



OpenDoors NEWSLETTER

Same faith. Different lives.



ISSUE 3

You gave an Indian pastor courage to stand, p. 2-3 • Update on Preetha and Vinita, p. 4
Preserving the Middle-Eastern Church, p. 5-6 • Ministry highlights, p. 7

You've helped give Pastor Shekhar strength and courage to stand

Despite India's constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion and the general population claiming to value tolerance, the situation in India continues to be extremely difficult for millions of believers simply wanting to live out their faith in peace.

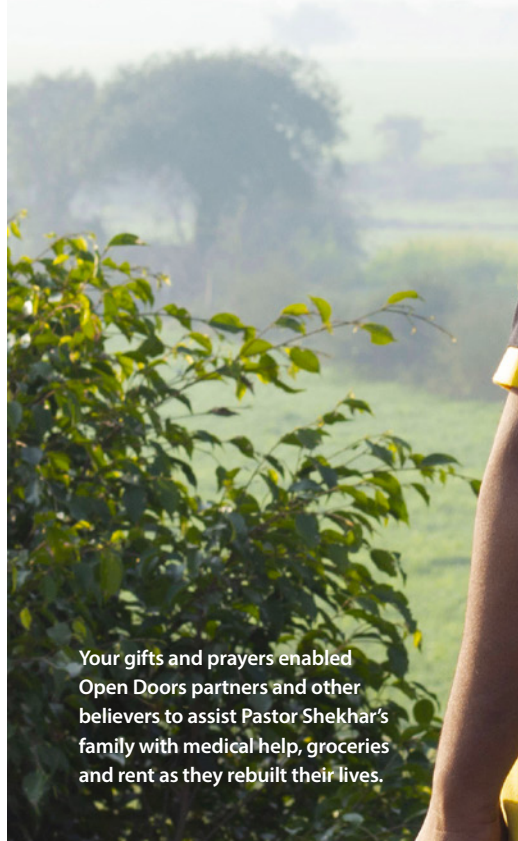
One such believer is Pastor Shekhar*, who began training his son in his pastoral ministry, confident that he would continue in his footsteps and serve the Lord as a pastor. But then Pastor Shekhar was arrested...

While he and other believers gathered for prayer, policemen came and stopped the meeting. *"It was in this moment I realised that our time of persecution has come,"* says Pastor Shekhar.

They seized everyone's Bibles and arrested them. They were harassed, beaten and tortured for hours at the police station before they took Shekhar to a separate room.

They beat Shekhar badly and slapped him so hard in the head, causing his eardrums to burst. They accused him of paying Hindus to convert to Christianity, which he denied, resulting in more beatings. *"I was in intense pain, swelling, sadness, fear and anxiety."*

Eventually, they released Shekhar with a warning for him and his family to leave town or be thrown in jail. He tried reporting the incident to no avail. With no other options, he and his family packed up and fled.



Your gifts and prayers enabled Open Doors partners and other believers to assist Pastor Shekhar's family with medical help, groceries and rent as they rebuilt their lives.



Even though they left the immediate danger, his wife refused to let him, or their children participate in ministry. But he convinced her that no amount of persecution would stop God's calling on his life.

The attack devastated Pastor Shekhar and his family financially. His medical bills were substantial, and they had difficulty with buying groceries and paying rent.

Thankfully in their darkest hour, they weren't alone. Open Doors partners and other believers came alongside the family. Your gifts and prayers enabled them to assist the family with medical help, groceries and rent as they rebuilt their lives.

"In that time of sadness, we could feel you as a family standing by us." Pastor Shekhar

"If an animal or a bird is injured, it's unable to get up on its own – it needs treatment," Pastor Shekhar says. *"I had faith and belief but didn't have the strength to stand. You took care of me like an injured bird and gave me enough strength and courage to stand on my own, which is why I'm standing today."*

Thanks to your gifts and prayers, Pastor Shekhar and his family can continue to be a light for Jesus in India. As part of the Body of Christ, this family belongs to a fellowship and for that, Pastor Shekhar is grateful.

*Name changed for security reasons.



UPDATE Preetha and Vinita's faith is stronger than ever

Earlier this year, we received an update on Preetha* and Vinita*. We shared their story in last year's July/August newsletter. Along with their families, they were attacked and beaten by a group of men that barged into Vinita's house.

Amazingly, the incident has strengthened Preetha and Vinita's faith. *"I'm strong in my faith; I begin my day at 5 o'clock with a one-hour prayer-time. Even though I'm illiterate and can't read the Word, I listen to it,"* says Preetha.

"My faith emerged stronger after the incident. I wake up very early in the morning and spend time reading the Bible and praying. Somehow, I'm finding courage to stay in the same locality," says Vinita.

Sadly, both women still face persecution. Preetha and her family had to move twice because people alerted the Hindu extremists that they're Christians. Vinita still endures mental abuse, taunts and sarcastic comments from her neighbours. For this reason both women keep a low profile.

Please continue to pray for Preetha, Vinita and their families:

- Pray for miraculous healing for Preetha's arm as it still doesn't work properly despite treatment.
- Pray that Preetha's husband, who had a heart attack a few months ago, will be able to receive the treatment he needs.
- Pray for Vinita's sister, who was also beaten in the attack. She can't practice her faith openly as her husband isn't Christian.
- Pray that Vinita will be able to move her shop to a more prime location where she can get more customers without surveillance from her non-Christian neighbours.

*Names changed for security reasons.



Preserving the Church in the Middle East

This year marks the end of our seven-year Hope for the Middle East campaign. We interviewed the Campaign Manager, Rami Abed Al-Masih*, who is originally from Syria. He gives some context, reflects on the past and looks to the future of this advocacy campaign.

