significant news for christians

Some news that's encouraging—some disturbing. Read with discernment. Watch and pray.

THE Church Around the WORLD

August 2020

Country in Focus: **Japan** (1)

Japan, with a population of nearly 124 million, is made up of four main islands and 3,000 small islands. Only 13 percent of the land can be cultivated. Japan is one of the world's most powerful exporting nations despite a lack of natural resources and oil. The country is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. Years of stability and economic expansion since World War II have turned Japan into an economic powerhouse. Unfortunately, the population of young people is decreasing due to Japan's low birth rate.

Freedom of religion in Japan is guaranteed to all by the constitution. Over 70 percent of the population claim no personal religion, but the majority follow the ancestor-venerating tenets of Buddhism and the rituals of polytheistic Shintoism. The Bible is alien to the worldview of the Japanese—the concept of a creator God is foreign to most—but uncertainty about the future has prompted spiritual searching. While only 3 percent of the population claim to be Christian, there does seem to be a more open attitude toward Christianity from the general public in recent years. However, Christianity is still regarded as an outside, Western religion, and it is estimated that half of those baptized into the Christian faith leave the church within 3 years.

Prayer concerns:

- Pray for the young people of Japan—a population that struggles with depression and high rates of suicide.
- Pray for a new generation of Christian leaders—70 percent of all pastors in Japan are over age 60.
- Pray that churches would be planted in the 24 major cities in Japan with no evangelical church at all.

Chinese Officials Shut Down Zoom Service (2)

Chinese officials detained multiple members of a congregation for participating in an online worship service and even shut off the electricity of one of the church members. The members of Early Rain Covenant Church were gathering on Zoom on Sunday morning

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This month you can . . .

Aid a Shut-In

It takes just one person and a lot of prayer to get a seniors' ministry off the ground. If that one person really cares about the elderly and infirm and is willing to devote time to the outreach, promote it, and offer interesting programs, there's no telling how the Lord will honor that commitment. If you have a heart to serve the elderly, call your church and see if there is any interest. You might draw up a plan, sit down with the staff, and explain what such a program could accomplish.

The church's ministry to the elderly can be both spiritual and practical, and it can be conducted both at church and in the residences of the senior citizens you're trying to reach. Here are some specific ways you can reach out to the elderly:

SPIRITUAL HELP

- **Ministry to shut-ins.** Pastors can make regular visits. Groups of volunteers can send birthday cards or drop by the seniors at home.
- **Counseling.** Some larger churches have Christian counselors on staff who can help elderly members and caregivers deal with problems, stress, or unresolved guilt or anger.
- **Telephone assurance networks.** Recruit a few dependable church members to take turns calling the elderly once a day to say hello, ask about concerns, take prayer requests, or simply chat.
- **Caregiver support groups.** Form a support group for caregivers and relatives. Put together a phone or email list so you can reach each other.
- **Stephen's Ministry.** Thousands of congregations are enrolled in this St. Louis-based program, which trains laypeople to provide support to individuals dealing with emotional, physical, or spiritual problems.

PRACTICAL HELP

- **Respite care.** Organize volunteers to relieve full-time caregivers in their homes for a few hours each week.
- **Adult day care.** This would involve the use of rooms at the church as a center where seniors can enjoy memory-stimulating games and activities, armchair exercises, crafts, Bible study, occasional parties, and field trips.
- **Transportation.** Many older people depend on public transportation to take them to the grocery store, doctor's appointments, hospitals, worship services, and so on. You can meet a tremendous need by starting a church bus ministry or putting together a list of volunteer drivers.
- **Clean-up and repair services.** Simple fix-it jobs can usually be handled by a church member who is handy with tools. For bigger jobs, a special collection could help provide aid to elderly members.
- **Parish nurses.** Parish nurses are registered nurses who provide education and counsel, and who act as referral agents for health care needs of a church congregation.
- **Equipment loan program.** Some church members may have canes, wheelchairs, commodes, or other home-care equipment that they no longer need. Ask the church to post a list of available equipment and a contact person for each item.

