

OpenDoors NEWSLETTER

Open Doors Southern Africa – 50 years of service to the persecuted Church



November / December 2021

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You've brought **HOPE** and **JOY** to Cecilia and her family



Soon we will be celebrating Christmas. For many of us in South Africa and across the world, this Christmas will be bittersweet as many of us have experienced loss over the past year. So as we come together in joy and laughter, our hearts also think of those whose hearts are aching this Christmas, like Cecilia from Nigeria.

Cecilia may have lost her husband in 2011 (when attacks against Christians broke out in the Plateau State), but she and her family are painfully aware of the empty seat at their Christmas table every year. Many of us can relate to that feeling this Christmas.

Cecilia didn't know what would happen to her and her family, but she *"decided to hold on to Jesus."* And by God's grace, she was able to take care of her family.

Thanks to her family in faith around the world, like you, she was able to provide food for her family and send her children to school. Because of you, her son, Sele, whose favourite subject is Mathematics, can go to school to study so that when he grows up, he can *"be a doctor... I want to save people's lives,"* says Sele.

Both Sele and Cecilia are grateful for their faith family around the world. *"I want to say thank you to the brothers and sisters who*

are helping me to pay my school fees. May God bless them," says Sele. Cecilia echoes his statement: *"I thank God for Open Doors. They're helping me, especially with Sele. We thank you a lot... especially Sele. After each of his exams, when he receives the results, he asks me if I can call the office (Open Doors) to tell them he came first in his class."*

Open Doors was able to surprise Sele with a Christmas gift. He had outgrown his clothes, and his mother didn't have money to buy him new clothes. He received a new formal shirt, trousers, and an illustrated Bible. The joy and surprise he displayed are priceless.

Thank you for giving the gift of joy and hope to families like Cecilia's. May God richly bless you as you spend time with your family and friends this Christmas!



Thank you! With your support Sele is top of his class and can dream of becoming a doctor.

Thank you to our family in faith!

As we close off this year, we're so thankful to God for His goodness and to all of you, our family in faith, who pray for and support our persecuted family in Christ.

We want to give a special shout out to our Northcliff Union Church family in Johannesburg. Since the 2000s they've been involved in many projects with Open Doors, standing with our persecuted family.

From praying for our persecuted family in their weekly church services to travelling to visit them as well as hosting Open Doors speakers and taking part in our letter writing campaigns, Northcliff Union Church has been faithfully involved in serving our persecuted family. *"We do what we can to try and keep the persecuted Church 'front of mind' in the life of our church family,"* says Gavin, senior pastor of the church.

We asked Gavin what their heart is behind supporting our persecuted family, and he said: *"I think 1 Corinthians 12:26 says it best. We're part of the Body of Christ. If one part suffers, we should all feel the agonising pain of that suffering. The Body of Christ is in horrific trauma all over the world and on our continent. If we can't feel that suffering, then we're not really connected to the Body of Christ, are we?"*

Thank you to Northcliff Union Church and many other churches for standing with our family for so many years.



**WE'D LOVE TO
HEAR FROM YOU!**



**If you have a special
testimony of you, your
church or small group's
involvement in supporting
our persecuted family, let
us know!**

Email: milandreh@od.org

The birth of Jesus through the eyes of children

Part of our vision at Open Doors is to impact the Kingdom for generations to come. That is why we have special projects focussed on strengthening persecuted Christian children, who face various difficulties because they love Jesus. Despite the extra pressure these children face, especially during Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Jesus doesn't go unnoticed.

We asked some of them how they celebrate our Saviour coming to earth and this is what they said...



KENYA

Mary

"Together" is the word associated with Christmas in Kenya, as we learn from Mary (13): *"Christmas starts with a normal service, the pastor preaches, we worship," she says. "After the service, we eat and drink together because there are those who don't have money to buy food to celebrate in their homes. So we all come together and share so that everyone has enough. Everyone can celebrate without being left behind or discriminated against."*



P.S. Consider giving the gift of hope to our family in Christ this Christmas through one of our Gifts of Hope. Visit www.OpenDoors.org.za/goh to have a look at our new Gifts of Hope catalogue.



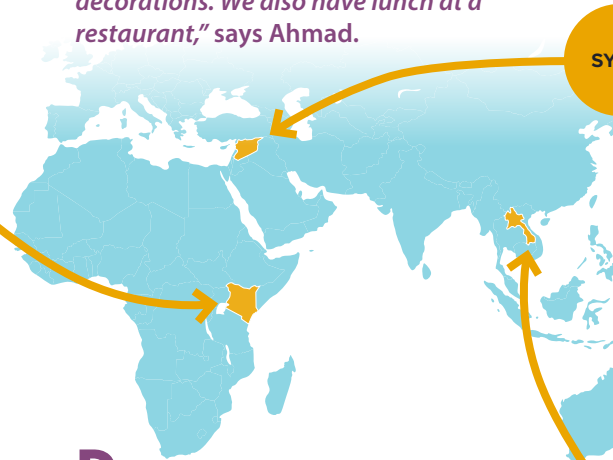
Ahmad & Lian

In Syria, Ahmad (14) and Lian (10) are decorating the Christmas tree. Even though the country has been stuck in a civil war for more than 10 years, remembering that the divine Jesus lived among us gives hope.

