

significant news for christians

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

THE Church Around the WORLD

July 2020



Country in Focus: Iceland (1)



Iceland, a volcanic island in the North Atlantic Ocean, is mountainous and largely barren, with many large glaciers. With a population of 365,000, it globally has one of the highest standards of living. Fishing and limited agriculture are being supplanted by tourism, hydroelectric energy generation, and aluminum smelting. The fast-growing financial sector infamously triggered a financial crisis and banking collapse in 2008–9. The country's parliament is the world's oldest, established in AD 930. Some consider traditional Icelandic life to be under threat, with disputes between conservationists and those who want to exploit natural resources.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is still recognized as the state church, but there is religious freedom. The majority of the population are Christian, but only nominally so. The Bible Society launched a new Bible translation at the turn of the century, which has been well received. Christian radio reaches about 90 percent of the population and has been a great help in more remote areas.

Prayer concerns:

- Pray for the Lutheran Church and other smaller denominations suffering from declining and aging congregations, low attendance, and a general lack of spiritual vitality.
- Pray for the few evangelical believers for their numbers to grow and for good cooperation between their churches.
- Pray for the Lutheran seminary in Iceland where most native pastors are trained.

Los Angeles Megachurch Feeds Hungry Families (2)

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, the Pentecostal megachurch Angelus Temple in Los Angeles canceled its public church services to focus on feeding families. They opened their Dream Center,

the church's nonprofit in Echo Park, from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. to provide free hot and boxed meals—not just to families with children from the Los Angeles Unified School District, but to anyone who stops by for its drive-through or pickup service. The center has also distributed free diapers to those in need and has taken in some 16 people without a home.

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Angelus Temple pastor Matthew said the center ordered \$20,000 of mass food from vendors it normally works with. The church has averaged 5,000 meals a day as well as 150 daily visits to the elderly to provide them with food. Chick-fil-A and Pink's Hot Dogs have also donated food, he said. The center is also asking for monetary contributions to

be able to continue serving residents. Los Angeles Dodgers teammates Justin Turner and Clayton Kershaw are among those who have donated money and have even called businesses to supply food.

Barnett said food distributions have gone smoothly and that the church plans to provide meals as long as necessary.



This month you can . . . Lead Worship at Home

With many churches choosing to replace their gatherings with livestream services or family worship guides, the COVID-19 pandemic has left many Christian families at home on Sunday mornings. Here are a few tips for parents wanting to make the most of this time.

- 1. Teach the importance of corporate worship.** Worship on the Lord's Day is no less sacred in the living room than it is in a church building. We should utilize whatever technology is available to stay connected to the body of Christ, to be encouraged by our faith family, and to be taught by the Word of God.
- 2. Limit distractions.** Before you begin, put away toys, phones, pets, and anything else that might distract so that worship and study can take priority.
- 3. Manage expectations.** Distractions are bound to happen. When they do,

be flexible and keep the mood light. Don't let one child with a bad attitude ruin the moment for everyone else.

- 4. Open your Bible.** It's tempting to sit back on the couch and passively listen to the livestream. Make sure each family member has their own copy of God's Word in front of them so you can all stay engaged with the sermon.
- 5. Take notes.** These circumstances provide an opportunity to show your children how to take notes during a sermon. It is much more difficult to teach young children to take notes in a full sanctuary without distracting those around you.
- 6. Dad, take the lead.** As the spiritual head of the household, this is a great opportunity for you. Be the one who gathers everyone together, and show a genuine excitement about worshipping in a new way.

- 7. Sing along.** Pray along. Read along. Interact with the livestream service. Make a joyful noise, even if it's off-key. Bow your head and close your eyes when someone is praying. Read along in your Bible during the sermon.

- 8. Long for the return of God's people gathered together.** Let your children hear how much you miss the Sunday gathering of the church, mirroring the longing that all Christians have for the day when we will gather together with the Lord Jesus to be with him forever.

With a little planning and intentionality, this temporary season of isolation could be used to grow your family closer to one another, closer to your local church body, and closer to God.

This is an abridged version of an article by JD Thorne, the lead pastor of Point Mallard Parkway Baptist Church in Decatur, Alabama.



