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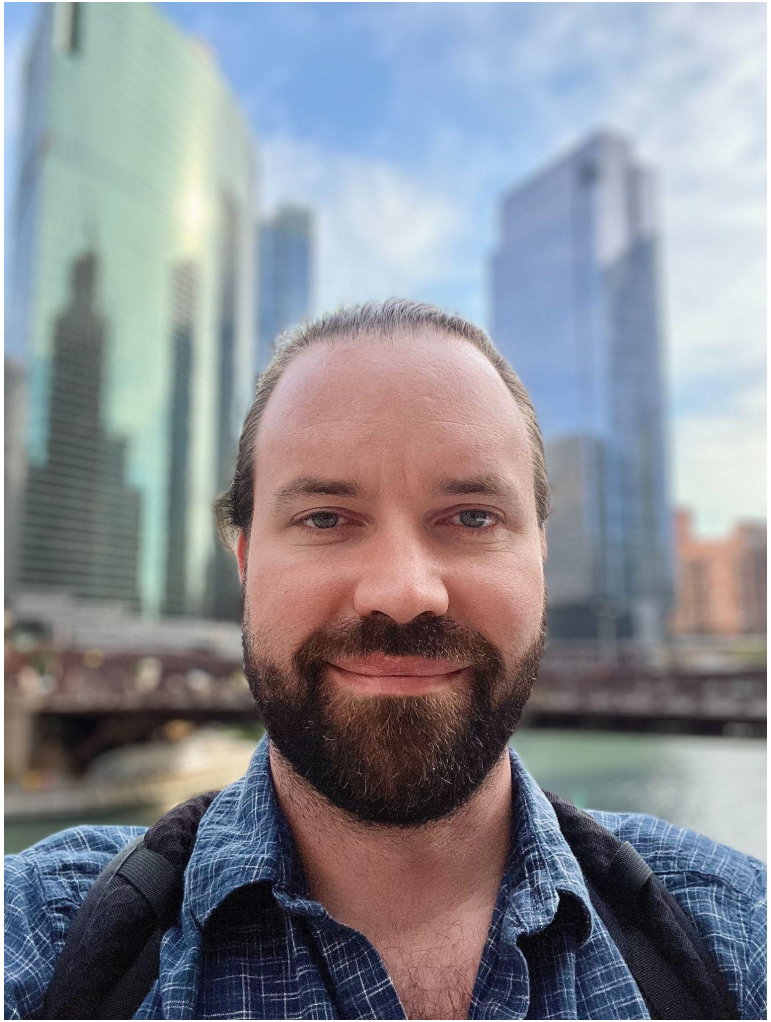
My bio:

Jeremy Weber is director of CT Global, a new initiative to fulfill Billy Graham's founding vision for Christianity Today as a central nervous system for the global body of Christ. Currently 1/3 of CT's 4 million monthly readers are outside the US.

Jeremy manages all of CT's non-US and non-English content. During the pandemic, he created a multilingual publishing team that produced 2,500 translations across 10 languages, reaching 4.5 million readers.

Based in Chicago, Jeremy has visited 40 countries and has received 1st Place reporting awards from both the Evangelical Press Association and the secular Religion News Association. The American Academy of Religion described him as one of the six most influential religion journalists in the US in 2018.

He graduated from Wheaton College and has worked at CT for 15 years. He and his wife Carolin are avid Argentine tango dancers and are making progress at having their 6 and 4 year olds follow in their footsteps.



They Sang 'a Heavenly Song' in a Dark Chinese Jail

Two Chinese Christian women ministered to their cellmates and prison guards with stories, prayers, and hymns.

E.F. GREGORY

简体中文 繁體中文

Image: Illustration by Mallory Rentsch / Source Images: Unsplash

News & Reporting

IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

MAY 22, 12:42 PM

Fewer Christians Know Families Who Foster or Adopt

While churches offer more support and encouragement, attendees say they're less likely to see personal involvement.

MAY 22, 9:19 AM

Died: Superstar Billy Graham, Teenage Evangelist Who Became a Wrestling Legend

In the ring and life, Wayne Coleman was a "heel" who wanted to be a "babyface."

MAY 19, 11:00 AM

Died: Tim Keller, New York City Pastor Who Modeled Winsome Witness

"We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

ESPAÑOL PORTUGUÊS FRANÇAIS 简体中文 한국어 INDONESIAN 繁體中文 РУССКИЙ УКРАЇНСЬКА 日本語

MAY 18, 9:00 PM

For Years, This Christian NGO Worked with Muslims in Myanmar. Then Came Cyclone Mocha.

Long-term relationships helped the group aid the Rohingya while the UN and others were shut out.

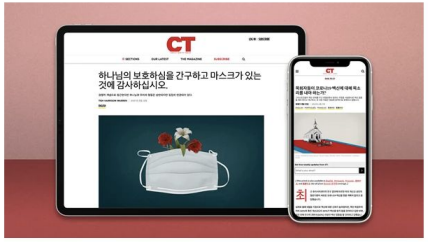
CT Translations:

6 core languages
8 trial languages
2,500+ translations
4 million readers

Bahasa Indonesia
CT's Indonesian articles

Español
CT's Spanish articles

Français
CT's French articles



한국어
CT's Korean articles

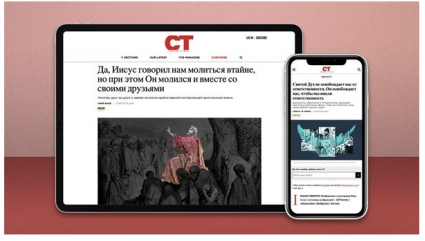
日本語
CT's Japanese articles

简体中文
CT's Chinese (Simplified) articles

繁體中文
CT's Chinese (Traditional) articles

العربية
CT's Arabic articles

Português
CT's Portuguese articles



Русский
CT's Russian articles

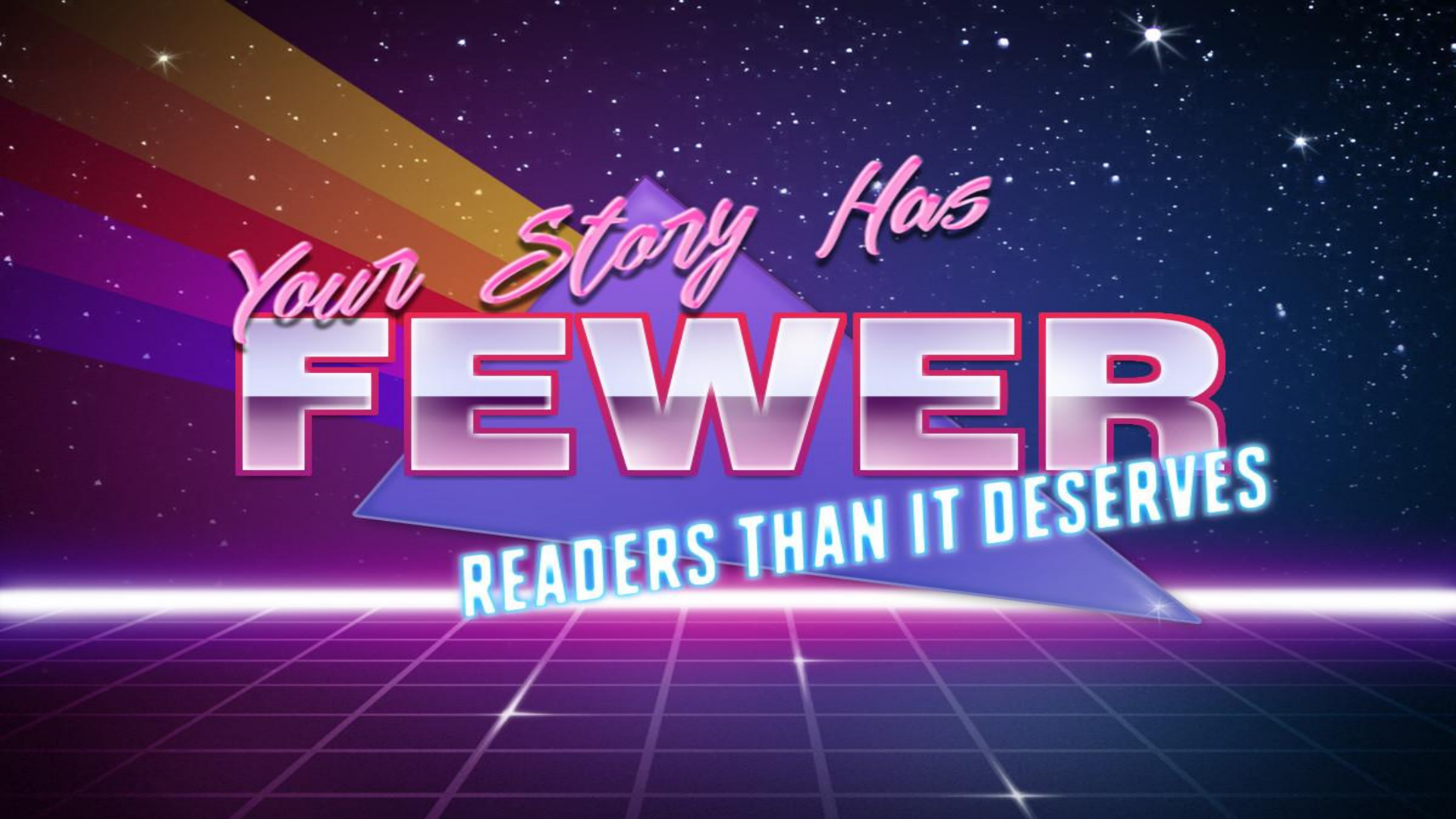
Luke the ~~Evangelist~~ Journalist

Luke 1:1-4 (NIV)

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses** and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have **carefully investigated** everything from the beginning, I too decided to **write an orderly account** for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

If your mother says she loves you, check it out.


Your Story Has
FEWER
READERS THAN YOU THINK


Your Story Has
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READERS THAN IT DESERVES


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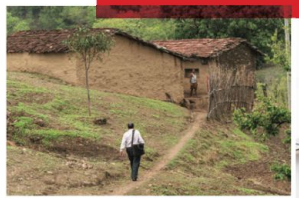
COVER PHOTO AND INDIA PHOTO BY GARY S. CHAPMAN • ILLUSTRATION BY NEIKOFF / SHUTTERSTOCK

REPORTING BY
JEREMY WEBER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
GARY S. CHAPMAN

OUTPACING PERSECUTION

WHY IT'S THE BEST OF TIMES AND THE WORST OF TIMES FOR INDIA'S BURGEONING CHURCHES.



Pastor Bhagwana Lal spends most of his day traveling the hills of Rajasthan by motorcycle to pray with far-flung tribal families who request healing that local priests and doctors have failed to provide.

The world's most unexpected megachurch pastor might be an illiterate, barefoot father of five.

Bhagwana Lal grows maize and raises goats on a hilltop in Rajasthan, India's largest state, famous for its supply of marble that graces the Taj Mahal. He belongs to the tribals: the cultural group below the Dalits, whose members are literally outcasts from India's caste system (and often called "thumb signers" because of how they vote).

Yet every Sunday, his one-room church, with cheerful blue windows and ceiling fans barely six feet off the ground, pulls in 2,000 people. His indigenous congregation draws from local farmers, whose families' members take turns attending so that someone is tending the family's animals. The cracks in the church's white outer walls are a source of pride: They mark the three times the building has been expanded.

