

A red splatter graphic, resembling a bloodstain, is positioned behind the text. It has a central dark red spot with lighter red, feathered edges that spread outwards.

adopt
the persecuted **church**
SUNDAY

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew 5:10*

Of the 100 million Christians who are persecuted every day, leaders of 90 million of them have invited the College of Prayer to help them build a praying Church.

322 Christians are killed every month. *(Open Doors USA)*

Many of these martyred believers had already been trained in the College of Prayer.

Some say as many as 105,000 believers are martyred each year. *(Deseret News 2011)*

The College of Prayer is currently serving believers in many of these countries.

100 million Christians are being persecuted worldwide every day. *(Reuters 2013)*

The leaders of 90 million persecuted church believers have invited the College of Prayer to serve them.

More than 60 countries are persecuted church nations. *(U.S. State Department)*

The College of Prayer is actively serving many of these church leaders from some of the largest, most populated nations on earth. Other countries we serve include Cuba, Colombia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia, Egypt, Sri Lanka and South Sudan, as well as other undisclosed nations in Asia, North Africa and the Middle East.

3 out of 4 followers of Christ (75% worldwide) experience some degree of persecution every day for their faith.

This persecution includes torture, rape, imprisonment, slavery, discrimination in employment and education, the denial of basic human rights, and of course, martyrdom is the ultimate form of persecution.

More Christians were martyred in the 20th Century than in all other centuries combined. (*Christianity.com*)

Stephen was the first martyr in the early church. (*Acts 8:54-60*)

All persecution of Christians is rooted in an anti-Christ spirit. (*1 John 2:18-19*)

Why Adopt the Persecuted Church?

1. They are begging for our help.

The College of Prayer International is being asked by 90 million persecuted church believers, "Please, come and help us! We are not asking for buildings or medical supplies; we want you to teach us to pray."

2. They deserve our help.

The Bible says, "Remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." Hebrews 13:3

3. Christ invites our help.

The kingdom of God is with the persecuted church (*see Matthew 5:10*). When we serve the persecuted church, we advance Christ's kingdom and we link ourselves more deeply with Christ Himself.





"If one part suffers, every

Stories from the Persecuted Church

Oh, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood? Revelation 6:10

Iraq

In 2011 Fred and Sherry Hartley started a College of Prayer in Iraq with pastors and their people from Baghdad, Mosul, Erbil, Kirkuk and Basra. More than 30 of them became Facebook friends with the Hartleys. Three years later, when ISIS captured Mosul, they all lost everything and some were beheaded.

Asia Pacific (undisclosed)

An elderly pastor in an undisclosed Asian nation who had spent fifteen years in prison tells his stories of extreme torture and persecution. "They would stick electrical wires into my chest and run electricity through my body, expecting me to be burned, but I was not burned. I did not even feel the pain; I just blessed them in Jesus' name. They tied my hands behind my back and then lifted them up over my head to pull my shoulders out of their sockets. But again I felt no pain and my shoulders were not injured; I just blessed them in Jesus' name. Many of them became Christians. Christ protected me—I just give Him the glory for being able to suffer in Jesus' name!"

In 2016 a persecuted pastor said to us with tears, "I have not prayed like that for thirty years. This is how the church in [our nation] used to pray, but we got away from it. This training you bring us is exactly what the church in [our country] needs now. I want to help you take the College of Prayer all over."

Sudan

At a College of Prayer in Uganda, we trained forty pastors from Sudan. They arrived looking exhausted, overwhelmed, helpless and hopeless from the persecution they had experienced. Three days later, at the end of the College of Prayer, their countenance looked radiant with joy, freedom and hope. They were restored. A pastor took my hands and begged me, "Please come back and bring the College of Prayer to our people in Sudan."

every part suffers with it."