Samaritan's Purse Brings Medical Relief to Italy ⁽³⁾

Nonprofit Samaritan's Purse has gone to Italy on the frontlines of an unprecedented worldwide pandemic to bring medical supplies, assistance, and the gospel. In March, the World Health Organization declared Europe the epicenter of the coronavirus, and Italy has been one of the hardest-hit countries, with a growing threat of running out of supplies and support for coronavirus patients.

Samaritan's Purse sent their plane filled with 20 tons of medical equipment, including structures, tents, beds, monitors, ventilators, masks, pharmaceutical medications, and supplies for volunteers to the suffering country. The plane carried a 68-bed emergency field hospital, 8 intensive care beds, and 60 inpatient beds. About 60 medical specialists also flew over and spent approximately 90 days in Northern Italy.

In addition to medical needs, the Samaritan's Purse team also planned to "support the Italian hospitals and people in the name of Christ" and attend to patients' spiritual needs.

Iranian Christians Proclaim Testimonies on Satellite TV ⁽⁴⁾

An interactive satellite television program called Signal is giving a voice to persecuted

Christians in Iran. Host of the show Reza Jafari, who converted to Christianity in 2003, wanted to introduce a new way to encourage Christians living in the Middle East and created the platform a year and a half ago to allow Christians to share their testimonies.

The program broadcasts to 25 countries across the Middle East and North Africa on its Farsi-speaking channel. The host talks to believers through Skype calls, prerecorded interviews, or live calls. Many of these Christians are Muslim converts outside of Iran or believers who still live in the country.

"One outstanding story and testimony of someone that we had on the show was a prerecorded testimony from an Afghan convert," Jafari shared. "He was part of a Taliban militia group in Afghanistan. His job was to murder people or go to war. His story and journey of transformation that he was sharing in our program was really inspiring."

Satellite TV has proven to be a safer form of communication for Christians in Iran than the Internet, where they can be closely monitored.

According to Open Doors USA, a nonprofit watchdog group, Iran is ranked as the ninth worst country in the world for Christian persecution. Nonetheless, the number of Christians has grown in the country. In 2016, Open Doors estimated approximately 400,000 Christians lived in Iran; that number has likely doubled to 800,000 in the past three years.



Audio Bibles for Bangladesh's Unreached People ⁽⁶⁾

Many people groups in Bangladesh remain unreached by the gospel. According to Greg Kelley of World Mission, the Shaikh of Bangladesh are “the largest single unreached people group in the world,” with 133 million people, none of whom are Christian. In addition to the Shaikh, many Rohingya live in Bangladesh due to genocide in their home country of Myanmar. Both peoples are primarily Muslim.

Countries surrounding Bangladesh have little gospel presence. Pakistan influences the country for Islam, India is quickly becoming more radicalized for Hinduism, and Myanmar is a Buddhist country. As a hub for so many religions, Bangladesh is “a very strategic location,” according to Kelley. “The body of Christ has to have an expression there,” he says.

Organizations such as World Mission are working with local national leaders to provide practical help, as well as a message of hope. However, handing over a printed Bible isn't helpful for many of these people, as many are nonliterate. World Mission seeks to present the gospel in a way unreached peoples can understand and use, primarily through solar-powered audio Scriptures.

World Mission calls believers to pray for fruit from audio Bibles in the area.

Sudan Abolishes Islamist Committees ⁽⁵⁾

Sudan's transitional government has abolished committees used to take over church properties under the Islamist regime of former President Omar al-Bashir. Advocates are hopeful that the move will lead to the return of church oversight to rightful church leaders.

“We are pleased by the Minister's decree, given the role these illegitimate church councils played in the former regime's persecution of Christians,” US Commission on International Religious Freedom Chairman Tony Perkins said in a statement.

After the secession of South Sudan in 2011, Christian communities were left vulnerable to the implementation of a strict Islamic legal code under Bashir's regime. Properties were taken from organizations such as the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church and the Sudanese Church of Christ.

Since the Bashir regime was ousted last April, the transitional government has made vows to improve conditions for Christians in the country.

**Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.
The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.**

JAMES 5:16