Thousands of colorful flags stream down the sanctuary along the blue beams that support the corrugated metal roof. Their rustling approaches a roar.

When asked the reason for the flags, Lal responds, "For joy!" laughing heartily. The decorations are normally used at weddings. "The same feeling should be inside the church. People should feel this is God's place."

Yet consider a contrasting megachurch in southern India. A taxi drives under the shadow of Hyderabad's four-story elevated train, whose massive support beams are marked with alternating colorful gods and goddesses. The roadside, lined with movie posters and squatter tents, gives way to clusters of large stone elephant-headed gods waiting to be painted with customary bright colors. The taxi turns into a dense traffic jam: a mile-long jumble of buses, motorcycles, and pedicabs surrounded by a throng of people on foot.

Amid the chaos, one detail jumps out: Many people have Bibles in hand.

An ad above the corner bus stop reveals why: "Welcome to the largest church in India." The crowd is departing from Calvary Temple—its 6 a.m. service, no less. The church can accommodate 35,000 people and fills each of its five Sunday services. Its Sunday school teaches 7,000 children.

Founding pastor Satish Kumar has just returned from speaking at Rick Warren's Purpose-Driven Church Conference. He speaks between a thick fabric cross and a pulpit that replicates the facade of the church. When he asks his congregants to open their Bibles and turn to 1 Corinthians 13, the rustle of pages sounds like the rushing wind back at Lal's church.

"Many Americans think nothing is happening among Christians in India," says Kumar after the service. "We have to change that opinion."

Christianity Today circled India from north to south and back again for two weeks in order to witness the innovative and successful mission efforts of Indian evangelicals—this, despite rising persecution from Hindu nationalists. In fact, evangelical leaders across India agree that their biggest challenge is not restrictions on religious freedom, but training enough pastors to disciple the surge of new believers from non-Christian backgrounds. They believe the church's future in India is not a persecuted red (or rather, Hindu saffron) but a rosy one.

The best estimates of Indian Christians range from 25 to 60 million, with the majority being Catholics. That's a tiny minority amid 1 billion Hindus, but still sizable enough to rank among the 25 countries with the most Christians, surpassing "Christian countries" such as Uganda and Greece.

This is why a US missions agency now trains its new cross-cultural workers in India alongside Indian counterparts. "This is real collaboration by the global church," says P. Singh, a leading scholar at a respected Christian institution.

Addressing mixed groups gathered at eight tables flanked by flags, Singh asks the trainees to share three stereotypes about each other's homelands. The Indian lists for Americans include: "Hollywood, burgers, Donald Trump"; "punctual, disciplined, educated"; and "rich, white, luxury of choice." The American lists for Indians include: "Hinduism, food, Bollywood"; "rickshaws, cows, bright colors"; and "productive, crowded, mysterious." Singh asks, "Do you mean *productive* in terms of population?" Everyone laughs.

But Singh has a point: It's past time for Westerners to shed their stereotypes of majority-world Christians as poor and persecuted. When Western missionaries largely left India after independence in 1947, he says, God raised up indigenous Indian workers whose efforts are bearing more fruit than churches can harvest. "It's the *missio dei*," says Singh. "God will always find a way to bring salvation to his people."

FROM GRAVEYARD TO VINEYARD

Indian Christianity is hard to quantify, as one would expect in a diverse and dense nation of 1.25 billion. (This story restricts itself to evangelicals, and excludes India's heavily Christian northeastern states.) But whether pastoring churches in the wilderness or in city centers, evangelical leaders across the subcontinent agree that God is moving like never before.

"North India was known as the graveyard of missions," says Isaac Shaw, president of Delhi Bible Institute (DBI). "It was the heartbreak of evangelism." Now these descriptions feel as dated as colonialism.

While Christianity previously flourished primarily in South India, today the clear trend is robust growth in the North. For example, in the 1980s, DBI discipled and sent out 100 students per year to pastor in the North. By the turn of the century, it was sending 1,000. Last year it sent out 7,600 students. Its goal for 2016 is 10,000—and it's achievable, says Shaw. "You can see how the leaven of God's truth rises slowly but surely."

Standing next to the prominent cross on the roof of a seminary, president F. Philip surveys a lake in Rajasthan near a vacation spot that some consider India's most romantic city. But the school is located here for another reason: India's "tribal belt" is fast becoming its "Bible belt," with church planting and baptisms surging in the states that bifurcate the subcontinent from Gujarat in the west to Jharkhand in the east.

Many US evangelicals will recall the earlier event of the Dalits' possible move toward Christianity around the turn of the millennium [see "India Undaunted," CT May 2004]. But today, more evangelistic energy is being focused on India's tribals, according to Philip, regional director for the Lausanne Movement and editor of *Christian Trends,* an Indian evangelical magazine.

"There has been a tremendous response to the gospel among the tribals," says Philip. The resulting challenge is having enough trained leaders, given that most tribals are very poor and minimally educated. The seminary trains tribal pastors to serve a network of 300,000 believers worshiping across 1,600 congregations. Most of the school's 140 current students are first-generation Christians. "Our desire is to take the least," says Philip, "and make them the best."

But Christianity is not growing only at the bottom of the caste system. Leaders report encouraging growth among Indians from all types of non-Christian backgrounds.

INDIA'S REPUTATION AS A MISSIONARY GRAVEYARD IS NOW AS OUTDATED AS COLONIALISM.

At Singh's institution, faculty offices are labeled not by professor names but by significant places in international church history: Ephesus, Chalcedon, Wittenberg, Edinburgh. Most Western Christians wouldn't recognize the city on Singh's door. Dornakal is where the first Indian Anglican bishop,

"WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED, THE POLICEMAN IS THERE LONG BEFORE JESUS IS."
—JOHN DAYAL

Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah, served for decades and the church grew from 50,000 to 250,000.

In the adjoining office, labeled "Lausanne," the four staff members of the Research Project on Christward Movements are analyzing five new groups of people turning to Christ across India's socio-religious spectrum. They already have 2,500 pages of interviews with new believers.

SURVIVING THE SAFFRON SURGE

In Varanasi, the walls of a call center display posters encouraging workers to "think positive" and listing "15 mantras for how to live better." One poster stands out. Its text comes from John 16:33: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The center is actually a "prayer tower" hotline run by Living Rock Church, whose seven volunteers take about 300 calls per day. "Here in India, people pray for anything," says pastor Patsy David. "If the cow is sick, they will call." Many calls are for health or money problems; some, for a love interest's change of heart. The volunteers pray with callers for 5 to 10 minutes, then try to connect them to a local church.

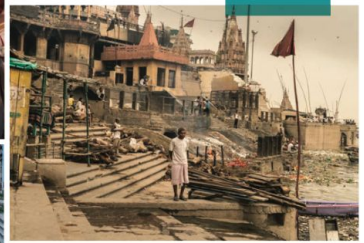
Doing so has never been easier. In Varanasi—where devout Hindus pilgrimage to bathe in the Ganges River—churches have multiplied from 5 in the 1990s to 250 today, says David. "Now in every nook and corner, you can find a church."

Perhaps because of that, more and more calls are about persecution. David shows CT a list of incidents that took place in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, in the past month. In one, a pastor was publically humiliated by being half-shaven, put on a donkey, and adorned with a garland of shoes instead of the customary flowers. In another, a 75-year-old pastor was beaten. Waiting in David's office is Jogindar, a 30-year-old pastor who says he was tied upside down to a tree, beaten with sticks, and thrown into a pit. David's list totals 26 incidents. "And that's just the major ones," he says. As CT leaves Varanasi, 100 pastors gather at a nearby church to discuss how best to respond.

Their main ally is the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), which represents 65,000 churches across 90 denominations. (By comparison, the National Association of Evangelicals represents 45,000 churches in almost 40 denominations.) While Christian persecution in India stretches back to the martyrdom of Thomas in A.D. 72, EFI has been busy documenting today's "saffron surge." From independence in 1947 until 1996, EFI and its partners recorded only 39 incidents of persecution. Now, its network verifies 100 to 200 each year.

Last year, EFI and other concerned groups launched a free 24-hour hotline for Christians to report persecution. The line initially collapsed from overload. By the end of 12 months, it had received more than 11,000 calls. "Not a day goes by without a pastor being beaten up, a church being attacked, or a Christian home being robbed," says Vijayesh Lal, EFI's general secretary. By the end of June, his researchers had already confirmed 135 incidents—almost the same total as in previous full years.

The perpetrators tend to be extremist followers of Hindutva, a nationalist and hegemonic strain of political Hinduism. Hindutva can be as violent as radical Islam, says John Dayal, an outspoken Catholic intellectual and activist who formerly led the All India Christian Council. High above Delhi on a club rooftop, he explains the "growing empathy between Hinduism as a religion and Hindutva as a political nationalism."



The famous ghats of Varanasi regularly draw Hindu pilgrims looking to ritually bathe—or even be cremated—in the sacred water of the Ganges River.

Roughly half of Mumbai's churches are now directly engaged in serving the peninsula city's sprawling slums.

Dayal cites the violent disruption of private meetings inside Christian homes. "Where two or three are gathered, the policeman is there long before Jesus is."

"The government will say it's only 1 percent causing problems," says Dayal. "But 1 percent of 1 billion Hindus is 10 million lunatics."

Of greater concern to Dayal and other Christian leaders are the increasing economic and political restrictions on Christians. As one leader puts it: "Instead of cutting off heads, they are cutting off the roots. They go in with the rulebook."

For example, Dayal notes that three hills in the state of Andhra Pradesh are considered to belong to a Hindu deity, which local farmers have long "leased" the land from. But a new law says Christian farmers can no longer do so and must give up their land.

"This economic and political emasculation of Christians is the bigger problem, because you are impacting generations. You are taking away the future," says Dayal. "You are making it punitive to be a Christian. This outweighs the violence, rape, and other opposition."

One source of encouragement is the Catholic grave of Thomas in Chennai, because it shows that the first Christian in India was also persecuted, says Singh. It also refutes the Hindutva argument that Christians in India are just a product of Western colonialism, allowing Christians to demonstrate that their presence dates from the days of Jesus—who was, after all, an Easterner. "It shows that Christianity in India is more apostolic than colonial," he says.

THE SAFFRON SHADOW'S SILVER LINING

Some think Christians can better defend their freedoms using carrots rather than sticks. "We can't be free of persecution, because the government has a wrong conception of what we Christians are about," says a Christian business leader in Mumbai. "We are not anti-India. In fact, we are the only community who prays for our government and our leaders.

"The real answer is a concentrated effort as the body of Christ to appeal to and educate the government. If we are united, the Lord will be able to achieve what we need to achieve."

Two of the best efforts so far: the National United Christian Forum and the United Christian Prayer for India (UCPI), which Lal says represent 98 percent of India's evangelicals, Pentecostals, historic Protestants, and Catholics. Initially a prayer movement that gathered Christians in 1,500 cities in November 2013, the UCPI has convinced hundreds of pastors to pray every Sunday, plant churches, and send cross-cultural workers.

"The church is more united than ever before," says Shaw. "Not to obliterate church lines, but to stand together against political opposition."

Thus, many pastors see a silver lining on the saffron storm clouds. "Like the early church in Acts, persecution helps the church to grow spiritually and to expand,'" says Vivian Fernandes, lead pastor of Maharashtra Baptist Society (MBS) in Mumbai. "The early church was married to persecution, prison, and poverty. Now we are married to prosperity, personality, and popularity.

