

# Open*Doors* NEWSLETTER

Persecuted  But never alone.



**NOVEMBER/  
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**Christmas  
around the  
world**



# Daniela and her family are safe thanks to you



This Christmas, because of their love for Jesus, there will be an empty seat at the table of the Salcedo family in Colombia.

In Colombia, drug lords and rebels (who are often the same people) operate like lawless warlords. There's a heavy price to pay for anyone who goes against them.

For Daniela (12), her brother Sebastian (5) and mother, Alba, it cost them their father and husband, Pastor Plinio. Sitting in his rocking chair in the family's living room, Pastor Plinio was shot dead. Alba and Daniela will never forget what they saw.

Pastor Plinio, like many other Christians, was a threat to these groups' operations, who recruit vulnerable young people to do their dirty work. Killing Daniela's father was a warning to Christians to stop their activities that helps people overcome their addictions and tries to prevent young people from being lured in by these rebel groups.

It's been difficult for the family but especially for Daniela, who struggles to express her feelings. When asked what is the hardest thing for her, Daniela responds: *"When I think of my dad."*

Last year, thanks to your support, we


took Daniela and her family to the Open Doors Children's Centre in Colombia, to give them a break from the sadness and isolation, to receive trauma care and to celebrate Christmas.

Being at the centre, Daniela *"felt good for the first time in a long time... I also learned that, although there are difficult times in life, there are also times Jesus helps us to overcome through people and prayer."*

Open Doors was also able to arrange a new house for them in a much safer area. *"This was only possible through the gracious prayers and gifts of our supporters,"* an Open Doors field worker says.

*"Thanks to you, Alba, Dani and Sebastian have moved and are in a safer place...."*

Daniela is thankful for your prayers and love. *"It's very important to know that this Christmas there are people around the world praying for me and my family. I'm very grateful for that,"* says Daniela.

Thank you for helping give many families like Daniela's psychological and pastoral support, financial aid and assistance with livelihoods. Your love has shown them that they are never alone. 

# Christmas wishes from children in Iraq

Open Doors has been supporting the Church in Iraq through local partners since 2003. The Church continues to need us because it has been severely weakened by the heavy persecution over the last few years, most notably the forced mass displacement of many Christians by the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).

With Christmas around the corner, many of us have certain wishes, especially our little children. So what does a young child in Iraq want for Christmas? Is it the latest computer game? Perhaps a new pet? Or even a shiny new toy?

We spoke with Christian children whose families had to flee to Erbil to escape the danger of ISIS in Mosul. Many of them barely remember their hometowns and are unable to return as it's still too dangerous. Their Christmas wishes reveal the kind of world they've been forced to grow up in.

***"I pray that there will be no terrorists in this world, so we can live in peace,"*** says Fakhri (11).

Dima (9) says: ***"I ask the Lord to protect my church in Iraq."***

***"I wish that people could live in safety and in peace,"*** shares Sam (10).

One of the children in the choir, Mark (10), says: ***"(I wish) I would be able to go back to my church in Mosul."***

Lydia (10) and Marina (8) would like to live like other children in the world, in love and peace.

While their Christmas wishes are heart-breaking, we're so thankful that we can be involved in these children's lives – all thanks to your support! Over the years, your support has provided these children and their families with emergency aid, child-friendly spaces, trauma care, education, and has helped parents start small businesses. Your support and prayers make this work possible.

Please continue to pray for these children and their families this Christmas. Ask God to keep them safe, provide for their needs and help them to truly know "Emmanuel" – that God is with them.

Fakhri



Dima



Sam



Mark



Lydia



Marina





# Celebrating Christmas in Colombia

Christmas is one of the most important traditions of the Christian faith. We may all celebrate it differently, but it binds us together as a family in celebrating the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, more than 2 000 years ago. In light of this special day, we asked young Christians in Colombia how they celebrate Christmas and what it means to them...



*"For me, Christmas means that Jesus came to earth. It's about sharing with family, expressing love and being together. In the church, we have a vigil, when we pray. We don't decorate our house because we don't have money."*

**Timóteo (18)**

*"I remember that it has always been a time to gather as a family and share. And that's what Christmas means to me: Sharing with family."* **Anny (13)**



*"We celebrate Christmas as a family. We get together on 24 December, eat and tell stories. It's like a family reunion. This period is of thankfulness that God has granted me another year and that I can celebrate the birth of Jesus – that He lived as a human and died for us."* **Abnober (22)**

*"We don't decorate our house. Instead, we hold a church vigil on the 24th until midnight, sometimes all night. On the 25th, we return to the church for a service. Then we take a walk to the river and have lunch with our family. It's a time of rest, giving thanks to God for the past year, as we prepare for the coming year."*

**Oscar (19)**



## Bring comfort and joy this Christmas

The Christmas season is one of the most difficult for persecuted Christians. In some countries, they're prohibited from celebrating Christmas; while in others they face increased persecution in this season.

