

April 2018 Prayer Items

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

--Isaiah 53: 5-6

Philippines—While the world has been focused on the violence in the Middle East, an unspeakable tragedy of similar proportions has been taken its toll on innocent civilians in the Philippines especially around the Philippine town of Marawi. Nearly a year ago Isis-linked fighters attacked the city, forcing nearly 360,000 people to flee amid bombings, the burning of schools and homes, and the hunting down and murdering of Christians and anyone who did not speak Arabic. Among those fleeing were approximately 160,000 children who walked for hours on bare feet approximately for miles in the middle of the night amid the bomb blasts and gunfire. It took the Philippine Army 5 months to end the siege, and 10 months later more than 80,000 children remain displaced in refugee camps. Parents and aid workers are all documenting signs of psychological scars that these children have developed due to what they been subjected to. Families who had stable incomes and good livelihoods are now destitute and without employment. Children's educations have been disrupted, and parents are reporting that normally happy healthy kids are suddenly withdrawn, angry, flinching when they hear loud noises, and breaking down into tears unexpectedly. In the refugee camps, because of scarcity of food and supplies, children are also showing signs of attrition such as being sick and losing their hair. The Philippine government estimates that it will take more than a billion dollars to repair the damage from the siege, including rebuilding homes, schools, government buildings, roads, and bridges. Pray for this traumatized and forgotten place, that though it is not on the world's radar, it is not forgotten by our heavenly Father. Pray for the children who remain displaced from their homes, who have lost everything, and whose futures hang in the balance. Pray for God's comfort and healing of their small bodies and bright minds. Pray that these communities can be restored to the peace and relative prosperity that they experienced prior to this atrocity. Pray that those who committed these acts of violence would be convicted of their wrongdoing and turn to find the light and love and salvation of Christ. (*Source: The Independent*)

India--Reena was raised in a Christian home and experienced persecution in her village as a child. She was mocked by the Hindu children, and her family was not allowed to use the village well to draw water. When she was a teenager, her family ran out of money so Reena had to go to work teaching at a school. Quite unexpectedly, the headmaster invited her to a room and drugged her. She was kidnapped and brought 14 hours away from her village, a victim of sexual exploitation. Ten days later, although she could hardly walk because of her abuse, she was able to escape and reach a train station and return home. After receiving medical care, Reena suffered from depression and despair because of what had happened to her. However, during a

Bible message at church, she felt renewed hope and joy, and she now wants to share the good news of the Gospel with her Hindu neighbors. Praise God for His healing and gentle comfort for Reena. Pray that He will protect her and help her to fully heal. Pray for protection from sexual exploitation and trafficking for girls and young women in India. (Source: *Open Doors*)

Iraq—Late February and early March witnessed a spate of violence against Christians and members of the Mandaean religious community in Iraq. Twenty-eight-year-old Samir Salah-Addin Younis, a Christian father of two, was shot by gunmen. Shortly thereafter, four men killed a Christian man, Hisham Al Maskouny; his wife, Dr. Shaza Malik Dinno; and his mother, Khairiyah Dawood Adada, and looted their home. Similarly, a Mandaean man was kidnapped from his shop and later found dead, while another Mandaean man survived a stabbing attempt. Four men have been arrested for these crimes, but no further progress has been reported. They are being characterized as criminal cases, but seem remarkably similar to attacks on Christians and other minorities in Baghdad and Basra in the early 2000s. Though the vice president and the Parliament speaker have denounced these crimes and indicated they understand the attacks were intended to cause Christians and minorities to flee, Christians still fear the ongoing targeting of their community and a pursuant migration. These attacks were also denounced by the Iraqi Fiqh Board, the highest academic Islamic Authority in the country. The UN has also called on the government of Iraq to do a better job protecting Iraqi minorities. We join Middle East Concern in praying for the families of the victims that they would know the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and that Iraqi Christians would experience the peace of Jesus and the protection of the Father amid these dangers. We also pray for those who intend violence against Christians and other minorities in Iraq, that they would both be brought to justice but most of all find repentance and forgiveness and New Life in Jesus. Pray for this region that it might experience security and the establishment of the rule of law throughout Iraq. Pray for increased tolerance and respect between Iraq's various ethnic and religious communities. (Source: *Middle East Concern*)

Bangladesh-- Rural Christian believers in Bangladesh suffer from persecution and poverty due to discrimination and often have no means of purchasing a Bible. In addition, they must meet secretly in homes to avoid attacks and death threats. One Christian brother who recently received a Bible shared: "*The Procharok Vai (Evangelist brother) came to us once a week and we would hear the Word of God from him. The rest of the [week we] didn't hear anything about God because I did not have a Bible; no one in our village had one. We would wait a whole week for the evangelist to come.*" Please pray that believers would have opportunities to gather together for worship and fellowship. Pray also that Bibles would be available and affordable so that they can grow in their faith and receive encouragement from Scripture. (Source: *International Christian Concern*)