"What is hindering the church is not from outside—it is from inside. People can come and throw stones, then they go. But it is the people inside doing bad things that can destroy the church."

Paul Cornelius, regional secretary for the Asia Theological Association, India

"THE RIGHT PRAYER IS NOT FOR PERSECUTION TO GO AWAY, BUT FOR SUSTENANCE THROUGH IT."
—PAUL CORNELIUS

chapter, agrees. "The right prayer is not for persecution to go away but for sustenance through it," he says. "To pray for it to entirely go away is unbiblical. If the church is being the church, persecution is to be expected.

"My topmost prayer is for the integrity of the Indian church—for it to be more Christ-like. The integrity of the church is where the gospel is at stake."

WORD, WORKS, WONDERS

Wati Longkumer, leader of the Indian Mission Association, is encouraging its 250-plus agencies to more effectively dispatch their 50,000 workers. "In light of the current situation, we should relook at our missions methods and not provoke," he says. "We should not temper our evangelizing; instead, we should get more creative."

Singh illustrates the spectrum of Christian mission as a wheel with three spokes. "What is the key avenue for communicating the gospel? Evangelicals say, 'Word,' mainliners say, 'Works,' and charismatics say, 'Wonders,' " he says. "All three are legitimate and needed if they point to Christ. Different contexts call for one or another, and without all three, the wheel will collapse."

During a monsoon downpour, our auto rickshaw navigates a Mumbai slum known as "Small UP." Just past a trash-filled stream where two children play under a bridge, the road ends at the green and white gate of a Muslim cemetery.

We disembark and turn right, walking up 92 steps—which the monsoon has turned into a waterfall—to the local Hindu temple. Then we turn left and follow the yellow-and-red brick road until it terminates in dirt. Here sits a church, literally at the end of the slum, with nothing but a small Christian cemetery and the jungle-covered mountain stretching into the mist beyond it. The building lay dormant for seven years until the 27-year-old pastor reopened it in 2013. "Here people look at churches in a negative way—as only interested in conversions," he says. "If we go into the community directly with the gospel, then people will oppose us." Instead, his church builds community connections through service.

"YOU ARE PRESENTING JESUS WITH A KNIFE AND FORK, BUT THE GOSPEL HAS TO BE EATEN WITH FINGERS HERE" —R. B. LAL

To do this, it partners with the Association for Christian Thoughtfulness (ACT), which helps churches distribute materials on HIV/AIDS, abuse, and other social needs to 200 houses at a time. In the 1970s, churches and ministries in Mumbai, India's most populous and wealthy city, filled 50 pages; the latest edition of the Mumbai Christian Directory required 338. In the middle is a bookmark shaped like a watermelon slice, bearing the blessing of Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply."

Mumbai churches have done just that. ACT estimates that in the past decade, more than half have launched ministries to the poor, trafficked, or other groups. "Everybody is doing it," says CEO Alita Ram. "And India looks at Mumbai as a trend-setter. Mumbai Christians are on the forefront because of prayer and the unity of pastors over time."

She refers to the Mumbai Transformation Network (MTN), a long-running collaboration by local pastors to serve their city. Due to its success, MTN recently gathered 180 people from 34 cities who were inspired to launch networks in their own cities.

Founder Viju Abraham was motivated by India's most famous Christian. "Why does Mother Teresa have a better message than us?" he says of the nun, recently sainted for her work with lepers. "There is something wrong with our theology if we do evangelism but no social work. If she has something to say and we don't, let's re-examine our theology."

One of MTN's core members is Fernandes's MBS, which operates an HIV ministry, literacy programs, a daycare, and a recovery home. "The greatest tragedy is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer," Fernandes explains at an MBS center in Thurbe, one of India's largest red-light districts. At this center, former sex workers come to earn a dignified income by making handcrafts sold through local churches. "When it comes to prayer, we have all fallen short. We can't all contribute financially, but we can all contribute prayer."

"The Indian church in its own right has come to understand the power of prayer," says Shaw. "Just like in the Acts of the Apostles, they gave themselves to word and prayer, and the church grew."

One success story of church planting is in Bihar, known as "the land of Buddha" because it is where Siddhārtha Gautama attained enlightenment and gave many of his sermons. The northern state, which borders Nepal, is also the home of Empower Believers Connections (EBC), a flourishing house church movement.

Near the terminus of one of India's longest bridges over the Ganges, about 60 pastors from across Bihar gather in its major city, Patna, for their twice-a-year training and encouragement. Representing 33 of Bihar's 38 districts, they sit in a semi-circle on rust-colored plastic chairs in a Catholic retreat center ringed with photos of Buddhist tourism landmarks. A portrait of Mother Teresa graces the right of the stage; a portrait of Pope Francis is on the left. Above the stage, serenely presiding over all, is a six-foot painting of Jesus mimicking the Buddha's garb and posture.

In addition to planting churches among Buddhists and other non-Christian groups, EBC is focused on making its churches self-sustainable through small enterprises. "We believe that God provides," says Mathai Soren, who leads the effort. "But God has given us hands and feet and the wisdom to use them."

EBC churches are testing out a number of "Christ-centered family businesses, so the whole family can contribute while a pastor is out doing ministry." Examples include family farms that focus not on subsistence crops like rice and corn, but on vegetables and spices, or raising poultry and goats. Some churches run private schools; one runs a youth hostel. Another runs a boisterous brass band that performs at parties and parades. One church even manufactures LCD bulbs.

"The ministry is the priority, not the business. But the business should support the ministry," says Soren. "And opponents have less to criticize when you are doing social good."

Back in Hyderabad, Kumar started Calvary Temple 11 years ago with 25 people; today it claims to be the second-largest church in the world (150,000 members) as well as the fastest-growing (80,000 joined in the past three years). He estimates that 70 percent of his congregation comes from non-Christian backgrounds, and 70,000 are younger than 30.

Kumar has scaled his church efficiently: Members mark their attendance by scanning key cards at each entrance kiosk, where they pick up a small white cup filled with pre-packaged Communion wine. Nearby, long metal racks hold more than 100 pairs of shoes in rows eight feet high. After its third service, the church feeds lunch to about 15,000. A free health clinic sees about 1,000 patients each Sunday, while a pharmacy offers free and discounted medicines. Every member who doesn't attend on Sunday gets a phone call asking the reason and offering prayer. And every member gets a birthday cake delivered to their doorstep.

Kumar has achieved such scale without the theological shortcuts that many mega-churches in the developing world take. Calvary Temple's tagline is "only for those who worship in spirit and truth." He emphasizes that his church is a "Bible-based church" that does not participate in charismatic signs or prosperity theology. He calls "signs and wonders" inside the church "a formula of hell."

INDIA HAS MORE BELIEVERS THAN "CHRISTIAN NATIONS" LIKE UGANDA AND GREECE.

"Signs and wonders attract

Most Indian churches seat women and men separately, and shoes are left at the door.

Calvary Temple in Hyderabad has quickly become India's largest church. Pastor Satish Kumar says he relies on the 'pure Word of God' instead of 'signs and wonders.'

people to the church, but don't keep people there," says Kumar. "Only the pure Word of God keeps people in the church."

Kumar preaches that Sunday from the life of Solomon, noting how the king of Israel "went wrong on wisdom, wealth, and women." His main point: "Don't pray for more prosperity; pray for more purity." One way he applies it personally: His church office doubles as his living room, with his bedroom on the opposite wall. His sons sleep on his office couches.

"I never criticize or condemn the other faiths," says Kumar. "When you have so much to tell about Jesus Christ, why would you talk about other people's faiths? If the taste of the Christ is so good, you don't have to bind them; they will keep coming."

A SUBCONTINENTAL SAVIOR

Richard Howell, Delhi-based leader of the Asia Evangelical Alliance, says that "word, works, and wonders" require different permutations in India than Western Christians are accustomed to. He cites a Brahmin, a member of India's highest caste: "We have not rejected Jesus Christ; you have not presented him in a way we can understand." Ever since the British left, Indian evangelicals have been working to change that.

One promising strategy is to present Jesus as the path to enlightenment sought by many Hindus. "If you begin with total depravity, they don't understand," says Howell. "But if you present the need for restoration, they understand." Howell says both high and low castes share a primary aspiration: hope. So Indian evangelicals are tapping into Hinduism's many "stories of hope." For example, Christians are reinterpreting the myth of the Baliraja—the "sacrificed king"—to show that Jesus is the one Hindus have waited for.

"Christianity is not being presented as opposed to Indian culture," says Howell. "Instead, Christianity is being presented as the fulfillment of the cultural aspirations that Indians already have."

While Western evangelicals have grown familiar with the C1–C6 debate over "insider movements" among Muslims [see "The Hidden History of Insider Movements," CT January 2013], in India the contextualization debate centers on "Christward movements." "This terminology better captures what is happening," says Singh. "People are being drawn to Christ; maybe not to Christianity or to the church as we know it, but undeniably to Christ."

"Christward movements are culturally Hindu yet Christian in faith," says Howell. Members read the Bible and pray openly, but they meet on Saturdays in homes, not churches, in order to avoid "the impression that Christianity is Western." Their biggest break is not with the Western church as much as the historic church: They don't perform baptisms.

YESHU DARBAR HAS SUCH A REPUTATION FOR HEALINGS, TAXI DRIVERS AT THE TRAIN STATION USED ITS NAME TO DIVERT VISITORS AND MAKE MONEY.

Yeshu Darbar in Allahabad is well known for its deliverances. But founder R. B. Lal says the real reason the non-Christian crowds keep coming is they encounter Jesus separate from Western Christianity soured by colonialism.

Howell supports their abstention. He estimates that 70 percent of Christians in India are of Dalit background, and thus constrained by the Scheduled Caste welfare regulations. "They worship no god but Jesus," he says. "But they don't take baptism because they will lose their jobs and families, because their benefits will be taken away by the government. The church is not equipped to help them. If they take baptism, millions would be out of jobs. What would we do?" The abstention is strategic, not syncretistic, he says.

"It's conversion of the heart that really matters," says Howell. "You can take 10 baptisms, but if there isn't a change of lifestyle, it doesn't make sense."

Howell promotes the Christward movements as examples of "fulfillment theology." "Let us take [Hindu practices] and put them under the lordship of Christ by giving them a Christian interpretation." He knows that many Western Christians are "nervous" to stray so far from the historical forms of Christianity. "But we need to let God control the narrative."

GOSPEL WITH FINGERS NOT FORKS

One of the most intriguing cases of contextualization is Yeshu Darbar, based in Allahabad at SHIATS University, whose founder invented a better plow in order to sow the gospel. Today the Royal Court of Jesus movement occupies a strategic location near the Triveni Sangam—the joining point for the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, as well as the invisible and mythic Saraswati River—where Hinduism's famous Kumbh Mela, the world's largest religious gathering, is regularly held. It draws up to 10 million pilgrims, who believe that bathing in the water absolves them of sins.

"We don't have to go out and share the gospel. They come right here," says David Phillips, assistant to SHIATS vice chancellor and Yeshu Darbar founder R. B. Lal. "We're contextualizing the gospel in a new way. We're doing what George Verwer and Ralph Winter had always wanted to do."

Yeshu Darbar's services take place on SHIATS's former soccer field. The stage backdrop recreates a courtyard with square white posts, green vines, and blue walls evoking the sky. Red foil and silver tinsel dangle from a ceiling emblazoned with the words of Jesus: "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the Good News!"