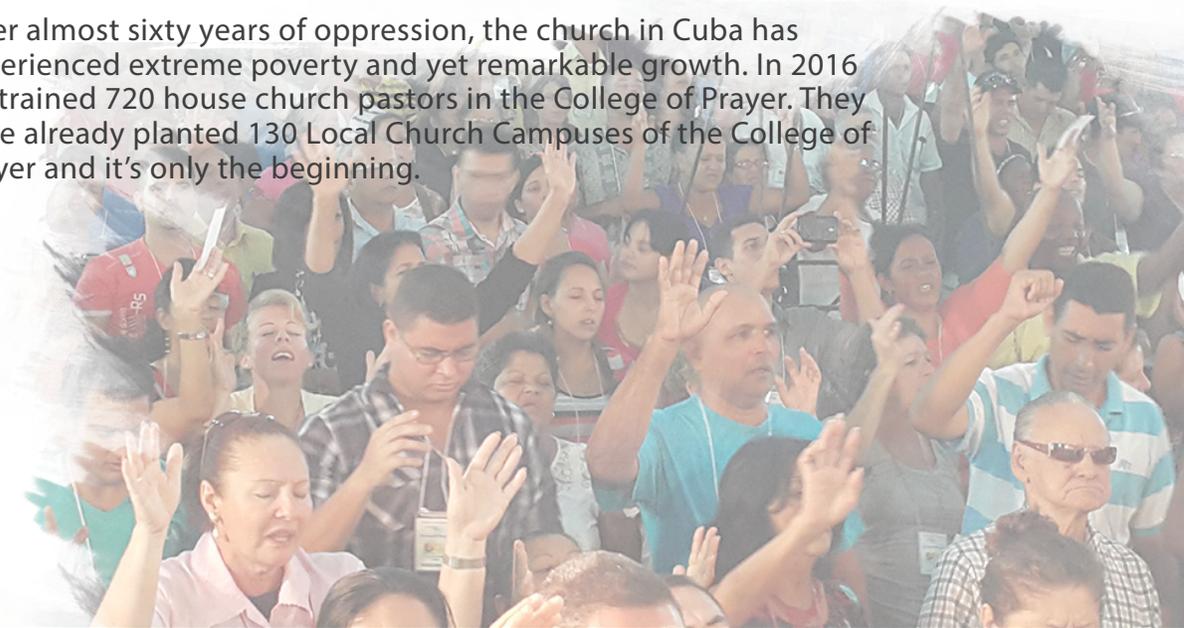
1 Corinthians 12:26

North Africa (undisclosed)

The church in an oppressive Muslim nation with only 240 Christians invited the College of Prayer to train their pastors. This is one of the most persecuted church nations on earth. In a neighboring country, we trained twenty four of their pastors. At first they were very fearful, thinking that inside the oscillating fan was a camera and that their pictures might be taken. Out of fear they kept their head cloths wrapped tightly in order to hide their identity. When we began singing, they told us that they had never sung together out loud publicly. By the end of our time together, they took off their head cloths and were actually waving them like banners, dancing before the Lord as we sang together. They had no rhythm at all and their movements were awkward, but it was one of the most beautiful moments of worship we had ever seen.

Cuba

After almost sixty years of oppression, the church in Cuba has experienced extreme poverty and yet remarkable growth. In 2016 we trained 720 house church pastors in the College of Prayer. They have already planted 130 Local Church Campuses of the College of Prayer and it's only the beginning.



Adopt (v.) - to voluntarily take responsibility for the well-being of someone else.

Adopt is a very powerful and highly emotional word. Today you have opportunity to bless your brothers and sisters in Christ who are begging for your help.

Allow us to help you through the adoption process!

How to lead your *Adopt the Persecuted Church Sunday*

1. Select the date for Adopt the Persecuted Church Sunday.

Date: _____

Select any Sunday in October or November. Normally, the first or second Sunday in November is designated "Persecuted Church Sunday," however, you as pastor are free to select the date that works best for you.

