

significant news for christians

Some news that's encouraging—some disturbing. Read with discernment. Watch and pray.

THE Church Around the WORLD

June 2019



Country in Focus: Tanzania (1)

Tanzania lies on the southeastern coast of Africa, by the Indian Ocean. It is home to more than 150 indigenous ethnic groups, although widespread promotion and use of Swahili have obscured some tribal divisions. Tanzania is one of the world's poorest nations, and agricultural subsistence farming dominates the economy. Earlier disastrous efforts to socialize the economy weigh heavily on the nation because of the massive debt incurred. The nation continues to attract outside investment due to the stability of its government and leadership. There is religious freedom—all major faiths have the freedom to share their faith. Religious harmony is remarkably high given the size and activism of Christian and Muslim communities.

Prayer concerns:

- That Tanzania would remain an “island of peace” amid the many troubled nations that surround it.
- That the number of evangelicals within the mainline churches will continue to grow.
- That the strong church-planting initiative will continue and that local church efforts will continue to reach the nation's unreached groups.
- That the widespread and systemic poverty will continue to be addressed by both outside investment and faith communities.
- That Tanzania's Christian population will receive solid teaching and discipleship.
- That missionaries will continue to be strategic even as they are being replaced by capable national workers.
- That Bible translation efforts will be successful—51 languages within Tanzania still lack a complete Bible translation.

Over 500 Inmates Saved in Prison (2)

Robert Morris, lead pastor of Gateway Church, a megachurch in Dallas, Texas,

announced recently that a new campus has been opened at Coffield Unit maximum security prison. Around 650 inmates attended the first Coffield Gateway service

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in November, and since then over 500 men have dedicated their lives to Jesus.

“At Gateway Church, we’re all about people because God is all about people,” Morris said. “Many of the men and women inside prison have been forgotten by society, but we want them to know we love them and God loves them and they are our brothers and sisters in Christ.”

The Coffield campus is set up to run like any other campus and gives inmates the opportunity to serve as greeters, ushers, audio and visual equipment operators, worship team members, or service staff. The campus is pastored by Stephen Wilson, an ex-offender who went to seminary post-prison.

Dozens of Missionaries Flee Haiti (3)

According to media reports, riots have erupted in Haiti, with the people calling for the resignation of President Jovenel Moise. “There have been lots of demonstrations in Haiti over the past year. There are lots of people that are unhappy with the government and the way the president is doing things. It’s just been escalating and building up,” said Lisa Honorat, a missionary who has since fled the country.

“It was all over the country, not just in the city,” she said. “There have been roadblocks and looting and burning tires, burning cars. If anyone tries to go out on the street, they will destroy your car. It’s very dangerous.”



This month you can . . . Help Reach the World with the Bible

It’s proving to be another busy year for Bible translation.

The head of Wycliffe Associates says his organization has received requests to launch Bible translation projects this year from 619 language groups, including in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Nigeria.

When these groups are informed that the entire New Testament can now be translated in just months, they are astonished, says Wycliffe Associates president and CEO Bruce Smith.

“They’re hearing about

the good news of what’s happened with their neighboring communities or other language groups around them,” he says, “and so that’s emboldening their faith and increasing their enthusiasm to get God’s Word for their own people.”

The challenge now, Smith says, is getting the financial resources to enable them to respond to the requests.

“To see the pent-up demand now rise to over 600 languages that are waiting for our response,” he observes, “just really sends us before the Lord [to] ask for his provision

and wisdom on how to respond to these opportunities.” Smith adds these opportunities will move Wycliffe even closer to their goal of having the Bible in every language by 2025 or sooner.

In the fall, Wycliffe celebrated their 100th translation of the Bible. To put this in perspective, it took 67 years to complete the first 500, and the second 500 took only 17 years. And the speed of translation continues to grow.

To help Wycliffe in their efforts, visit them at www.Wycliffe.org.



James Roberts, vice president of Haiti Arise, says the riots and violence started when food and fuel depots were closed. “People couldn’t even buy food, if there was any available, because the money got devalued. So, we were starting to run out of food for all our people,” he said. Mission organization Dirt Road Project had plans to travel to Haiti to help with those food shortages and provide other aid, but the US State Department has since ordered an evacuation of all nonemergency US citizens in the country.

United Methodists Reaffirm Sexual Ethics Stance ⁽⁴⁾

The United Methodists have upheld their denomination’s rules on sexual ethics, rejecting the One Church Plan, which would have permitted individual congregations to allow same-sex marriages and the ordination of LGBTQ clergy. The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, the only body that can speak for the 12.6 million-member Christian denomination, voted to reject the plan, which was advocated for by the majority of the church’s bishops.

The United Methodist Church is the second-largest Protestant denomination in the United States but has a global membership of more than 12 million

members in the United States, Africa, Europe, and the Philippines. The denomination’s longstanding official standards are that all people are welcome in its churches, but that marriage is only between one man and one woman.

Persecution Rising across Africa and Middle East ⁽⁵⁾

Life for Christians across northern Africa and the Middle East is deteriorating rapidly according to Open Door’s World Watch List, which finds that Christians are most at risk in fragile states with militant Islamic movements.

The annual list ranks the world’s 50 countries most hostile to believers over the last year. So-called failed states where militant Islamic movements are flourishing are some of the hardest places for Christians to live, according to a new annual report on Christian religious freedom. Open Doors says the situation has deteriorated most rapidly across northern Africa and the Middle East, in countries where sectarian violence has advanced unchecked by central governments.

Since the first list was published in 2002, the number-one spot has been held by North Korea, where exposed Christians face long prison terms or execution. Among the

top 10 on the list are five countries where the government has little or no control: Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen. At number eight, Pakistan has a huge number of extremists, because the national government does little to control local politicians who provide room for anti-Christian pressure to grow, according to Open Doors.

Of the top 10 countries on the list, all but North Korea are majority Muslim. Continuing a 15-year trend, militant Islam is a growing source of pressure on Christians and has become the primary driver of persecution in 36 of the 50 countries on the list, with clashes being especially violent in sub-Saharan Africa.

Chinese Exposed to Gospel While Working in Africa ⁽⁶⁾

Chinese citizens who have gone to work in Africa are converting to Christianity—and taking their newfound religion home despite an uptick in persecution. As a result of the influx of Chinese resources and approximately 10,000 Chinese-owned companies in Africa, the estimated 227,000 to 1 million Chinese working on the continent are hearing the message of the gospel from African Christians.

Many local African churches have reached out to Chinese workers, even incorporating Mandarin into services. A number of Chinese, in turn, have welcomed the sense of community and belonging

that these Christian churches offer. And a small but growing number of ethnically Chinese missionaries from Taiwan and other countries are specifically targeting Chinese nationals in Africa, preaching to them with a freedom they'd never be allowed in the People's Republic of China. When those evangelized Chinese Christians return home from Africa, they take their new faith with them.

The Chinese government's repression of Christianity is being done in the name of President Xi Jinping's Sinicization campaign, which seeks to strengthen Chinese culture and protect the state from Western influence. Last year, President Xi issued draconian new regulations for religious affairs which led to the arrest of 100,000 or more Christians and the destruction of several churches and rooftop crosses. In some parts of the country, Christian symbols are being torn down and sometimes replaced with pictures of President Xi.

"China isn't backing away from the religious persecution; it seems to be expanding," said Sam Brownback, the US ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, last year. China has once again been listed among the US State Department's 10 worst religious freedom violators. Still, there are an estimated 93 to 115 million Protestants currently in China—and should current growth rates continue apace, the nation will soon have more Christians than any other country in the world.

**So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable.
Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that
nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.**

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58