After the sermon, attendees line the metal railing at the front of the stage and await their turn for Lal's laying on of hands and anointing with oil. The line quickly transforms into an exorcism line. "Oh Jesus, oh Jesus, why are you tormenting me?" screams a partially veiled woman in a teal sari. Another woman in a green sari thrashes silently before staring Lal in the eyes and saying, "Don't tell me to come out. She is mine." Lal slowly repeats "come out, come out, come out" until she subsides.

Lal's services have developed a reputation for such healings. At one point, Phillips says, the taxi drivers at the Allahabad train station started putting Yeshu Darbar's name on their vehicles because they wanted to divert its visitors in order to make money. Meanwhile, hundreds of village pastors have replicated Yeshu Darbar's name and approach. "We have not [trademarked] our name," says Phillips. "If the gospel is being preached, why should we be upset?"

Lal says he never intended to launch such a movement. He was an administrator and scientist who applied "the Bible into my life, every word, and it worked." When accused of converting Hindus and Muslims, he explains that he never asks anyone to leave their current religion.

"I consider other religions as cultures. I tell them, 'Why don't you take Jesus Christ and make him a Hindu? Make him a Muslim. Make him a Buddhist,'" he says. "I'm giving them the gospel of Jesus along with Jesus. And I guarantee you, if they accept Jesus in their own setting, transformation will take place."

Church leaders across the subcontinent will explain that most Indians consider Jesus to be a white, Western god. Lal seeks to separate his Savior from the stereotype. "Christianity trapped Jesus Christ so that the Hindus and Muslims cannot get to him," says Lal. "We are de-Christianizing Jesus.

"You [Western Christians] are presenting Jesus with a knife and fork, but we Indians are accustomed to fingers," he says. "The gospel has to be eaten with fingers here."

Howell vouches for the orthodoxy of Yeshu Darbar—its members repent, take baptism, and renounce idol worship—as well as God's blessing. "For God to start this in Allahabad, it is the laughter of God," he says. "And of all people, he chooses a scientist."

"All movements are messy," says Singh. "But what's undeniably clear is that the Spirit is active and doing something new in our time."

Singh takes an optimistic—and, he argues, biblical—stance on Christward movements. He cites the "Barnabas principle" from Acts 11, when the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to investigate the newly formed Gentile church in Antioch. "Barnabas probably found the form of worship and presentation of the gospel among Gentiles to be different than among Jews. But when he found evidence of God's grace, he was glad and encouraged them. This gave him an avenue to later teach and disciple them." Thus, Singh's stance: If grace is present in a movement, then encourage and equip it.

In fact, some Indian experts think Western or traditional churches trying to impose their cultural form of Christianity could disrupt church growth even more than Hindutva extremism. "If we come in with a theology checklist intent on giving certificates of orthodoxy, there is a danger of these groups getting completely withdrawn and isolated," says Singh. "They need the body of Christ." His goal: "facilitating these groups without fracturing the unity of the church."

He says one biblical example is John 4:30, where many Samaritans "made their way toward" Jesus, who warns the disciples against hindering them. "These people are on a journey, and taking baby steps toward Christ," says Singh. "Don't see them through eyes of prejudice, like the 12 disciples saw the Samaritans. Learn to see them as Jesus did."

"We need to take risks and take Jesus to new settings," says Howell. "Jesus is alive. He will take care of himself." CT

JEREMY WEBER is senior news editor at CT.

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TERRORIZED ON TWO FRONTS, AFRICA'S LARGEST CHURCH ASKS HOW LONG IT'S SUPPOSED TO "COUNT IT ALL JOY."

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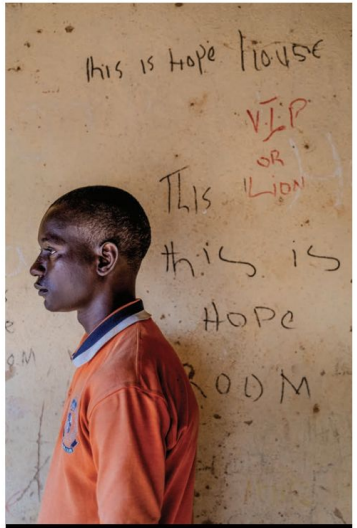

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REVIEWS

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'HOW LONG WILL IT BE?'

AMID BOKO HARAM AND FULANI ATTACKS, NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS HAVE NO CHEEKS LEFT TO TURN.

BY JEREMY WEBER IN JOS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARY S. CHAPMAN

A

At the Church of Christ in Nigeria congregation, Sunday morning worship opens with the din of a military-style drumroll. Inside a long, one-room building with a sheet-metal roof supported by handmade trusses, the uniformed Girls' Brigade choir takes turns singing and dancing—younger girls on the left and women on the right. A wide-eyed child clings to a djembe played by his mother.

Next to her, a young drummer bears a dramatic scar across her left cheek. It is a reminder of the day, eight years ago, that the evangelical church and surrounding homes in this community of Christian farmers south of Jos were razed by Muslim extremists.

Other markers are less subtle. Beyond rebuilt houses with soaring live-cactus fences, amid rice and corn fields where a dozen goats are tied to stakes, sprawls an enormous concrete slab with a thin, rusty metal cross on top. Entombed there are 483 victims from the attack, stacked in three rows.

A plaque on the mass grave cites Revelation 6:10–11:

> They shouted in a loud voice, "Almighty Lord, holy and true, how long will it be until you judge them on earth and punish them for killing us? Each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to rest a little while longer, until the complete number of their fellow servants and fellow Christians had been killed as they had been.

The verse would prove prophetic: Days after *Christianity Today* visited the site, Muslim extremists killed more than 200 people across a dozen nearby villages, prompting outrage from Nigerian Christian leaders wearied by years of the crisis with little response from their federal government or from abroad.

After worship that Sunday, a police escort walks from the tomb with a radio on his hip, bouncing next to his AK-47. Over the airwaves comes the Nigerian version of a familiar hymn: "Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry; while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by."

Evangelical leaders in Africa's most populous nation would apply that last phrase to their American brothers and sisters and the US government. Amid global attention on ISIS in Iraq and Syria for its persecution of Christians, in Nigeria two other groups of Muslim extremists—Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen—have killed and displaced about as many believers in recent years.

During ISIS's peak, Boko Haram was formidable, rivaling the Islamic State in deaths and displacement, according to the Global Terrorism Index. Today, the Fulani conflict has surpassed Boko Haram as Nigeria's greatest violent threat, killing more than 1,300 Nigerians from January to June alone—six times higher than Boko Haram's death toll, according to the International Crisis Group.

As fans cheered teams at this summer's World Cup, CT traveled to Nigeria to visit displacement camps and interview Christian leaders in five states in the so-called Middle Belt, where the nation's mostly Christian south meets its mostly Muslim north. Nigeria currently ranks No. 14 on Open Doors' World Watch List of the countries where it is hardest to be a Christian. Nearly everyone CT spoke with argues it should rank higher.

Entering Nigeria's capital, Abuja, from the south, vehicles pass a towering sculpture bearing twin spires and the words "You Are Welcome." A cutout of Nigeria, painted green and white like its flag, hangs between the spires on taut cables that look like they could tear the shape in two.

It's inescapable that Nigeria is a highly religious place. On the road from Abuja's airport, every third billboard advertises the ministry of a megachurch pastor. On evening TV, there are as many megachurch infomercials as there are World Cup ads. Roadside businesses have names like God's Will Furniture, Winning Divine Favor Lighting, and God's Son Chikun Feed. Where many US gas stations would have a standalone car wash, many Nigerian ones have a small mosque.

Traffic on the main road from Abuja toward Jos is at a standstill, backed up four cars wide as far as the eye can see. The reason isn't the end-of-Ramadan holiday traffic; a group of about 100 Muslim men are conducting their mid-morning prayers across all the westbound lanes. A short distance down the road, throngs of Muslims stream past roadside mattress vendors toward a large mosque. Driving slowly through them is a white church van with a prominent slogan: "Repent or perish."

In such a fraught sectarian environment, Nigerian Christians aren't shy about their evangelism. The word *missionary* labels the rear doors of many church vans. But also omnipresent alongside the roadways are grazing white cattle—the kind the Fulani herd. Boko Haram, an Islamist terrorist group whose name loosely translates to "Western education is sin," has been concentrated (and contained) in Nigeria's three most northeastern states in its failed attempt to establish a caliphate next to Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. But the Fulani, a sizable tribe of nomadic Muslim herders, are present throughout Nigeria and pose a greater security concern as more of them radicalize.

Today, travel through even majority Christian areas is interrupted by frequent security checkpoints, where women and children swarm each waiting vehicle and thrust bundles of bananas, carrots, or cashews through the open windows, trying to make a sale. But the vendors scrutinize and hassle travelers more than most soldiers manning the roadblocks do. (Upon learning the driver is a pastor, one soldier asks, "In church, they give offerings, right?"—a polite attempt at extortion.) Most of the roadblocks are labeled "Operation Safe Haven"—an irony given that many northern Christians who fled Boko Haram came seeking just that in the Christian stronghold of Plateau state and its capital, Jos.

Instead, like the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation with its mass grave, they found Fulani radicals.

Most denominations in the north

AMID GLOBAL ATTENTION ON ISIS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA FOR ITS PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS, IN NIGERIA TWO OTHER GROUPS OF MUSLIM EXTREMISTS—BOKO HARAM AND THE FULANI—HAVE KILLED AND DISPLACED EVEN MORE BELIEVERS IN RECENT YEARS.

can point to churches destroyed and lives lost, but the three hardest hit are evangelical ones: COCIN, the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), and the Church of the Brethren (EYN). "Our stories are not heard," Dacholom Datiri, president of COCIN, tells CT. More than 1,000 of his members in 50 communities have lost their homes and churches to Fulani attacks. "The effect on the church has been devastating," he says. "You hear needs from left, right, and center. You are woken up in the night by phone calls, and you are at a loss of what to do."

Datiri tries to preach sermons that will encourage his struggling people. "I use most often James [1:2]: 'Count it all joy when you face trial,' " he says. "But it is becoming harder to count it all joy. For the past month, trial has been every day. It has been incessant."

The official government narrative is that the violence is economic, not sectarian. It's a perennial clash between mostly Muslim herdsmen and mostly Christian farmers over suitable land, they say, aggravated by the Sahara Desert encroaching farther south and by some Nigerian states passing anti-grazing laws that the herdsmen see as unjust. Evangelical leaders vigorously dispute this.

"If you get the narrative wrong, then you get the solution wrong," says Yunusa Nmadu, general secretary of ECWA and its 5 million members. "The government doesn't want to call it what it is: terrorism."

"I'm 51 and have lived all my life as a northerner," says Nmadu, who lived in Kaduna—where Nigeria's Muslim leader, the Sultan of Sokoto, is based—until moving to Jos last year. "From time immemorial the Fulani have lived among us. Yes, there was conflict; sometimes cows eat the produce. But the Fulani only had sticks. All of a sudden, they start carrying AK-47s. Who gave them the funds and the training? For me, it's just Boko Haram changing tactics."

In 2015, a delegation from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom visited Nmadu in Jos. "They asked me what was my fear. I said that Fulani attacks would increase, because we will have a Fulani president and they will feel emboldened.

"If that was a prophecy, it has come true," he says. "But it's not rocket science; it's a simple analysis."

Throughout the Middle Belt, stenciled signs for ECWA, COCIN, and other churches line the roadside as frequently as ads for Coca-Cola and cell phones do in other countries. The second-most-common signs are for political candidates running in the upcoming national election in February 2019. ("In God we trust" is a common slogan—for Muslim candidates.) The most consequential: whether current President Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani himself, will be granted a second term.