2. Familiarize yourself and your leaders with the 3 adoption opportunities and the 3 ways your people can give.

Three OPPORTUNITIES to give:

1. Adopt a persecuted believer. \$5/mo.

Your monthly gift of \$5 provides the first year of our biblical, revival-prayer curriculum for a persecuted church believer who will be trained by their pastor.

2. Adopt a persecuted pastor. \$15/mo.

Your monthly gift of \$15 provides the first year of training for a pastor at one of our Regional Campuses and provides them with the first year of our biblical, revival-prayer curriculum so that they can train their lay people.

3. Adopt a persecuted congregation. \$25/mo.

Your monthly gift of \$25 provides the first year of training for a pastor at one of our Regional Campuses and provides them and their entire congregation with the first year of our biblical, revival-prayer curriculum so that they can all experience deeper spiritual growth.

Keep in mind, we are not asking for tithes, which go to God through your local church. We are asking for a monthly offering ... it might mean they give up Starbucks once a week, or a night out once a month. Please make it clear that the tithe goes to God through your local church and the offering goes beyond the tithe.

Three WAYS to give:

1. Provide your congregation with the opportunity to give by text. They can simply text #adopt to (770) 284-3600. They will then receive instructions by text.
2. Go online to www.collegeofprayer.org/adopt.
3. Use the Adopt the Persecuted Church offering envelopes (see enclosed sample). We are prepared to give you as many envelopes as you need. Notify us as soon as possible. These envelopes can be sent back to us using the large return envelope provided. We suggest sending it Certified Mail.

**The persecuted church is not another program,
it is people!**



3. Begin your 5-week countdown.

- 5 weeks prior: Send a personal congregational email or letter announcing your *Adopt the Persecuted Church Sunday*. Include many of the facts about the persecuted church we have provided along with the campaign logo.
- One month prior: Begin praying for the persecuted church during Sunday worship and other prayer gatherings.
- 2-3 weeks prior: Make a 1-2 minute announcement about the persecuted church. Feel free to use one of the videos we have provided instead of an announcement—your choice!
- Preach about the persecuted church on *Adopt the Persecuted Church Sunday*. For your convenience we have included a message outline.

4. Call for commitment on your *Adopt the Persecuted Church Sunday*.

Consider using the following script:

Today is our opportunity as a church family to adopt the persecuted church—to open our hearts and open our hands. We encourage everyone here this morning to commit to pray regularly and give monthly. We are partnering with the College of Prayer to mentor, train and equip persecuted church believers in an on-going effort to reach a lost world through a revived church.

- You can adopt a persecuted **believer** for \$5 per month. Your gift will provide them with biblical, revival-prayer curriculum for one year.
- You can adopt a persecuted **pastor** for \$15 per month. Your gift will provide the first year of their training at a College of Prayer Regional Campus and provide their first year of curriculum so that they can train their lay people.
- You can adopt a persecuted **congregation** for \$25 per month. Your gift will provide the first year of training for their pastor and the first year of biblical, revival-prayer curriculum for everyone in the church.

Let's pray ... now to make our commitment. There are 3 ways you can give:

1. Right now you can text #adopt to (770) 284-3600.
2. Or you can go online to www.collegeofprayer.org/adopt.
3. Or you can fill out the brief information on the special offering envelope and drop it in the offering plate.

The Bible says, "*Remember those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.*" Hebrews 13:3. Today is our day to make this commitment. God bless you as you give and keep praying for the persecuted church.



www.collegeofprayer.org/adopt



770.829.0122



contact@collegeofprayer.org



EAST AFRICA

ETHIOPIA

Population:

| 99.5 million.

Christians:

| Estimated at 62.7 million, mainly Orthodox.

Main Belief:

| Orthodox Tewahedo Christianity.

Persecution Level:

| Moderate to severe.

Source of Persecution:

"While the constitution protects religious freedom, believers continue to face discrimination, threats and violence from both Islamic and Ethiopian Orthodox elements." (Source: Voice of the Martyrs)



ETHIOPIA

TRANSFORMING A NATION THROUGH PRAYER.