Today, you can help them experience comfort and joy this Christmas and all year round by helping reach a R 1984 000 goal. Your gift and prayers will help them receive the protection, care and support they need to thrive.



**Visit [www.opendoors.org.za/christmas](http://www.opendoors.org.za/christmas) to bless them today!**

## "Jesus is always with me."

Bijli\* (10) from Bangladesh stands by herself in her schoolyard, drawing a figure of a girl who looks like her in the dirt. She also draws some friends for her imaginary girl, all with big smiles.

A couple of girls approach Bijli and ask her what is she doing. She stammers: *"I've just been drawing..."* One of the girls' stamps on her drawing, making the smiling faces disappear.

*"My mother says that your family are infidels,"* another girl says. *"We're not infidels,"* Bijli says,

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starting to cry.

*“Are you saying my mother is lying?”* asks the girl and proceeds to push Bijli over. The girls laugh and run away, while Bijli stays on the floor, tears rolling down her face.

At such a young age, Bijli has already experienced the pain of being rejected and isolated for her family’s faith in Christ in their Muslim majority village.

Since leaving Islam, *“no one wants to talk, communicate and associate with us,”* says her father, Badol\*. It’s especially difficult on Bijli, who only has her brother, Mohon\* (5), to play with, as *“my friends don’t want to play with me,”* says Bijli.

Thankfully, every year, Bijli and her family along with many other Christian families, get the opportunity to leave the isolation in their communities, to come together to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Here, Bijli is able to play with children of her age.

Being able to come to this celebration, thanks to your support and prayers, means a lot to them. Badol says, *“I would like to give thanks to those who gave us the opportunity to come here.”* Bijli says: *“I want to give thanks to all of my uncles and aunts who organised this programme.”*

A few days after the celebration, Bijli is back in her schoolyard, drawing in the dirt. This time, she draws someone different next to her – a tall man with a beard and a big smile. She smiles at the memory of the music and the dancing at the Christmas celebration, and reminds herself of what she learned: *“Jesus is always with me.”*

\*Names changed for security purposes.



**“Jesus is always with me.”**

Bijli\* (10) from Bangladesh

# Thank you for standing with your family in Christ around the world!

This has been a tough year for many of us and for the persecuted Church. We're so thankful for you that, despite your own difficulties, you've continued to faithfully stand by our persecuted family through your prayers and gifts. You have helped them immensely as they suffered for the name of Christ on the frontlines. This is what your support has meant to some of them during this year:



*"Thank you to the brothers and sisters who helped us get the clinic up and running again. Your donations are much needed as we rebuild. May God bless you abundantly." – Dr Samuel, whose village was attacked by Boko Haram*



*"All the help that Open Doors has provided for us has been very useful. But the thing that I'm most grateful for is the teaching. I've learned how to resist in the middle of a storm. I've also learned that we're not alone in this." – Asuncion, Mexico*



*"I would like to thank everyone who supported us, and I want to ask them to keep supporting us, because we as a Church need someone to stand with us. With your support we can continue our ministry and spread the Word of the Lord [to] deliver the Word of life." – Dalia, Iraq*



*"Thank you everyone for praying for my family. Especially for financially supporting my family in this time of persecution and difficulties. I thank God because I'm able to overcome these trials and our family's difficult situation, because of your support." – A Dhon\*, Vietnam*

\*Name changed for security purposes.



# FROM JAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Dear partner of the persecuted Church

Around the world, the Christmas season is a time when we get together with family and friends. And if we can't be with them physically, we send them messages of love and encouragement. It's also when we miss those closest to us who are no longer with us, the most. And it's a time when we're reminded again of what is truly important.

Ecclesiastes 3:12 reads: *"I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live."* This is especially true during Christmas, as it's during this season that many people stop focusing on themselves and start to focus on others and doing good.

Looking back at this year, I thank you, our partners, for the good you've done for our family in Christ through your prayers and support throughout the year. It was a difficult year, especially due to the pandemic, but you stood with them. May God bless you for your love for our family in Christ.

During this season, my heart goes out to our family in Christ in countries where they're persecuted. Many of them pray for peace, as it's a time of increased persecution for them. Others like the Salcedo family (p. 2) remember their loved ones who were killed because they believed in a baby born at Christmas.

As we look forward to spending time with loved ones, please continue to keep our persecuted family in your prayers. And if you're able to give, please bless them this Christmas (see p. 5). Let's keep on reminding them that amid persecution they are never alone!

Together in His service

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