(Thanks to Focus on the Family for this information. Visit them at focusonthefamily.com)

Chinese Officials Shut Down Zoom Service, continued from page 1

when officials blocked the meeting and took six members into custody.

Early Rain is an illegal, unregistered church that was shut down by Chinese officials in 2018. Its members have stopped gathering in person.

Last year, Early Rain's pastor, Wang Yi, was sentenced to nine years in prison for "inciting subversion of state power" and "illegal business operations," although his only crime was to preach the gospel in an unregistered church, supporters say.

One member reportedly was warned by police, "Don't participate in already banned religious activities anymore! Don't listen to Pastor Wang's sermons anymore! If you do this again, we will deal with it seriously and take you away!"

Christian Women Attacked in Uganda (3)

In separate incidents, two young women were beaten for their faith in eastern Uganda, sources said.

In the first instance, radical Muslims assaulted Lydia Nabirye, the 23-year-old daughter of a Church of God evangelist. Nabirye said she shared her faith with a young Muslim woman who subsequently became a Christian. The woman, unnamed for security reasons, received threats from her Muslim family due to her new faith, so Nabirye's family gave her refuge in their home, where six other former Muslims are also staying due to threats, she said.

On her way home one day, Nabirye was attacked by a group of radical Muslims.

"They held me and started beating me up," Nabirye told Morning Star News. "They slapped me, and others hit me with sticks, saying that they were out to kill me because I was changing Muslims to become Christians."

In an unrelated incident in Pallisa District, also in eastern Uganda, a pregnant woman is recovering from injuries after her family beat her for becoming a Christian. Sylvia Shamimu Nabafa, 27, had attended church services secretly for five weeks after putting her faith in Christ. As she was leaving church on the sixth week, a Muslim neighbor saw her and reported it to her father. That evening, her father asked her if she was a Christian, said Nabafa.

"I did not respond. He began hitting me with kicks and blows," Nabafa said. "The next thing I knew, I found myself in the hospital bed."

Uganda's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another. Muslims make up no more than 12 percent of Uganda's population, with high concentrations in eastern areas of the country.

Atheist Group Wins Legal Fees After Ending Graduation Prayer (4)

A federal judge awarded an atheist group more than $450,000 after the organization successfully fought against high school graduation prayer as part of a 2013 lawsuit. US District Judge Bruce Hendricks awarded the American Humanist Association attorney's fees and expenses for the lawsuit less than a year after she ruled against Greenville (SC) County Schools in a much-watched prayer case.

"Throughout this case, the School District has argued that students, like other citizens, have the right to free speech, including that of a religious nature," the school district said in a statement. "The School District . . . anticipates appealing both the fee award and the decision upon which it was based to the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals."

In 2013 the American Humanist Association sued the school on behalf of parents of a student who objected to students leading prayers at a graduation. The organization also objected to the graduations being held in off-site chapels.

Attacks on Indian Christians Increase in 2020 (5)

Attacks on Christians and their places of worship in India continued to escalate in both number and severity in the first half of 2020, with 27 violent incidents reported in March alone. United Christian Forum, a Christian organization that advocates on behalf of Christians in India, documented 56 threats against Christians as well as 26 physical assaults between January and March of 2020.

In most cases, the attacks were perpetrated by mobs objecting to Christians holding worship services. In March, a mob attacked a pastor and his 6-year-old son because they were running a house church. The mob forced the pastor's 8-year-old daughter to strip and threatened to beat her to death if she did not comply.

Another mob of 300 individuals attacked a church service in Kunda Thana, in India's Uttar Pradesh state. There, the pastor was beaten by the police and falsely charged with using the church for criminal offenses.

India is ranked 10th on Open Doors USA's World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. The organization says that Christians in the country face "horrific" violence from extremists, with thousands of attacks taking place every year.

May your ways be known throughout the earth, your saving power among people everywhere.

PSALM 67:2

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