Christian circles are rife with conspiracies over to what extent Buhari's administration is instigating the current crisis; at the very least, it's clear that Fulani radicals are pushing their limits against Christians just like radical Hindus are under fellow nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi [see "Outpacing Persecution," November 2016].

Back in Abuja, the government has built a towering monument halfway between Nigeria's massive national mosque and national church. It resembles a torch. But while the northern states feel highly flammable, the capital is surprisingly peaceful for a center of government. This is mainly because many people live in satellite cities like Gwagwalada, where on a Sunday night about 200 former residents of Jos have gathered to break a fast and passionately pray for peace.

"Enough is enough!" declares one of the pastors hosting Plateau Prays, an annual event, at a COCIN church. "The time has come. I pray that God will answer our prayers." As the congregation breaks their fast with okra stew and fufu, a common Nigerian dish made from semolina flour, leaders go backstage to the pastor's office and trade stories of newly displaced arrivals or of members who were ambushed. One leader keeps muttering "Jesus!" He means it as a prayer, but it sounds like a swear.

"There's not one person in that service whose family has not been affected. Not one," says Kyauta Damulak, president of the Plateau diaspora in Abuja, as he blots away tears with a gray plaid handkerchief. "I worry this will be a long dark night for us. Our only consolation is in the Scriptures—that when people repent and turn to God, he will aid them."

Aaron Ndirmbita, pastor of the COCIN church hosting the event, is from Chibok, the northeastern city where 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2014. (Despite #BringBackOurGirls activism, more than 100 remain unaccounted for.) He was also head pastor of COCIN Headquarters Church in Jos when it was attacked in 2012; the wreckage of the suicide bomber's vehicle is still preserved in the courtyard.

"We remember the way God saved us," he explains. That Sunday, he was preaching to 1,200 attendees seated in the basement—the main sanctuary was under construction—when the assailant's van got stuck after running over a motorcycle and exploded mere meters from the building, demolishing Ndirmbita's office and his house but killing only four people. "It was a miracle," he says. "We need to remember the hand of God."

Many analysts worry about Nigeria becoming the next

BULUS EZEKIEL, A LOCAL EVANGELIST, ESCORTS A VISITING PASTOR TO THE MASS GRAVE IN DOGONAWA (NOW CALLED DEMBROOK) WHERE FULANI MILITANTS MASSACRED ALMOST 500 CHRISTIANS IN 2010. HE SAYS AN ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE WAS CANCELED AFTER TOO MANY VILLAGERS FELL ILL FROM GRIEF.

Central African Republic, riven with reprisal attacks by uncontrollable Muslim and Christian militias. Ndirmbita worries about his nation becoming Egypt or Algeria. "We are students of church history," he says. "History tells us that [such places] were once Christian and then Islamized." (While in today's Nigeria the two religious groups are evenly split at about 100 million each, by 2050 the Pew Research Center projects Muslims will outnumber Christians by 75 million.)

Such fears amid the 2018 surge in Fulani attacks are best illustrated in Benue, the state known as the nation's breadbasket. Green and lush during the rainy season, small farms of cassava and yams line the red earth roads as far as the eye can see. Frequent roadblocks interrupt what would otherwise be an idyllic drive. Whereas once the main threat would have been the bad roads, now the sectarian troubles of Nigeria's northeast have come into one of Nigeria's Christian strongholds. As one election sign says, "The days of jokes are over."

In the state's capital, Makurdi, a large sculpture of a Nigerian cornucopia dominates the central roundabout. Just outside the city, however, farmers are seeking safety in one of eight camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) that the Benue government opened this year after a recent anti-grazing law triggered a surge of attacks by herdsmen. Bamboo scaffolding still encases the outer walls of most structures. Thousands are staying in a large U-shaped building with one wing unfinished. Most men sleep outside (except when it rains) due to overcrowding. "To be a man is not a day job," proclaims graffiti on one wall. But there is not much for anyone to do other than wait.

Over meager lunches of corn stew, everyone CT interviews wants to return to their homes and their fields. "As they say, there is no place like home," says Philip, a 42-year-old ECWA member who fled Fulani assailants with his wife and four children, ages 2 to 12. Here he can't farm or pay school fees.

The camp's manager tells CT how one couple went back to check the damage. The husband was killed in front of the wife, who was told to come back to the camp and carry the message: "We

have taken over. Don't come back."

Roughly 90 minutes away in Mbalom, a Catholic church suffered an April attack that made global headlines the same day Nigeria's bishops were at the Vatican to personally petition Pope Francis about their troubles. Along the narrow dirt road to the church, villages typical of those attacked peek through grass that towers above passing vehicles: isolated clusters of six to ten huts, surrounded by their subsistence fields. Many of their clearings have a handful of small tombs, decorated with blue and white square tiles—where the dead would normally be buried, rather than in mass graves.

At the low-slung church, handmade wood benches form 14 rows of pews before a white lectern with a small cross and a basic altar draped in green. Only the front third has walls, rusty sheet metal now perforated with bullet holes. Congregants who survived the attack explain how the assailants rushed from behind the church-built school to the left as soon as the bell rang to start the service that fateful Sunday. A banner memorializes the two priests killed. Nothing marks where the other 17 bodies fell as people rushed toward the nearby market, vacant since the attack, whose buildings form a large square shaded by towering mango trees.

Gbinde Godwin, a church member whose brother died in the attack, explains how he has sent his four kids, ages eight to two, to family hours away. The cow is now a symbol of fear: that herdsmen are nearby and could attack again. Upon seeing a cow, the 28-year-old farmer explains, "the community will start running. Oh my God, my God, I won't stay here."

Just over one of the bridges spanning the massive Benue River that bifurcates Makurdi, Yimam Orkwar, a former chairman of the state chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), debates politics with a colleague at Faith Cathedral. They argue whether President Buhari, a patron of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, should be impeached. "Have you seen a country where cattle are valued more than human life?" he asks. Often the Fulani killings will be framed as retaliation for stolen cattle. He wants to know where the allegedly missing cows could have gone; he can certainly show visitors the graves of the scores of farmers.

A New Year's Day massacre in Benue may have been the first many outside Nigeria had read about the crisis, but it was the 47th attack in four years, explains Bishop Mike Angou, chairman of the state chapter of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria. Leaders want to build a chapel at the nearby mass grave where the 73 victims were buried, as "a petition to the world," according to one.

"The people are very disgruntled. It was horrifying to see 1 person bury 73 people," Angou says, as Japan scores its first goal over Colombia on the nearby TV. "Then 23 were killed. Then 17 were killed. Then 50 were killed." He rattles off attacks and their grisly details. Colombia ties the game, but Angou doesn't notice.

Across dozens of interviews, Nigerian church leaders told CT they encourage their congregations to follow Jesus' example and turn the other cheek. One source of perseverance: Leah Sharibu, a Dapchi teenager kidnapped in February by Boko Haram whose refusal to renounce Jesus has left her imprisoned but made her an inspirational meme on many Christians' social media profiles or smartphone wallpapers.

But now that Fulani violence has eclipsed Boko Haram, beleaguered believers complain they have no cheeks left to turn. Angry youths sometimes attack Fulani or their cows, though on a smaller scale than the violence that necessitated mass graves. "The people have been pushed to the boiling point," Orkwar says. "There's a limit to when you can pacify them with the Word of God."

ECWA's Nmadu worries that reprisal attacks could morph into something worse. "We are on the precipice," he says. "If Nigeria goes into civil war, all of West Africa is gone. The immigration crisis will be damningly catastrophic for Europe and America."

IN JOS, THE STEFANOS FOUNDATION HAS TURNED AN ABANDONED SCHOOL INTO A TRANSITION CAMP FOR NORTHERN CHRISTIANS DISPLACED BY BOKO HARAM AND FULANI MILITANTS. STEFANOS FOUNDER MARK LIPDO SAYS 5,000 FAMILIES HAVE ALREADY PASSED THROUGH.

"I am not a prophet of doom," he says. "But it looks like we are very close to it."

In neighboring Nasarawa state, 72-year-old Bishop Masin was asked to return to the CAN state chairman position he'd held twice before because he was once quartermaster general of a tank battalion of 14,000 soldiers. "I don't hold a gun anymore, but I have a mouth," says Masin, who pastors a large Pentecostal church full of displaced believers in the state capital, Lafia. "And I have no fear

AT ONE OF BENUE'S NEWEST CAMPS FOR DISPLACED FARMERS, MOTHERS COOK A MEAGER LUNCH WHILE CHILDREN GATHER UNDER THATCH TRELLISES IN AN ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN THEIR SCHOOLING. THE MAKURDI CAMP IS SO CROWDED, THE MEN SLEEP OUTSIDE UNLESS IT RAINS.

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YUNUSA NMADU
GENERAL SECRETARY OF ECWA

to talk to the government face to face." He encourages members of his church not to resort to guns themselves. "I say I am fighting for them; let them not fight back," he said. "Instead of the gun or bullet or knife, I fight with paper. We want to document and take people to see."

Masin shows his tally of local attacks in 2018. It includes 314 villages; many have photo evidence, compiled by local farmers associations. His smartphone displays a May protest march in Lafia that drew thousands; one woman holds a "Free Leah" sign while everyone around her waves clumps of tall grass. "The herdsmen are looking for grass. Is there any grass in the church?" he says of the Catholic massacre in Mbalom. "That's what we came out in protest: to bring our cry to the world to hear." Behind his desk hangs an embroidered cityscape of Jerusalem—his reminder to pray for its peace. Masin wishes more people around the world were praying for the peace of Nigeria.

Currently, Christian leaders are putting their worldly hopes on the 2019 election as a chance to remove Buhari and his Fulani-friendly administration. Churches across Nigeria are campaigning for members to arrive the following Sunday with their "PVCs": permanent voter cards. Some have even made it a requirement for taking Communion—a sign of how serious they are taking the 2019 presidential vote.

The PFN's Angou estimates nationally only 1 in 4 Christians has their PVC. He says the effort in Benue hopes to hit 90 percent. "This seems to be the only way out," he says. "We cannot carry arms. And we are law-abiding. Christians have to come out and vote in 2019."

In the meantime, many Nigerian Christians have dedicated their lives to serving those on the frontlines of the crisis. One noteworthy example: a camp for children displaced by both Boko Haram and the Fulani. It was founded a decade ago by a Fulani Muslim convert, whose family persecuted her for leaving Islam. She had a vision to create a place of refuge for children like herself. It soon swelled to 300 youths, who receive shelter and food but also discipleship. A team of them recently placed first in a national Bible memorization competition.

Beyond the camp, a peaceful sea of green farmland bearing maize and potatoes stretches to the foggy horizon. But the camp director says recently they could see smoke and flames on the horizon from a Fulani attack. "The kids were so fearful. They started packing their bags to run away," he said. "We had to calm them and pray for God to protect us."

Closer to Abuja, at a food distribution at Gurku Interfaith Relocation Camp, about 100 displaced women and children have gathered under the shade of a mango tree to receive cereal bowl–sized rations of maize and rice and bags of shoes and clothing. The US ambassador

MARKUS GAMACHE, A CHRISTIAN CONVERT WITH A MUSLIM FAMILY, FOUNDED A SUCCESSFUL INTERFAITH IDP CAMP (ABOVE) BECAUSE "YOU CAN'T PREACH TO SOMEONE TWO KILOMETERS AWAY—EVEN IF YOU SHOUT." HE ALSO HAS A CAMP FOR BRETHREN FAMILIES (BELOW).

and other American officials are visiting the site, among Nigeria's many IDP camps, for one unique reason: It is a place where displaced Christians and Muslims have agreed to live side by side.