MISSION:

The largest evangelical denomination in Ethiopia intends to plant 8,700 campuses of the College of Prayer over the next 5 years. Their desire is for every pastor to be a praying pastor, and every church a house of prayer!

SOUTH SUDAN

Population:

| 11.3 million.

Christians:

| 6 million.

Main Belief:

| Islam and Christianity.

Persecution Level:

| Moderate to severe.

Source of Persecution:

Islamic extremists and an influx of refugees can often provide a hostile environment for Christians here. Much of the fighting in Sudan, which practices Shariah law, spills over into South Sudan.



SOUTH SUDAN

PROVIDING HOPE IN A WAR TORN COUNTRY.

MISSION:

The church in Sudan has been documented to be one of the most persecuted church is on earth. Many have fled to South Sudan where we recently launched the College of Prayer. Our ministry is growing, leaders are being mentored and trained, and we have incredible opportunity to provide the training resources they need for further spiritual growth.

"Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance" Psalm 2:8

ADOPT A REGION

When you adopt a region in East Africa, your church will take responsibility to pray and provide financially for the establishment of strong College of Prayer campuses over the next three years. By adopting the persecuted church in East Africa, your church will help:

- » Mentor, train and equip Christian pastors and leaders for three years.
- » Establish strong College of Prayer campuses that will provide an environment for spiritual development.
- » Provide our biblical, God-encountering curriculum for church leaders each year for the next three years.

When you become a Church Partner by adopting the persecuted church, you will receive regular reports from us about the impact your support is having, as well as on-going ways to pray. There will also be opportunity to go on-site and minister alongside our leaders. Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity.



Partner with the College of Prayer International by adopting the persecuted church in a nation where we are actively ministering.

Contact our Church Relations Director, Fred Hartley, IV at (770) 829-0122 x102 or email fred@collegeofprayer.org. More details are also available on our website at www.collegeofprayer.org/partner.

All U.S. contributions are tax-deductible as allowed by law. A small percentage of designated funds are applied for administrative costs.

ETHIOPIA

North Region	\$15,000 per year.
South Region	\$10,000 per year.

SOUTH SUDAN

Total:	\$12,000 per year.
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Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity. Please call us today to begin the conversation.

ETHIOPIA

Our opportunity in Ethiopia is tremendous. The church is well organized and well established, but their resources and opportunity for spiritual development are limited. Many of these churches are in incredibly impoverished areas, but they are hungry and thirsty for all of Christ they can get. Pray for God's direction and the Spirit's unity as we begin this partnership with the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church.

SOUTH SUDAN

Pray for protection over the remnant of the church in South Sudan. They are under constant suspicion and threat of violence. Many have lost family members and friends to violence. Pray that their hearts would be healed and they would be free to forgive their tormentors.

ASIA PACIFIC

Population:

| 1.4 billion.

Christians:

| Estimated at 85 million.

Main Belief:

| Atheism.

Persecution Level:

| Moderate to severe.

Source of Persecution:

Persecution in this area of the world varies widely by region. Pastors are often jailed and at times churches are torn down. In order to be officially recognized in some countries, churches must be registered and monitored by the government, oftentimes limiting their growth.



OUR LARGEST OPEN DOOR.

MISSION:

Church leaders overseeing roughly 80 million Christians in Asia Pacific are asking for our help! In 2015 we began a partnership which provides the College of Prayer International with a long-term opportunity to mentor, train and equip tens of thousands of pastors and church leaders in how to build a praying church. These church leaders are being led to a fresh encounter with Christ, provided our core curriculum and receiving on-going training and mentoring to build Upper Rooms of prayer in their families and churches.

"Some countries in Asia Pacific have had a tumultuous spiritual history. In the last 60 years all religious activity was suppressed in certain areas, and faith of any kind was oppressed. Recently, national economies in some countries have grown prosperous, but the countries remain spiritually starved."

