

OpenDoors®

1000 CHURCHES MOVEMENT

1000 churches supporting 1000 pastors this Christmas.



THE CONTEXT

Christmas is a challenging time for the persecuted Church. Isolated and oppressed, Church Leaders have a particular burden to carry.

This year, we have an ambitious target for 1000 churches across Australia and New Zealand to help 1000 pastors in the persecuted Church. **By each church giving \$1000, pastors in Iraq, India, Vietnam and other oppressed nations will be strengthened and supported this Christmas.**

THE NEED

Watched, threatened, and arrested, Church Leaders in persecuted countries are at constant risk.

Just last year, a pastor in Myanmar was arrested on Christmas Day, on his way home from their morning services. Pastor Salai, from a Baptist Church in Bago, spent Christmas Day detained and interrogated in prison.

His story is not unique.

Pastor Quan*, a church leader in Vietnam and Open Doors' partner, says that each year his church must submit their calendar of activities for approval to the Communist Government. Christmas events are often not permitted.

"If churches push through with activities that aren't authorised, all the church members will be invited to the police station." – Pastor Quan

In a village tucked behind towering mountains in Central Asia, believers gather tentatively. They are led by 38-year-old, Pastor Van*, who came to faith when his parents heard a Christian radio broadcast, aired in their local language.

"We face persecution and lots of challenges," he says.

The local authorities don't allow his church to meet and give financial penalties if they are caught.

"One of the ways they torture us (is) they put the gravel on the floor, and they force people to kneel over it until their knees bleed."

These pastors face threats and intimidation simply for celebrating Christmas.

THE RESPONSE

This Christmas, you can help.

\$1,000 provides leadership training seminars for remote church leaders in Southeast Asia. Pastors can gather and be strengthened by God's word and in fellowship with one another. Without support from churches like yours, the costs to meet are too high.

The seminar reminds pastors they are not alone. The training not only equips them with understanding and knowledge but connects them with mentors and discipleship networks – the community they need to endure.

"We thank you so much for those supporting the training financially...thank you for those who develop the training materials. Those were really helpful to us. On behalf of the church here, thank you so much and God bless you." – Pastor Van



THE STORY

“Raids happen quickly,” says Caleb*, an Open Doors partner in China.

“Some churches have been shut down. One was in a five-storey building in a small city. The church took up two floors of the building and had enough seating for 200 brothers and sisters.”

“This venue was raided, shut down and sealed off. The authorities came inside and smashed all the equipment. New renovations were also destroyed. The church was closed and bolted from the outside. The believers were devastated.”

Restrictions, pressure, warnings and sometimes, surprise raids. These are all part of life for Chinese Christians. Pastors and co-workers regularly debate the pros and cons of registering their church with the government, and the risks and consequences they will face if they refuse to register and continue as unregistered house churches.

In some cases, just the fear of persecution can be detrimental. One church had about 100 believers. The pastor of the church was far from prepared for persecution, so even though the authorities didn’t come looking for him, on hearing that other churches in the area had been closed, he panicked and let fear overtake him.

Distressed, the pastor told the brothers and sisters what was happening nearby. In less than two months, one third of the congregation had left. A few months later, when we visited them again, we found that another third had ‘caught the fear’ and left.

One young pastor shared that his father’s church was told to register, or close down. The authorities added a ‘sweetener’ by saying if they registered, the church would be allowed to continue meeting, as long as they first submitted a name list of all the believers in the church. Finally, the church elders agreed.

But it was a trap.

Using the list of names, the authorities immediately targeted the older believers and threatened them, berated them, and forbade them from going back to church. They warned them that if they went back to church the authorities would block their children and grandchildren’s education and future employment prospects.

The older brothers and sisters felt cornered and angry. Understandably, the leaders of the church regretted their decision.

When the young pastor shared what he had learned at the Open Doors’ training about persecution with the leaders of the church, they said they wished that they had been able to attend the training earlier – then they would not have given in so easily. And they certainly wouldn’t have agreed to register.

In the end, the young pastor and his co-workers all knelt and prayed together. They recognized the need to spend quality time with the believers in their church to prepare them in how to respond to any future persecution, and to treasure their faith, never give up, and stay committed to the Lord Jesus.

The incident made it clear that many churches in China need help to prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.

While our training sessions look slightly different in every region, here are three ways we support church pastors around the world.

\$1,000 provides a leadership training seminar for networks of house church leaders in countries like China. The training gives them the knowledge, strength and community to withstand the harsh persecution that surrounds them. Will you help this Christmas?

**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR SUPPORT!**

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

opendoors.org.nz/give/train-church-leaders

OR CALL US ON:

09 620 4200

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