There is no electricity, so we cannot work at night.”

Children attend school in tents or under canopies. Most have no desks and sit on the ground. In the last exams, camp children performed very poorly.

“It is extremely difficult. We live off the grace of our God,” Zoundji says.

REBUILDING TRUST

A lack of resources isn’t the only problem Christians in the camp face – they are also under pressure for their faith. “The Muslims don’t want us to pray. They say we must become Muslims... They don’t want to hear the name Jesus.”

The trust that once existed between Muslims and Christians has gone – but it is not impossible to rebuild it. “My Muslim neighbour had my number and tried to call me to come and see the place, but I refused to go because I was angry and scared,” recalls Zoundji. “He even sent messages through others, but I would not go.”

Eventually, he gave in and returned to his home. “When I got to my neighbour, he was with other Muslims. He got up, came towards me and introduced me to his friends. I was so afraid. But, to my

surprise, they contributed some money and bought tea and sugar and served me!" Not only that, but Zoundji's neighbour told him that for four years he had barricaded the door of the church to prevent fellow Muslims from looting it.

'WE WILL MOVE FORWARD'

Despite the difficulties he faces, Zoundji wants to encourage believers to hold on to their faith. His church takes comfort from Isaiah 54:17 – "'No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me,' declares the Lord."

Open Doors has supported Zoundji and other believers in central CAR through cross-

cultural awareness training, economic empowerment training and the distribution of aid and Bibles. "Your consultations helped us a lot when the crisis came to Bria," Zoundji says. "We drew strength from the teachings and asked God's help in preparing for the crisis."

"We will move forward, knowing that only God can protect us"

We can find the strength to follow God and proclaim the gospel no matter our circumstances. We may never be displaced like Pastor Zoundji, but our world will never be completely pain-free. Sometimes it can be

hard to see where God is in our circumstances, or where on earth we will draw the strength to continue from. But Pastor Zoundji knows the answer – and that is to throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus and depend on Him wholeheartedly in all things.

He says, "It is only by the grace of God that I am here today, not by my own strength. I thank God for protecting and sustaining me today. It has been very difficult, but we are here. We will move forward, knowing that only God can protect us. And even if death should come, I will die in the Word."



ABOVE RIGHT Pastor Zoundji wants to encourage believers to hold on to their faith

ABOVE Pastor Zoundji is determined to preach the love of Jesus in the IDP camp he's called home for the past six years



INVITE YOUR MP TO THE WORLD WATCH LIST LAUNCH

In January we will be launching the Open Doors 2020 World Watch List in Parliament – make sure your MP is there by inviting them using the tear-off invite on the response form included with the magazine! Please be praying for your MP and make sure they get the invite by **14 January**. Ninety-eight parliamentarians were at the 2019 launch and this was thanks to you!

Bake

— WITH THEM —

Whisking it all for the persecuted church

Ready, steady – bake! Coming together over good food is a wonderful way to celebrate Christmas, wherever you live in the world. So as you plan ahead for Christmas, what better way to celebrate Jesus' birth than a bake sale that blesses your persecuted family too?

Is there anything cosier than the warm smell of baking on a cold winter's night? This Christmas, you have the perfect reason to don your apron and get whisking. *Bake with Them* invites you to gather your friends, family or church for a simple celebration to raise money for our persecuted brothers and sisters.

You'll find everything you need to host a brilliant bake off in the new *Bake with Them* fundraising pack from Open

Doors. As well as posters, labels and a how-to guide, you can read recipes and stories from Christians in the Middle East, Nigeria and India.

Included is a recipe for Gulab Jamun, a traditional Indian dessert served at celebrations and family gatherings. Indian couples often eat Gulab Jamun at their wedding banquet to signify 'the beginning of something sweet'. Your fundraising will help to bless Christians like Ajay, whose

wedding sadly signified a wave of persecution for his new family.

Ajay's wedding was supposed to be a punishment. When Ajay became a Christian, aged 13, his family beat him. When he hadn't given up his faith by 16, he was forced to marry a Hindu girl. But just a few months into their marriage, his young wife gave her life to Jesus too!

Since then, Ajay and his wife have been disinherited,



threatened with death, thrown out of their home and refused access to the village well because of their faith. Yet despite the daily persecution, Ajay, his wife and young son continue to stand strong. Ajay grins, "God is blessing me in countless ways!"

Celebrations focussed on food are an experience we share with our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. In some countries, gathering over food is a covert way to gather for Christian fellowship.

Back at home, *Bake with Them* is a great way for all ages to celebrate together. You can involve your church, your family, a group of friends or work colleagues. Pick your own time and venue, whatever works for you.

The great thing about baking is that anyone can do it. You don't need to be the next Prue Leith to throw some eggs and flour in a bowl and whisk up a tasty treat. (Although if you do fancy recreating the entire Nativity in gingerbread, don't let us stop you...)

Pre-order your pack today and start planning a Christmas celebration of baking fun that blesses your wider Christian family around the world. Packs will be available from mid November.



RECIPE FOR BAKE WITH THEM SUCCESS

Visit www.opendoorsuk.org/bakewiththem and pre-order your own *Bake with Them* pack, full of recipes, how-to guides and useful resources.

If you are coming to Standing Strong in Birmingham, pop in to the Bake stand where you can collect your *Bake with Them* pack, learn more and enjoy a cake decorating demo.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF IN SOUTH KOREA



TIME TO BURN OFF YOUR BAKE OFF?

Run, walk or cycle across South Korea in next year's Muskathlon challenge. You can meet and encourage Christians who've defected from North Korea, give yourself a personal fitness challenge and raise money to supply believers with shelter, emergency relief aid and Bibles.

INTERESTED?

Visit www.opendoorsuk.org/muskathlon or contact Fiona, our Challenge Events export on **01993 460015** or challenge@opendoorsuk.org.



With your help, God's light could shine brighter in Syria this Christmas



Today, Abraham and his mum, Jina, could begin to see a brighter future.

Jina lost her husband, and Abraham lost his father, when Rober was kidnapped for

his Christian faith in 2013. They still don't know if he's alive.

"It's hard to raise our boy alone, very difficult," says Jina. "People keep telling me, 'Go, work – go work.' But where could I work? Where can I leave my son?"

With your support and prayers, Open Doors church partners in Syria can give hope to Jina and Abraham and other vulnerable families, sustaining them with essential fuel, food and medicine. Otherwise, they may face a very bleak winter.

This Christmas, your gift will help shine God's light in the darkness for Syrians like Jina and Abraham. Will you please give what you can today?

Every £35 could provide a monthly relief pack for a family like Jina and Abraham's in Syria. This could include food, clothing, and heating during the freezing winter.

A gift of £65* could go towards providing training and a loan, to enable a woman to open a small business so she can support her family and community.

To make your gift, use the response form, phone **01993 460015** or visit **www.opendoorsuk.org** Thank you.

*The total cost of this training and loan is £452 per person

HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

 **OpenDoors**