- Global Partners in Hope



"Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him."

Psalm 33:8

ADOPT A REGION

When you adopt a region in Asia Pacific, your church will take responsibility to pray and provide financially for the establishment of strong College of Prayer campuses over the next three years. By adopting the persecuted church in a region, your church will help:

- » Mentor, train and equip Christian pastors and leaders for three years.
- » Establish strong College of Prayer campuses that will provide an environment for spiritual development.
- » Provide our biblical, God-encountering curriculum for church leaders each year for the next three years.

When you become a Church Partner by adopting the persecuted church, you will receive regular reports from us about the impact your support is having, as well as on-going ways to pray. There will also be opportunity to go on-site and minister alongside our leaders. Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity.



East Region	\$15,000 per year
West Region	\$15,000 per year
Central Region	\$10,000 per year
North Region	\$17,000 per year
South Region	\$17,000 per year

Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity. Please call us today to begin the conversation.



Perseverance. The persecuted believers in Asia Pacific are not asking us to pray that their persecution will stop; they want us to pray that their courage would increase; that they would persevere.

*"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints."
Revelation 14:12*

Faithfulness. More than anything, persecuted church believers want to be faithful to Jesus Christ.

*"Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life."
Revelation 2:10*



Partner with the College of Prayer International by adopting the persecuted church in a nation where we are actively ministering.

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Population:

| 1.3 billion.

Christians:

| Estimated at 62.3 million.

Main Belief:

| Hinduism.

Persecution Level:

| Moderate to severe.

Source of Persecution:

These days there is a calculated government initiative to reconvert Christians to Hinduism. Whole villages are being terrorized by Hindu radicals in order to reconvert those who have come to faith in Christ. It is common to hear about pastors and church members who have been beaten, intimidated or worse. Christians are generally considered to be a lower class group of people. In Northern India, they also face persecution from Muslim radicals.

**OUR FASTEST GROWING OPPORTUNITY.****MISSION:**

One of the fastest growing church planting networks in India has invited us to partner with them in mentoring, training and equipping their pastors and church leaders in prayer. With a well organized and growing group of over 80,000 churches in every state of India, the opportunity for national impact is enormous. The College of Prayer is growing at an exponential rate here, and we need your help.



“... that Your ways may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.”
Psalm 67:2-3

ADOPT A REGION

When you adopt a region in India, your church will take responsibility to pray and provide financially for the establishment of strong College of Prayer campuses over the next three years. By adopting the persecuted church in India, your church will help:

- » Mentor, train and equip Christian pastors and leaders for three years.
- » Establish strong College of Prayer campuses that will provide an environment for spiritual development.
- » Provide our biblical, God-encountering curriculum for church leaders each year for the next three years.

When you become a Church Partner by adopting the persecuted church you will receive regular reports from us about the impact your support is having, as well as on-going ways to pray. There will also be opportunity to go on-site and minister alongside our leaders. Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity.



North Region	\$15,000 per year
South Region	\$15,000 per year
Central Region	\$12,000 per year
East Region	\$10,000 per year
West Region	\$12,000 per year

Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity. Please call us today to begin the conversation.



Revelation: We seek to lead church leaders to a fresh revelation of Jesus Christ.

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

Ephesians 1:17

Direction: The doors are opening faster than we can keep up with in India. We want to have God’s leading and timing into each region of India we move into.

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.” John 16:13



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Population:

| 11.3 million.

Christians:

| Estimated at 600,000 evangelicals.

Main Belief:

| Catholic Syncretism.

Persecution Level:

| Moderate.

Source of Persecution:

Cuba's government is still considered hostile towards the evangelical Christian faith. We don't know how long doors will be open, so we are moving quickly to serve the church in Cuba. Many of our Christian leaders in Cuba find it difficult to communicate with us here in the U.S. This is due in part to old communications infrastructure as well as privacy concerns.