Its founder, Markus Gamache, the chief liaison for the Brethren church, didn't plan to create a national case study that the US government would highlight. He was trying to reduce the burden of hosting 60 displaced people at his house, where he already had a family of 13. The first places he went, community leaders told him they would kill any Muslims that came. He finally found a host—in the bush, far away from the main road. Partially for safety, but mostly because the displaced farmers couldn't cultivate food for their families in the cities.

Gamache also created the camp because he wants Christians and Muslims to live together, as before their displacement, for evangelism. "You can't preach to someone two kilometers away—even if you shout," he says. "You need to whisper the love of Jesus when they are next to you."

Back at the youth camp, a group of girls accompanied by a spirited drummer sing a praise song to Jehovah, which after an 8x refrain, "Where shall I run to?" is followed by:

> I run to the mountain, the mountain said no
> I run to the hill, the hill said no no no
> I run to the ocean, the ocean said no
> I run to my God, my God has answered me.

The worship song is about a "sinner man" but feels apropos to Nigerian Christians at large. Consider the theme of the year for ECWA's 10,000 churches: "Joy in Suffering," based on 1 Peter 4:13. "You are not alone in your suffering," says Nmadu. "God is with you.

"For the Christian, persecution is inevitable; Jesus himself promised us persecution. All we can do is reduce its effect," he says. "Whatever happens, this world is not our home. We have a better home, where one day all this persecution will cease." **CT**

JEREMY WEBER is deputy managing editor of *Christianity Today*.

4 Elements of a Reported Article

1) **Facts:** As few as necessary; as succinct as possible; pace them out

2) **Quotes:** From formal interviews; they said it better than you ever could; or safer to let them say it and not you

3) **Paraphrase:** Say it better and shorter than they did

4) **Anecdotes/Color:** Prove you were there; take the reader with you; find symbolism in small details

Facts
Quotes
Paraphrases
Anecdotes

A

At the Church of Christ in Nigeria congregation, Sunday morning worship opens with the din of a military-style drumroll. Inside a long, one-room building with a sheet-metal roof supported by handmade trusses, the uniformed Girls' Brigade choir takes turns singing and dancing—younger girls on the left and women on the right. A wide-eyed child clings to a djembe played by his mother.

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The verse would prove prophetic: Days after *Christianity Today* visited the site, Muslim extremists killed more than 200 people across a dozen nearby villages, prompting outrage from Nigerian Christian leaders wearied by years of the crisis with little response from their federal government or from abroad.

After worship that Sunday, a police escort walks from the tomb with a radio on his hip, bouncing next to his AK-47. Over the airwaves comes the Nigerian version of a familiar hymn: "Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry; while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by."

Evangelical leaders in Africa's most populous nation would apply that last phrase to their American brothers and sisters and the US government. Amid global attention on ISIS in Iraq and Syria for its persecution of Christians, in Nigeria two other groups of Muslim extremists—Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen—have killed and displaced about as many believers in recent years.

During ISIS's peak, Boko Haram was formidable, rivaling the Islamic State in deaths and displacement, according to the Global Terrorism Index. Today, the Fulani conflict has surpassed Boko Haram as Nigeria's greatest violent threat, killing more than 1,300 Nigerians from January to June alone—six times higher than Boko Haram's death toll, according to the International Crisis Group.

As fans cheered teams at this summer's World Cup, CT traveled to Nigeria to visit displacement camps and interview Christian leaders in five states in the so-called Middle Belt, where the nation's mostly Christian south meets its mostly Muslim north. Nigeria currently ranks No. 14 on Open Doors' World Watch List of the countries where it is hardest to be a Christian. Nearly everyone CT spoke with argues it should rank higher.

Entering Nigeria's capital, Abuja, from the south, vehicles pass a towering sculpture bearing twin spires and the words "You Are Welcome." A cutout of Nigeria, painted green and white like its flag, hangs between the spires on taut cables that look like they could tear the shape in two.

It's inescapable that Nigeria is a highly religious place. On the road from Abuja's airport, every third billboard advertises the ministry of a megachurch pastor. On evening TV, there are as many megachurch infomercials as there are World Cup ads. Roadside businesses have names like God's Will Furniture, Winning Divine Favor Lighting, and God's Son Chikun Feed. Where many US gas stations would have a standalone car wash, many Nigerian ones have a small mosque.

Traffic on the main road from Abuja toward Jos is at a standstill, backed up four cars wide as far as the eye can see. The reason isn't the end-of-Ramadan holiday traffic; a group of about 100 Muslim men are conducting their mid-morning prayers across all the westbound lanes. A short distance down the road, throngs of Muslims stream past roadside mattress vendors toward a large mosque. Driving slowly through them is a white church van with a prominent slogan: "Repent or perish."

In such a fraught sectarian environment, Nigerian Christians aren't shy about their evangelism. The word *missionary* labels the rear doors of many church vans. But also omnipresent alongside the roadways are grazing white cattle—the kind the Fulani herd. Boko Haram, an Islamist terrorist group whose name loosely translates to "Western education is sin," has been concentrated (and contained) in Nigeria's three most northeastern states in its failed attempt to establish a caliphate next to Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. But the Fulani, a sizable tribe of nomadic Muslim herders, are present throughout Nigeria and pose a greater security concern as more of them radicalize.

Today, travel through even majority Christian areas is interrupted by frequent security checkpoints, where women and children swarm each waiting vehicle and thrust bundles of bananas, carrots, or cashews through the open windows, trying to make a sale. But the vendors scrutinize and hassle travelers more than most soldiers manning the roadblocks do. (Upon learning the driver is a pastor, one soldier asks, "In church, they give offerings, right?"—a polite attempt at extortion.) Most of the roadblocks are labeled "Operation Safe Haven"—an irony given that many northern Christians who fled Boko Haram came seeking just that in the Christian stronghold of Plateau state and its capital, Jos.

Instead, like the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation with its mass grave, they found Fulani radicals.

Most denominations in the north

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AMID GLOBAL ATTENTION ON ISIS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA FOR ITS PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS, IN NIGERIA TWO OTHER GROUPS OF MUSLIM EXTREMISTS—BOKO HARAM AND THE FULANI—HAVE KILLED AND DISPLACED EVEN MORE BELIEVERS IN RECENT YEARS.

can point to churches destroyed and lives lost, but the three hardest hit are evangelical ones: COCIN, the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), and the Church of the Brethren (EYN). "Our stories are not heard," Dachollom Datiri, president of COCIN, tells CT. More than 1,000 of his members in 50 communities have lost their homes and churches to Fulani attacks. "The effect on the church has been devastating," he says. "You hear needs from left, right, and center. You are woken up in the night by phone calls, and you are at a loss of what to do."

Datiri tries to preach sermons that will encourage his struggling people. "I use most often James [1:2]: 'Count it all joy when you face trial,'" he says. "But it is becoming harder to count it all joy. For the past month, trial has been every day. It has been incessant."

The official government narrative is that the violence is economic, not sectarian. It's a perennial clash between mostly Muslim herdsmen and mostly Christian farmers over suitable land, they say, aggravated by the Sahara Desert encroaching farther south and by some Nigerian states passing anti-grazing laws that the herdsmen see as unjust. Evangelical leaders vigorously dispute this.

"If you get the narrative wrong, then you get the solution wrong," says Yunusa Nmadu, general secretary of ECWA and its 5 million members. "The government doesn't want to call it what it is: terrorism."

"I'm 51 and have lived all my life as a northerner," says Nmadu, who lived in Kaduna—where Nigeria's Muslim leader, the Sultan of Sokoto, is based—until moving to Jos last year. "From time immemorial the Fulani have lived among us. Yes, there was conflict; sometimes cows eat the produce. But the Fulani only had sticks. All of a sudden, they start carrying AK-47s. Who gave them the funds and the training? For me, it's just Boko Haram changing tactics."

In 2015, a delegation from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom visited Nmadu in Jos. "They asked me what was my fear. I said that Fulani attacks would increase, because we will have a Fulani president and they will feel emboldened.

"If that was a prophecy, it has come true," he says. "But it's not rocket science; it's a simple analysis."

Throughout the Middle Belt, stenciled signs for ECWA, COCIN, and other churches line the roadside as frequently as ads for Coca-Cola and cell phones do in other countries. The second-most-common signs are for political candidates running in the upcoming national election in February 2019. ("In God we trust" is a common slogan—for Muslim candidates.) The most consequential: whether current President Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani himself, will be granted a second term.

Christian circles are rife with conspiracies over to what extent Buhari's administration is instigating the current crisis; at the very least, it's clear that Fulani radicals are pushing their limits against Christians just like radical Hindus are under fellow nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi [see "Outpacing Persecution," November 2016].

Back in Abuja, the government has built a towering monument halfway between Nigeria's massive national mosque and national church. It resembles a torch. But while the northern states feel highly flammable, the capital is surprisingly peaceful for a center of government. This is mainly because many people live in satellite cities like Gwagwalada, where on a Sunday night about 200 former residents of Jos have gathered to break a fast and passionately pray for peace.

"Enough is enough!" declares one of the pastors hosting Plateau Prays, an annual event, at a COCIN church. "The time has come. I pray that God will answer our prayers." As the congregation breaks their fast with okra stew and fufu, a common Nigerian dish made from semolina flour, leaders go backstage to the pastor's office and trade stories of newly displaced arrivals or of members who were ambushed. One leader keeps muttering "Jesus!" He means it as a prayer, but it sounds like a swear.

"There's not one person in that service whose family has not been affected. Not one," says Kyauta Damulak, president of the Plateau diaspora in Abuja, as he blots away tears with a gray plaid handkerchief. "I worry this will be a long dark night for us. Our only consolation is in the Scriptures—that when people repent and turn to God, he will aid them."

Aaron Ndirmbita, pastor of the COCIN church hosting the event, is from Chibok, the northeastern city where 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2014. (Despite #BringBackOurGirls activism, more than 100 remain unaccounted for.) He was also head pastor of COCIN Headquarters Church in Jos when it was attacked in 2012; the wreckage of the suicide bomber's vehicle is still preserved in the courtyard.

"We remember the way God saved us," he explains. That Sunday, he was preaching to 1,200 attendees seated in the basement—the main sanctuary was under construction—when the assailant's van got stuck after running over a motorcycle and exploded mere meters from the building, demolishing Ndirmbita's office and his house but killing only four people. "It was a miracle," he says. "We need to remember the hand of God."

Many analysts worry about Nigeria becoming the next Central African Republic, riven with reprisal attacks by uncontrollable Muslim and Christian militias. Ndirmbita worries about his nation becoming Egypt or Algeria. "We are students of church history," he says. "History tells us that [such places] were once Christian and then Islamized." (While in today's Nigeria the two religious groups are evenly split at about 100 million each, by 2050 the Pew Research Center projects Muslims will outnumber Christians by 75 million.)

BULUS EZEKIEL, A LOCAL EVANGELIST, ESCORTS A VISITING PASTOR TO THE MASS GRAVE IN DOGONAWA (NOW CALLED DEMBROOK) WHERE FULANI MILITANTS MASSACRED ALMOST 500 CHRISTIANS IN 2010. HE SAYS AN ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE WAS CANCELED AFTER TOO MANY VILLAGERS FELL ILL FROM GRIEF.