"I celebrate Christmas by going to my grandfather's house, and we eat sweets and stuff like that," Lian says. "We put up a tree and eat delicious meals," adds Ahmad. "I go out with my friend. We walk through a Christian street where people put Christmas decorations. We also have lunch at a restaurant," says Ahmad.



SYRIA



Deng

In Laos, Deng (12) and her friends are lighting Christmas candles. The girls don't think about persecution when they prepare for Christmas. *"Christmas is the day that Jesus came down on earth to forgive our sins, and it's His birthday," Deng says.*

The girls rehearse a dance they plan to perform for Christmas. *"We celebrate Christmas by dancing," Deng says: "to show glory to God, sing songs, and worship God with the adults."*

Praise the Lord for these children's faith in Christ. This Christmas, as we come together to celebrate Jesus's birth, may we remember the hope that we have in Him and thank Him for forgiving us so that we can spend eternity with Him!

LAOS



My prayer for Christmas



Soon it will be Christmas. With Covid having hit us unexpectedly in 2020, our Christmas celebrations have in some ways changed. I sometimes wonder, what kind of Christmas will we have this year? With everything going on, I'm standing in hope and praying for a turnaround.

I pray that the streets will be filled with rest, peace and joy and we'll get to see our friends and loved ones while remembering those who've passed on, and children will be able to be children. **I pray** that churches will be allowed to gather for celebrations and that the choir will sing and children at church can act out their plays. **I pray** that it will be all about celebrating the birth of Jesus.

Sadly, for persecuted believers, these kinds of prayers aren't even close to their reality, especially during this pandemic

and Christmas time. It's one of the most dangerous times for them, and they are daily targets due to their faith. So, for them, **I pray** that this Christmas they will be protected from violence and harassment and that they'll be able to come together safely (and discreetly) where possible.

No matter where they find themselves – in prison, hiding, on the run, **I pray** that this Christmas they'll experience the hope we have in Jesus Christ despite their circumstances. And **I pray** the same for you – that in whatever you may be facing this Christmas that you'll experience this hope too.

Young and old, near or far – **I pray** that we as the Body of Christ across the world will continue to run the race of faith faithfully and together during this Christmas season and in the coming year.





VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We have a vision to see the persecuted Church remembered in every church in Southern Africa. But we can't do this alone. That is why we're calling on you, our partners, to help us make this happen.

How? You may ask. By becoming a church representative or speaker.



Become a church representative

As a church representative, you'll be the go-to person at your church for everything Open Doors. Keeping the church up to date with the latest stories, resources, and campaigns to enable them to pray and take action. All you need is a heart for our persecuted family, the eagerness to make a difference and the rest we will supply.

Become a speaker

As a speaker, you can use your voice to inspire others to take action and stand alongside those most persecuted for our faith. You will help spread the message of the persecuted Church by being a voice in your area for those in our family of faith who are unable to speak up for themselves.



Come use your time, skills and passion and run the race of faith with our persecuted family! Together we can make an impact for the Kingdom in our communities and for the persecuted Church!

Visit www.opendoors.org.za/volunteer for more information and to sign up.

FaithFluencers
Be inspired to live differently

8am Sundays on eTV

Our persecuted brothers and sisters are influencers in the faith – they are FaithFluencers. Be inspired by their faith by catching our FaithFluencers programme on e.TV at 8 am on Sunday mornings as Vicky Kente chats with Open Doors staff, partners and travellers as they speak about their encounters with our persecuted family and how it has influenced their faith. The programme runs until 19 December. Don't miss it!

From the heart

Dear friend

It has been a tough year for many who've lost loved ones, or livelihoods and many have felt the burden of insecurity and isolation. While we've endured difficulties this year, we've also witnessed compassion rising, solidarity to lend a helping hand across historical dividing lines and communities standing together to protect each other against wilful destruction. Amidst this situation, we're encouraged to keep the faith and boldly follow Jesus.

Over the last few months, I've been strengthened by your support for our brothers and sisters in Christ. I've also been encouraged by a word in season from the letter to the Hebrews and pray you'll also be encouraged by it: *"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."* (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Christmas time is a gift that allows us to pause and fix our eyes on Jesus as we prepare to celebrate His birth and

incarnation with loved ones. At this time, I ask you to please consider our most persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ across the world. Despite hunger, war, oppression, imprisonment, hatred and being outcasts – they're called to remain, to keep the presence of Jesus as carriers of light in the darkness. We can learn so much from them.

May we continue to keep them in our prayers as they need our prayers and support as they run the race set out for them.

As we close off this year, I thank you for standing with us and our brothers and sisters in Christ, and I pray that as you come together with your loved ones this Christmas that you'll have a blessed time as we all reflect on the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Peace

Lynette Leibach

Executive Director

Open Doors Southern Africa



Persecuted  But never alone.



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