**IGNITING THE HEART OF THE CHURCH.****MISSION:**

We have an incredible opportunity to continue serving one of the most spiritually deprived countries on our side of the globe. We are mentoring, training and equipping over 1,000 pastors and church leaders to build Upper Room churches and stir the waters of revival. When we launched in 2016 over 700 leaders joined together in an old Communist warehouse to cry out for revival in their land! That was only the beginning of the opportunity God is unfolding for us in Cuba.

“Violations of freedom of religion or belief have increased in number and severity in Cuba. All religious activities and institutions are strictly regulated by the [government]. Leaders of registered religious groups regularly complain that official requests to carry out building repairs, for example, or to register a house church are refused or go unanswered. Cubans associated with unregistered religious groups are routinely harassed and threatened by government officials. Cuban authorities attempt to dictate which individuals may or may not attend religious services.”

(Source: Christian Solidarity)



ADOPT A REGION

When you adopt a region in Cuba, your church will take responsibility to pray and provide financially for the establishment of strong College of Prayer campuses over the next three years. By adopting the persecuted church in Cuba, your church will help:

- » Mentor, train and equip Christian pastors and leaders for three years.
- » Establish strong College of Prayer campuses that will provide an environment for spiritual development.
- » Provide our biblical, God-encountering curriculum for church leaders each year for the next three years.

When you become a Church Partner by adopting the persecuted church you will receive regular reports from us about the impact your support is having, as well as on-going ways to pray. There will also be opportunity to go on-site and minister alongside our leaders. Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity.



East Region: \$10,000 per year
West Region: \$10,000 per year

Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity. Please call us today to begin the conversation.



Love. Declare God's love over the persecuted church in Cuba. Persecuted church believers need to know the love of Christ.

"God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." Romans 5:5

Please also pray for clarity between our team and those on the ground in Cuba. Communications can often be difficult with poor infrastructure and government oversight.



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adopt

NORTH AFRICA

Population:

| 16.5 million.

Christians:

| Estimated at less than 0.001%.

Main Belief:

| Islam.

Persecution Level:

| Severe to extreme.

Source of Persecution:

Religious extremists and Islamic governments often carry out severe persecution towards Christians. Many who convert risk losing their life or at the very least are shunned by their families.



REACHING THE LARGEST UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS ON EARTH.

MISSION:

The College of Prayer has been operating in several undisclosed countries in North Africa for the last few years. Many of these areas have fewer than 0.001% of Christians. Those who are leading churches and house churches have few, if any, resources in their native language to help them in their spiritual development. By God's grace, we are responding to their requests to come and mentor, train and equip them. Recently, we launched a new campus serving church leaders from the largest unreached people group on earth. We are gaining significant momentum that will provide long-lasting impact.



"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples." Psalm 96:3

ADOPT A REGION

When you adopt a region in North Africa, your church will take responsibility to pray and provide financially for the establishment of strong College of Prayer campuses over the next three years. By adopting the persecuted church in North Africa, your church will help:

- » Mentor, train and equip Christian pastors and leaders for three years.
- » Establish strong College of Prayer campuses that will provide an environment for spiritual development.
- » Provide our biblical, God-encountering curriculum for church leaders each year for the next three years.

When you become a Church Partner by adopting the persecuted church, you will receive regular reports from us about the impact your support is having, as well as on-going ways to pray. There will also be opportunity to go on-site and minister alongside our leaders. Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity.



Total: | \$20,000 per year.

Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity. Please call us today to begin the conversation.



Protection. In North Africa we are on the front lines of a battle between God's kingdom and the kingdom of darkness. Please pray for protection for our leaders on the ground who oversee our work here in several countries. They need daily times of refreshment in God's presence.



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MEXICO

Population:

| 122.3 Million.

Christians:

| Estimated at 18 million evangelicals.

Main Belief:

| Catholic Syncretism.

Persecution Level:

| Moderate.