*Name changed for security reasons.

Q: You managed a campaign to bring hope to the Middle East. Can you sketch out the context?

A: The campaign officially launched in 2016, where we had several internal conversations within Open Doors. We mostly spoke about ISIS because it was in 2014 when ISIS started to take control over vast areas of both Iraq and Syria.

We asked ourselves, are we standing in front of a question that could be existential for the future of the Church?

The vision was to step into a global campaign in which Christians in Syria and

Iraq are the focus, in an effort to present a new vision for the Church and preserve the place of the Church, as a church and in society.

Q: What are some of the highlights of campaigning and implementing programmes together with churches in Iraq and Syria?

A: Globally, we worked on a big mobilisation effort for a petition. This was presented to the UN secretary general's office in New York.

A year after presenting the petition and following one of the policy

recommendations we presented, the US development agency started a new initiative to support the work that faith-based organisations do in countries like Iraq. There are at least four Christian organisations who accessed some of those available funds in the first round of it.

Q: A seven-year campaign is long. What have been challenges you ran into?

A: A seven-year campaign is a very long journey. That in itself presents a challenge: how to keep the momentum from our supporters, contacts we have in governments and policymakers over this long period of time. Also, the local church in Iraq and Syria are often faced with fatigue, with a sense of we've been waiting for this change, and it's still not coming. Advocacy change takes time.

Another challenge is the reality of the Middle East being ever-changing. Overnight a regime could be thrown out. Or someone could be assassinated which would lead to a regional conflict.

Q: What can you say about the vision beyond 2022?

A: Ultimately the vision is to continue consolidating the place of the Church as a Centre of Hope in Iraq and Syria. The beacon of hope and to project light. For these Centres of Hope to be able to project that vision to people around them and consolidate their place to be able to continue to expand the work that they're doing.

Thank you for your prayers and support over the last seven years of this campaign. Please continue to keep our persecuted family in the Middle East in your prayers.

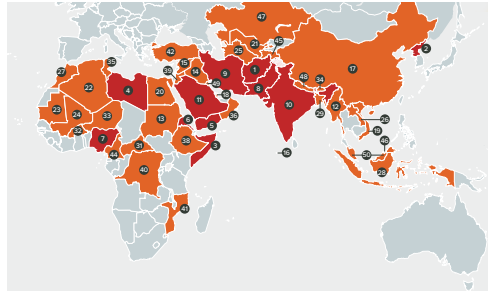


Thank you for your prayers and support!

We can't believe it's already the second half of the year and we are so thankful for your prayers and support so far. Here are some highlights from the first half of the year.

Open Doors World Watch List 2022 release

In January, we released our annual World Watch List with a special launch event. We're thankful for all who attended our launch and the coverage received to create awareness about the current situation facing our persecuted family of faith.



Gender-specific Religious Persecution Report

Now in our fifth year of reporting on gender-specific religious persecution (GSRP), we're grateful for the momentum being built in this area of our ministry as we shed light on the plight of men and women in the persecuted Church.



30 Days of Prayer for Afghanistan

Thank you to every partner that took the time to stand in prayer for our family in Afghanistan (#1 on the WWL) during Ramadan. Your prayers mean more than you could ever know.



Persecution Sunday

For the first time in the history of Open Doors Southern Africa, we hosted our first Persecution Sunday. Thank you to all our volunteers and partners who took part in the event.



From the heart



Dear partners and friends

It's hard to believe that we're already in the second half of this year. I hope that you're wrapped up warm and sitting with a hot drink as you discover the content of this newsletter.

It has been a busy season as we started building a church volunteer network. Our volunteers helped us during our Persecution Sunday campaign in June to raise awareness, prayer, and funds for those who suffer the most for following Jesus.

Looking at the newsletter, I'm touched by the update on the Hope for Middle East advocacy campaign. Now in its final year, the Centres of Hope and momentum gained continue to shine as beacons of light in the war-ravaged nations of Iraq and Syria.

You will notice a special insert with opportunities for you to write to our persecuted family. Please consider sending words of encouragement to those in our family who are hurting because of persecution. It doesn't have to be long to

impact their lives and help them in their faith.

Join me in a brief prayer: *"Father God, we ask in Jesus' name for Your Kingdom to come in all nations, neighbourhoods and families – we ask for a breakthrough in the ones where following You costs the most – we especially lift up India, Iraq and Syria to you. Have mercy, Lord, and may Your will be done in each situation. Amen."*

Thank you to each of you who continue to give, volunteer and pray regularly for our persecuted family of faith and our ministry. We're truly privileged to play a part with you in strengthening them.

Peace

Lynette Leibach

Executive Director

Open Doors Southern Africa



If you would like to share your feedback or suggestions on how we interact with you, please email southafrica@od.org.



 **OpenDoors**

I www.opendoors.org.za

T +27 11 888 9341 | F +27 11 888 9362

E southafrica@od.org  064 867 4730

P.O. Box 1771, Cresta, 2118



Persecuted  **But never alone.**

Bank Accounts: South Africa, **Geopende Deure - Open Doors NPC, ABSA - Northcliff (632005), Acc. no. 160340568**

Geopende Deure - Open Doors, Nedbank Business Account (198765), Acc. no. 113 750 4552

Bank Account: **Namibia, Geopende Deure - Open Doors NPC, Nedbank - Windhoek (461609), Acc. no. 1-2000-23847-1**

(Please fax proof of payment to: +27 11 888 9362)

All information compiled by Open Doors Southern Africa and correct at time of printing. No reproduction without permission.

Contact Milandr  at [milandre@od.org](mailto:milandreh@od.org)

REG # 2004/023397/08 | Printing done by Resolution Litho