Such fears amid the 2018 surge in Fulani attacks are best illustrated in Benue, the state known as the nation's breadbasket. Green and lush during the rainy season, small farms of cassava and yams line the red earth roads as far as the eye can see. Frequent roadblocks interrupt what would otherwise be an idyllic drive. Whereas once the main threat would have been the bad roads, now the sectarian troubles of Nigeria's northeast have come into one of Nigeria's Christian strongholds. As one election sign says, "The days of jokes are over."

In the state's capital, Makurdi, a large sculpture of a Nigerian cornucopia dominates the central roundabout. Just outside the city, however, farmers are seeking safety in one of eight camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) that the Benue government opened this year after a recent anti-grazing law triggered a surge of attacks by herdsmen. Bamboo scaffolding still encases the outer walls of most structures. Thousands are staying in a large U-shaped building with one wing unfinished. Most men sleep outside (except when it rains) due to overcrowding. "To be a man is not a day job," proclaims graffiti on one wall. But there is not much for anyone to do other than wait.

Over meager lunches of corn stew, everyone CT interviews wants to return to their homes and their fields. "As they say, there is no place like home," says Philip, a 42-year-old ECWA member who fled Fulani assailants with his wife and four children, ages 2 to 12. Here he can't farm or pay school fees.

The camp's manager tells CT how one couple went back to check the damage. The husband was killed in front of the wife, who was told to come back to the camp and carry the message: "We

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have taken over. Don't come back."

Roughly 90 minutes away in Mbalom, a Catholic church suffered an April attack that made global headlines the same day Nigeria's bishops were at the Vatican to personally petition Pope Francis about their troubles. Along the narrow dirt road to the church, villages typical of those attacked peek through grass that towers above passing vehicles: isolated clusters of six to ten huts, surrounded by their subsistence fields. Many of their clearings have a handful of small tombs, decorated with blue and white square tiles—where the dead would normally be buried, rather than in mass graves.

At the low-slung church, handmade wood benches form 14 rows of pews before a white lectern with a small cross and a basic altar draped in green. Only the front third has walls, rusty sheet metal now perforated with bullet holes. Congregants who survived the attack explain how the assailants rushed from behind the church-built school to the left as soon as the bell rang to start the service that fateful Sunday. A banner memorializes the two priests killed. Nothing marks where the other 17 bodies fell as people rushed toward the nearby market, vacant since the attack, whose buildings form a large square shaded by towering mango trees.

Gbinde Godwin, a church member whose brother died in the attack, explains how he has sent his four kids, ages eight to two, to family hours away. The cow is now a symbol of fear: that herdsmen are nearby and could attack again. Upon seeing a cow, the 28-year-old farmer explains, "the community will start running. Oh my God, my God, I won't stay here."

Just over one of the bridges spanning the massive Benue River that bifurcates Makurdi, Yimam Orkwar, a former chairman of the state chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), debates politics with a colleague at Faith Cathedral. They argue whether President Buhari, a patron of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, should be impeached. "Have you seen a country where cattle are valued more than human life?" he asks. Often the Fulani killings will be framed as retaliation for stolen cattle. He wants to know where the allegedly missing cows could have gone; he can certainly show visitors the graves of the scores of farmers.

A New Year's Day massacre in Benue may have been the first many outside Nigeria had read about the crisis, but it was the 47th attack in four years, explains Bishop Mike Angou, chairman of the state chapter of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria. Leaders want to build a chapel at the nearby mass grave where the 73 victims were buried, as "a petition to the world," according to one.

"The people are very disgruntled. It was horrifying to see 1 person bury 73 people," Angou says, as Japan scores its first goal over Colombia on the nearby TV. "Then 23 were killed. Then 17 were killed. Then 50 were killed." He rattles off attacks and their grisly details. Colombia ties the game, but Angou doesn't notice.

Across dozens of interviews, Nigerian church leaders told CT they encourage their congregations to follow Jesus' example and turn the other cheek. One source of perseverance: Leah Sharibu, a Dapchi teenager kidnapped in February by Boko Haram whose refusal to renounce Jesus has left her imprisoned but made her an inspirational meme on many Christians' social media profiles or smartphone wallpapers.

But now that Fulani violence has eclipsed Boko Haram, beleaguered believers complain they have no cheeks left to turn. Angry youths sometimes attack Fulani or their cows, though on a smaller scale than the violence that necessitated mass graves. "The people have been pushed to the boiling point," Orkwar says. "There's a limit to when you can pacify them with the Word of God."

ECWA's Nmadu worries that reprisal attacks could morph into something worse. "We are on the precipice," he says. "If Nigeria goes into civil war, all of West Africa is gone. The immigration crisis will be damningly catastrophic for Europe and America."

"I am not a prophet of doom," he says. "But it looks like we are very close to it."

In neighboring Nasarawa state, 72-year-old Bishop Masin was asked to return to the CAN state chairman position he'd held twice before because he was once quartermaster general of a tank battalion of 14,000 soldiers. "I don't hold a gun anymore, but I have a mouth," says Masin, who pastors a large Pentecostal church full of displaced believers in the state capital, Lafia. "And I have no fear

IN JOS, THE STEFANOS FOUNDATION HAS TURNED AN ABANDONED SCHOOL INTO A TRANSITION CAMP FOR NORTHERN CHRISTIANS DISPLACED BY BOKO HARAM AND FULANI MILITANTS. STEFANOS FOUNDER MARK LIPDO SAYS 5,000 FAMILIES HAVE ALREADY PASSED THROUGH.

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"IF YOU GET THE NARRATIVE WRONG, THEN YOU GET THE SOLUTION WRONG. THE GOVERNMENT DOESN'T WANT TO CALL IT WHAT IT IS: TERRORISM."

YUNUSA NMADU
GENERAL SECRETARY OF ECWA

AT ONE OF BENUE'S NEWEST CAMPS FOR DISPLACED FARMERS, MOTHERS COOK A MEAGER LUNCH WHILE CHILDREN GATHER UNDER THATCH TRELLISES IN AN ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN THEIR SCHOOLING. THE MAKURDI CAMP IS SO CROWDED, THE MEN SLEEP OUTSIDE UNLESS IT RAINS.

to talk to the government face to face." He encourages members of his church not to resort to guns themselves. "I say I am fighting for them; let them not fight back," he said. "Instead of the gun or bullet or knife, I fight with paper. We want to document and take people to see."

Masin shows his tally of local attacks in 2018. It includes 314 villages; many have photo evidence, compiled by local farmers associations. His smartphone displays a May protest march in Lafia that drew thousands; one woman holds a "Free Leah" sign while everyone around her waves clumps of tall grass. "The herdsmen are looking for grass. Is there any grass in the church?" he says of the Catholic massacre in Mbalom.

"That's what we came out in protest: to bring our cry to the world to hear." Behind his desk hangs an embroidered cityscape of Jerusalem—his reminder to pray for its peace. Masin wishes more people around the world were praying for the peace of Nigeria.

Currently, Christian leaders are putting their worldly hopes on the 2019 election as a chance to remove Buhari and his Fulani-friendly administration. Churches across Nigeria are campaigning for members to arrive the following Sunday with their "PVCs": permanent voter cards. Some have even made it a requirement for taking Communion—a sign of how serious they are taking the 2019 presidential vote.

The PFN's Angou estimates nationally only 1 in 4 Christians has their PVC. He says the effort in Benue hopes to hit 90 percent. "This seems to be the only way out," he says. "We cannot carry arms. And we are law-abiding. Christians have to come out and vote in 2019."

In the meantime, many Nigerian Christians have dedicated their lives to serving those on the frontlines of the crisis. One noteworthy example: a camp for children displaced by both Boko Haram and the Fulani. It was founded a decade ago by a Fulani Muslim convert, whose family persecuted her for leaving Islam. She had a vision to create a place of refuge for children like herself. It soon swelled to 300 youths, who receive shelter and food but also discipleship. A team of them recently placed first in a national Bible memorization competition.

Beyond the camp, a peaceful sea of green farmland bearing maize and potatoes stretches to the foggy horizon. But the camp director says recently they could see smoke and flames on the horizon from a Fulani attack. "The kids were so fearful. They started packing their bags to run away," he said. "We had to calm them and pray for God to protect us."

Closer to Abuja, at a food distribution at Gurku Interfaith Relocation Camp, about 100 displaced women and children have gathered under the shade of a mango tree to receive cereal bowl–sized rations of maize and rice and bags of shoes and clothing. The US ambassador

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MARKUS GAMACHE, A CHRISTIAN CONVERT WITH A MUSLIM FAMILY, FOUNDED A SUCCESSFUL INTERFAITH IDP CAMP (ABOVE) BECAUSE "YOU CAN'T PREACH TO SOMEONE TWO KILOMETERS AWAY—EVEN IF YOU SHOUT." HE ALSO HAS A CAMP FOR BRETHREN FAMILIES (BELOW).

and other American officials are visiting the site, among Nigeria's many IDP camps, for one unique reason: It is a place where displaced Christians and Muslims have agreed to live side by side.

Its founder, Markus Gamache, the chief liaison for the Brethren church, didn't plan to create a national case study that the US government would highlight. He was trying to reduce the burden of hosting 60 displaced people at his house, where he already had a family of 13. The first places he went, community leaders told him they would kill any Muslims that came. He finally found a host—in the bush, far away from the main road.

Partially for safety, but mostly because the displaced farmers couldn't cultivate food for their families in the cities.

Gamache also created the camp because he wants Christians and Muslims to live together, as before their displacement, for evangelism. "You can't preach to someone two kilometers away—even if you shout," he says. "You need to whisper the love of Jesus when they are next to you."

Back at the youth camp, a group of girls accompanied by a spirited drummer sing a praise song to Jehovah, which after an 8x refrain, "Where shall I run to?" is followed by:

I run to the mountain, the mountain said no
I run to the hill, the hill said no no no
I run to the ocean, the ocean said no
I run to my God, my God has answered me.

The worship song is about a "sinner man" but feels apropos to Nigerian Christians at large. Consider the theme of the year for ECWA's 10,000 churches: "Joy in Suffering," based on 1 Peter 4:13. "You are not alone in your suffering," says Nmadu. "God is with you.

"For the Christian, persecution is inevitable; Jesus himself promised us persecution. All we can do is reduce its effect," he says. "Whatever happens, this world is not our home. We have a better home, where one day all this persecution will cease." CT

JEREMY WEBER is deputy managing editor of *Christianity Today*.

GOD AT WORK ALONG THE REFUGEE HIGHWAY

EVANGELICALS IN IRAQ AND GREECE DON'T KNOW HOW TO 'SOLVE' THE REFUGEE CRISIS SHAKING THEIR HOMETOWNS. BUT THEY DO KNOW HOW TO SERVE SUFFERING PEOPLE IN THEIR DISPLACEMENT.

BY JEREMY WEBER, IN ERBIL AND ATHENS

PHOTO BY ANTONIO [illegible]ELLO / NURPHOTO / CORBIS

GARMAWA CAMP, NINEVEH PLAINS, IRAQ

Just beyond the still-under-construction ring road on the outer edge of Erbil, a group interview turns into a mutiny.

"You already understand why we are here," says one of the 15 displaced Christians and Muslims who have gathered at a World Vision food distribution site in the capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region. "Everyone in America should know about our crisis by now: ISIS."