Source of Persecution:

Organized corruption, religious zealots. Most people in the U.S. are unaware of the persecution taking place against evangelical Christians in Mexico. Christians in almost half of Mexico's states have confirmed some form of persecution.

BREAKING DOWN RELIGIOUS STRONGHOLDS.

MISSION:

The church in Mexico is hungry for God. They are desperate. A network of several hundred evangelical pastors has officially asked us to help them establish strong campuses of the College of Prayer in strategic cities throughout their country, particularly in areas where persecution is the most severe.

“Persecution of evangelicals occurs in certain parts of Mexico. Evangelicals in the southern states, particularly Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero, face prejudice, harassment, expulsion from their villages, attacks against their churches and private property, threats of sexual assault, imprisonment and murder. Opposition to evangelicals derives mostly from their refusal to participate in syncretistic community religious events that involve pagan rituals and heavy drinking. Evangelicals are considered a threat to local political and religious leaders’ control.”

(Source: Voice of the Martyrs)

ADOPT A REGION

When you adopt a region in Mexico, your church will take responsibility to pray and provide financially for the establishment of strong College of Prayer campuses over the next three years. By adopting the persecuted church in Mexico, your church will help:

- » Mentor, train and equip Christian pastors and leaders for three years.
- » Establish strong College of Prayer campuses that will provide an environment for spiritual development.
- » Provide our biblical, God-encountering curriculum for church leaders each year for the next three years.

When you become a Church Partner by adopting the persecuted church you will receive regular reports from the us about the impact your support is having, as well as on-going ways to pray. There will also be opportunity to go on-site and minister alongside our leaders. Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity.



ADOPT

PRAY

Total: | \$10,000

Church Partnerships can, for the most part, be tailored to your specific missional efforts and capacity. Please call us today to begin the conversation.

There is incredible opportunity here to make a dramatic societal impact. Please pray that old religious walls would be broken down and that the church would be bold and courageous to continue standing against syncretistic religious events. We want to serve the church and help people move from simply hearing about Christ to actually encountering Christ.



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adopt
the persecuted church
SUNDAY

“What a Waste”

Acts 6:8-8:3

Illustration: Last year we were horrified when we saw the picture of 21 North African Christians forced to dress in orange jumpsuits, paraded along the Mediterranean coast of Libya by the barbaric ISIS terrorists. We were shocked. Nauseated. We learned that they beheaded every one of the Christians. We look at this in disgust and some said, “What a waste! What a waste of life!” But then we turned away and we forgot. Church, we cannot turn away. We cannot turn away from the 100 million Christians who are being persecuted every day. There are over 300 Christians who are killed every month because of their faith; some say as many as 105,000 each year (*Deseret News, 2011*).

Turn with me to Acts 6-7. This morning we want to look at Stephen, the first Christian martyr in history.

A. Stephen's Accusers

Stephen was the prince of the early church—the first one chosen to be a leader. He was filled with faith and with the Holy Spirit. The apostles laid their hands on Stephen. Acts 6:8 says he was “*filled with grace and with power.*” It says, he “*did great wonders and signs.*” Since no one could withstand his wisdom and power, those who hated Jesus started hating Stephen. The enemies of Christ brought false charges against him. They wanted to destroy him. They took him to court and brought all kinds of false charges against him.

B. Stephen's Defense

Acts 7:1 In response to the false charges, the high-priest asked a simple four-word question, “*Are these things so?*” He was looking for a simple yes/no answer. Sometimes, however, a simple yes or no is not adequate. So, to the simple four-word question, Stephen gives a 999 word answer. It is the longest speech recorded in the Book of Acts. He essentially preaches through the entire Old Testament and walks through the flow of redemptive history. He begins with Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and the Prophets. Stephen builds this enormous verbal pyramid, turns it upside down, and puts it square on the forehead of his accusers. Listen...[Read Acts 7:51-53]

As Stephen says very clearly, the issue is not about Stephen; the issue is about Christ. They hated Christ, and thereby, they hated Stephen.