Mexico—Despite the impression of being a religious culture, Mexico has become one of the most dangerous places to be a Catholic priest. Since 2012 there have been 21 murders of priests documented, all of which are believed to be related to their work as Christian leaders. Pray for priests like Father Omar Sotelo Aguilar, who has been documenting for years threats of

violence against fellow clergy. This work is incredibly dangerous and requires tremendous courage. Pray that he would be protected and not become discouraged or give way to fear. Ironically, many religious minorities suffer a great deal of persecution at the hands of some of the Catholic majority community. In Rancho Nuevo village, 10 Protestant families have been facing harassment and persecution since 2016 from a community leader for not participating in Roman Catholic village festivals. Similarly, Protestants and Jehovah Witnesses were driven by force from their homes in Yaltzi and Tuxpan de Bolanos, and then their homes were destroyed. Also, religious minorities in Hidalgo, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla states face violent evictions, confiscation of property, the cutting off of their electricity and water, and other kinds of persecution for their faith. To make matters worse, when these crimes are reported, police and government officials do very little, or often nothing, to investigate, let alone bring any of the perpetrators to justice. Pray for those who faithfully follow Christ—from any denomination—that they would remain strong in their faith and convictions, would continue to speak up for truth and justice with the love of Christ, and be delivered from violent persecution for their faith or their work as religious leaders. Pray that those in the community who seek to coerce and intimidate others would recognize their wrongdoing, repent, and desist. Pray that the love and saving grace of Christ would prevail in Mexico. (Source: *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*)

Zanzibar-- Please pray for the church as Christian persecution is on the rise in this semi-autonomous island. Dozens of church buildings have been burnt down, Islam must be taught at all schools, new churches are not allowed to be constructed, and Muslims are encouraged to drive out Christian believers. Please pray that the church would not only survive, but thrive under this unfair treatment. Pray that the lost on this island would truly seek and find the Lord. Pray for the body to grow here, and praise God that there are pastors committed to serving here who will not be driven out. (Source: *Voice of the Martyrs*)

United States—The Optima North Shore Woods Apartments, a luxury high-rise in Skokie, Illinois, was recently uncovered to be on site of an international sex-trafficking ring. Other residents of the complex recounted men coming and going at all times of day and night—men described as those with disposable income, often wearing what was described as “golf clothes.” Twenty-one traffickers are facing charges for bringing women from Thailand, holding their passports, and forcing them into prostitution to “pay back” their travel expenses. There were sites discovered nationwide for this sex-trafficking ring, involving thousands of “customers.” Pray for the violent and cruel people who have exploited women for their own personal gratification and financial profit, that they might repent of their horrific acts, and find the grace of God. Pray especially for the many, many women who have suffered unspeakably at the hands of evil men (and women who were involved in the scheme). Pray for their emotional, physical, and spiritual healing. Pray that they will find the love and healing of Jesus, who treated all women with the utmost respect, gentleness, and kindness. (Source: *Fox32 News*)

Nigeria-- Praise God for a woman known as "Mama" to over fifty orphaned children whom she has welcomed into her home to live. Close to half of the children were victims of Fulani attacks of their mostly-Christian communities, in which their parents were killed. Praise God that these

little ones have a safe home now and that so many have helped Mama feed and clothe them all. Pray for God's special comfort for them after all their loss. (*Source: International Christian Concern*)

Egypt—Pray for the case of Azza Soliman, and numerous other human rights defenders in Egypt, who have recently been targeted by the government and falsely accused of being spies and national security threats because of their work speaking out about torture, arbitrary detention, domestic violence, and rape in Egypt. Azza Soliman herself has established two legal aid organizations focused on protecting the poor, the exploited, and dissidents, especially women. These organizations also provide support and literacy aid for these women. She and others are now facing potential life sentences, they are under constant surveillance, have been banned from travel, and had their assets frozen. Azza Soliman in particular is facing charges for “slandering the image of Egypt” for bringing to light the plight of women who endure abuse and rape in Egypt. Pray for the deliverance of Azza Soliman and other courageous activists in Egypt, who speak out for the leasts of these and are bravely confronting injustice and abuse. Pray that their good work would continue, that God would bless it, and many would be given the support and help they need. Pray that justice and integrity might be established in Egypt and that many would find true freedom in Christ. (*Source: Amnesty International*)

Algeria--Authorities have been closing and threatening to close churches due to various insignificant safety requirements, which seem to be excuses to restrict church activity. In fact, over half of the churches in Algeria have received notices of failing to meet safety regulations. Please pray that churches that have been closed will be reopened and that those that are pending closure will be allowed to stay open. Pray for protection for religious freedom in this North African country. (*Source: Middle East Concern*)