C. Stephen's Death

Look at their what happened. [Read aloud Acts 7:54-60]

The accusers saw themselves in the mirror of God’s Word, and they couldn’t stand the sight. They gnashed their teeth. They seethed in anger. They frothed at the mouth. They clawed their hooves in the ground and rose up against him in attack!

As the dust billowed around them, Stephen lifts up his eyes. [Acts 7:55] “*But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God in Jesus standing at the right hand of God.*”

He not only saw Christ standing, but he declared it. [Acts 7:56] “*Behold, I see the heavens open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.*”

His two eyeballs became like two giant video screens in which his accusers could now see straight into the throne room of God. No wonder everyone listening tried to cover their ears. They cried out and lost control. [Read Acts 7:57]

You want to see what a man is made out of? Squeeze him! The harder they squeezed Stephen, the more they saw what was really inside. The harder they squeezed, the louder Stephen prayed-- two prayers:

Acts 7:59 “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” and Acts 7:60 “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

D. Was it a Waste?

So I ask you—was it a waste? This young man was the prince of the early church. He dripped with potential. He was full of the Holy Spirit, and now he’s lying dead in a pool of his own blood. Was it a waste?

There is no question, he made the ultimate sacrifice. Those who looked on from the outside might have said it was a waste.

All over the world today, hundreds of millions of Christians today are being persecuted. Some are laying down their lives. We need to settle this matter once and for all. Is it a waste?

“Sacrifice”= *to give up something of value to gain something of greater value.*

Outsiders will always look at sacrifice and say, “What a waste.” Insiders, on the other hand, view sacrifice as the only logical choice. An insider does not look at what he’s giving up, but what he’s gaining.

To him, it was obviously not a waste, because of his value system. He gave up something of value, but he gained something of far greater value.

1. Stephen pleased Christ.

The New Testament says that when Christ ascended into heaven He, “*Sat down at the right hand of God the Father.*” Here, however, we see Christ standing at the right hand of God. It is as if Christ stood and recognized his servant Stephen and the sacrifice he was making.

2. Stephen represented Christ.

Three times in these verses we see Saul standing in the shadows.

Acts 7:58 “*The witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.*”

Acts 8:1 “*Saul approved of his execution.*”

Acts 8:3 “*Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*”

Saul was a man radically devoted to his cause; when he saw Stephen, however, he met his match. He was tormented beyond tolerance to see the devotion Stephen had. In many ways, it was Stephen who introduced Saul to Christ. In Acts 22:20 when the Apostle Paul stood trial himself, he referred to Stephen shedding his blood and the role that played in his own conversion.

Was Stephen’s death a waste? Certainly not. He pleased Christ and he presented Christ to Paul.

E. Our Response

Recently, God has been opening our eyes to the world of the persecuted church. Stephen was the first martyr and there have been many, many more. Every day, 100 million Christians are persecuted because of their faith—everything from job discrimination, rape, imprisonment, slavery, and hundreds are murdered every month. Is it a waste? No, it’s not a waste. Everyone who dies for Christ has NOT wasted their life.

Do you want to know what is a waste?

A waste is a Christian who has tasted of eternal things and yet lives for temporary things.

A waste is a Christian who wants to protect his reputation and refuses to publicly identify with Christ for fear of rejection.

A waste is a Christian who delays repentance...who does not gets around to getting right with God or who dabbles with God. That’s a waste! That’s a waste of time. A waste of life.

There are those who look at Christ hanging on the cross and say, “What a waste.” Certainly, there were those who stood near Mary and thought, “Jesus was such a fine young man; it’s sad He had to die so young. What a waste!”

What about you this morning? When you look at Christ you have two options—Do you say, “What a waste!”, or “You are worthy!” You decide!

Church, today we look at Christ and say You are worthy! And we look at the persecuted church and we say, You are worthy—you are worthy of our investment!