This group is weary of telling NGOs and journalists why they fled their homes, and how hard and fragile life is among Erbil's abandoned buildings.

They are especially weary because this will be their second winter of displacement. Meanwhile, food aid has decreased from $25 to $16 to now $10 per month. Most refuse to give interviews, despite the fact that their stories could spur Westerners to send more aid. If their current visitors are not there to increase food vouchers, then, they say, everyone is wasting their time.

Some in the group fidget with 11 oz. bottles of water bearing blue caps and the word *life* spelled in red. The *i* is an upside-down exclamation point, a marketer's attempt at fun in a sad setting.

But such a mark fittingly punctuates the refugee crisis. The numbers—1 million refugees entering Europe by the end of 2015—surpassed comprehension long ago. The question is whether they have now also surpassed compassion.

The world now has more displaced people than during World War II. Beyond Europe, another 2.5 million refugees are in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, while 4.5 million people remain displaced within Syria and Iraq, where ISIS is most active.

As winter approached, *Christianity Today* traveled to Iraq and Greece to witness how Christian leaders are working along the "refugee highway" that now stretches from the Middle East to Europe and North America. The situation is so complicated, and the risks so high, that leaders are torn between two aid strategies: should they help Christians and other minorities stay in their historic homelands, or should they help them journey to safer Western democracies?

But Kurdish and Greek evangelical leaders agree on one thing: hope remains, because they see God at work all along the highway.

'THANK YOU, ISIS'

From his front steps, Hadi Ali has a great view of the winding ravine where many flock during Nowruz (a New Year celebration) to vacation and picnic alongside the river that descends from Lake Dukan, one of the largest lakes in Kurdistan. But Ali wishes he still lived 300 miles from here. He is one of hundreds of internally displaced persons now living in a jumble of unfinished homes on the slopes of the rugged red mountains that tower above the river.

In the shadow of a pale yellow mosque that sits atop the hillside community, Ali, 43, skirts pomegranate skins as he climbs the steps of an unfinished, concrete building. He has lived here with his family of 9 for the past 15 months. His wife and children, ranging from ages 5 to 18, fled from south of Baghdad after they were threatened at gunpoint.

"They took our homes and our money," he tells CT. "Everything is gone. We don't know when we will go back."

Ali, once a school bus driver, sold his bus to relocate his family. Now he's a day laborer, working on the three-story building next door that is even more unfinished than his own temporary dwelling. "I always think of going back home once peace comes. I wish it were tomorrow. But we don't know the future. I am waiting for God."

The crisis has gone on for longer than anybody anticipated—nearly five years now for many families. Almost all of the displaced women whom CT interviewed across eight refugee camps have given birth to children since fleeing.

'I always think of going back home once peace comes. I wish it were tomorrow. But we don't know the future. I am waiting for God.'

HADI ALI, FATHER, NOW IN KURDISTAN

PHOTOS BY STEVE JETER / COURTESY OF WORLD VISION

"We support each other," says the chief of Garmawa, a 250-year-old Christian town only 40 minutes from Mosul. Ever since ISIS seized Iraq's second-largest city in June 2014, the nearby town of 70 families has shared its land with about 500 mostly Muslim families. "It is part of our faith that we host them," says the chief. However, Garmawa residents expected to play host for two months. "This is the second winter," he says. "We did not dream of this."

Christians have faced significant and well-publicized persecution (notably in Mosul and other Nineveh Plains cities). Christian leaders told CT that other minorities such as the Yazidis, an ancient religious group, have suffered even worse. Thus, many churches are aiding more non-Christians than fellow believers.

In a UN camp in Khanke, seven Yazidi children tussle over the UNICEF-issued teal backpack found in almost every refugee dwelling and arrange its contents on the floor. It holds not school supplies but photos of their deceased older sister, Almas, killed when ISIS came to their hometown of Sinjar. Their four-month-old sister, born in this room of concrete walls and a tarp roof, is named in her honor. Their mother, Wadkha, says the memory makes it too painful to return to Sinjar, which was liberated from ISIS while CT was in Iraq. "When I make bread, I think of my daughter and weep."

Many refugees no longer hope to return home. "The Christians are tired here," says Ashty Alisha, chairman of the Evangelical Alliance in Kurdistan. At his most recent church service, a member explained how he plans to leave with his family because they have no money for rent or food; all they have is the memory of their son killed by ISIS. Alisha says, "I am not encouraging people to go. But I can't tell people to stay."

Father Daniel is more blunt. "The Middle East is lost for Christians," says the 25-year-old priest at Mar Elia Church, which hosts 570 displaced believers on its triangular compound in Ankawa, Erbil's Christian district. He just finished leading a service in Aramaic; Mar Elia is one of the few churches that preserve the language Jesus spoke. But Daniel says he would be fine if one day he had no flock to shepherd because they had all left for Europe or the United States.

"We should consider the lives and souls of these people," he says. "It's not just about the Christian history here. We don't want them to live as victims." A newlywed resident of the camp concurs: "This is truly a holy land here for us. But it is no longer a heartland."

By contrast, Abu Karam is likely one of the only displaced Iraqi Christians to ever turn down a visa to the West. The 66-year-old Mosul pastor became a UN refugee in Jordan and obtained a visa to Canada. But then, he says, God told him in a vision to go back to Iraq and serve the church. He declined the visa and returned to Mosul until ISIS arrived.

At the Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Ankawa, Karam now serves displaced Christians from a range of historic and newer denominations. He encourages them all to stay in Iraq. "Jesus tells us it won't be easy to continue our religion. But he says, 'No matter what happens to you, I win, so you will win,'" says Karam. "Ever since the third century, this has been our Christianity: one of suffering. If we live an easy life, what is our message?"

Notable efforts to help Christians stay include an evangelical church that rents a five-story building in Erbil for 170 people displaced from Qaraqosh. The Chaldean archbishop of Erbil, Bashar Warda, is trying to build a new Catholic university. (He explains: "How will they stay unless we show them that we are going to stay?") On the "go" side, a group from Slovakia—visiting Mar Elia at the

'We should consider the lives and souls of these people. It's not just about the Christian history here. We don't want them to live as victims.'

FATHER DANIEL, PRIEST, ERBIL

same time as CT—brokered a deal to relocate 149 Christians to their Eastern European nation by Christmas.

"It is not a zero-sum game of stay or go. We can help people stay safer and go safer," says Jeremy Courtney, director of the Iraq-based Preemptive Love Coalition. "But if we are serious about helping Christians stay, we have to love Muslims more than we hate and fear Islam. We do bad for Christians if we don't do good for their neighbors."

One of the silver linings of the crisis is that most of Iraq's evangelical churches are now overflowing with displaced Christians. They more than make up for the families that emigrated to the West after the United States invaded Iraq 12 years ago. "God is using ISIS to shake the church," says a leader in Erbil who requested anonymity. "Christians who were nominal are now saying, 'We need to be the church.' "

Likewise, many pastors told CT the crisis presents an unprecedented opportunity for evangelism. "I've been here 20 years and shared the gospel with two people; one accepted, one did not," said a long-term missionary from Egypt who also requested anonymity. "These days, we can reach 2,000 people in one day. This is the time to be here, otherwise we'll lose the opportunity. I've heard many people say, 'Thank you, ISIS,' because they lost everything but have new life in Jesus."

As many churches have become de facto refugee camps, cramming as many Christian families onto their properties as possible, the mixing of different denominations has produced what Pope Francis terms an "ecumenism of blood."

"Before ISIS came, we were divided. We thought we were the best Christians, and we could do everything on our own," says Daniel. "God does things for a purpose. He combined the churches together to handle the situation as one hand.

"Unfortunately, it was ISIS that united us. We can send a message to all the Christians around the world: Don't wait for bad things to unite you; unite now, under the name of Jesus Christ."

PARALYZED BY PARIS

On CT's last day in Iraq, global sentiment toward refugees began shifting dramatically. Coordinated ISIS attacks killed 130 in Paris. Soon, the main emblem of the refugee crisis—the small body of a drowned Syrian three-year-old on a beach—was replaced by the specter of sleeper terrorists. More than half of US governors announced bans on refugee resettlement in their states. Polls suggested that many evangelicals supported the bans; only one-third of white evangelical Protestants told the Pew Research Center they favored the United States accepting more refugees—and that was prior to Paris. After the attacks, LifeWay Research found that 48 percent of self-identified evangelical pastors agreed there was "a sense of fear" within their congregation about refugees coming to America.

But a month after Paris, one prominent gathering told a different story about evangelical attitudes. On the campus of Wheaton College, more than 120 leaders representing major denominations and ministries gathered to discuss how US churches could best apply the Great Commandment and the Great Commission to the situation, and not repeat the mistakes of what speakers labeled a tardy response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Conference organizers had expected only one-fourth as many people to come, but the room overflowed. There, leaders took turns addressing the crowd. Wheaton president Philip Ryken said it was "hard to imagine a more important topic to be talking about a compassionate, Christ-centered response to right now." Southern Baptist International Mission Board president David Platt used Bible passages to exhort evangelicals to "act justly, love sacrificially, and hope confidently," given that God remains sovereign over the refugee crisis.

PHOTOS BY STEVE JESTER / WORLD VISION

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World Relief president Stephan Bauman said that while "this is a time of lament" as refugee resettlement groups receive criticism, his ministry has seen "more volunteers coming out from churches to help than ever" in its 35 years. "Not all Americans will be in favor," he said. "But as they understand that facts are our friends, and theology is a mandate, more will see we don't have to have security and compassion be mutually exclusive." (Two-thirds of evangelical pastors told LifeWay they agree.)

Prior to Paris, three-quarters of self-identified "committed Christians" in America said they were willing to help Syrian refugees, according to an Ipsos poll sponsored by World Vision. However, only 44 percent had already done so.

Of the one-quarter of committed Christians who were not willing to help, 34 percent said it was because they feared that refugees were potential terrorists, while 24 percent felt the problem was too big for them to make a difference.

Such findings were corroborated at Wheaton, where leaders took a straw poll to identify the main obstacles to mobilizing American evangelicals on refugee care. Only one word received a unanimous vote: *fear*. Church leaders agreed that they needed better information to circulate in better ways.

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LifeWay also found that only 1 in 3 evangelical pastors have addressed the refugee crisis from the pulpit. A prior survey found that only 2 percent of evangelicals get their information on international migration to America from their local church, while 12 percent cited the Bible. The two combined were fewer than those who rely on the media. "Most evangelical Christians are not thinking as Christians on the issue," said Matthew Soerens, World Relief's church training specialist. "Most see newcomers as a threat or a burden. Only 4 in 10 see a gospel opportunity."

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GIVING AS MUCH AS THEY CAN

More than 80 percent of refugees enter Europe by crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey into Greece, due to its many islands (like Lesbos) and thus pourous border. Most pass through Athens en route to Germany, Sweden, and other popular refuges.

Greek evangelicals were actually leading refugee ministries decades before little Alan Kurdi—dressed in a red T-shirt, blue shorts, and Velcro sneakers—washed up on a Turkish beach and galvanized the world's attention on Syria and Iraq. And they remain at the forefront, even as their own nation weathers a 25 percent unemployment rate and a debt crisis that nearly brought down the Eurozone.

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"The refugee crisis is both new and not new," says Giotis Kantartzis, senior pastor of one of Greece's largest evangelical churches. "Greece has been receiving refugees for a long time. What is different is the intensity of it."

What was once 3,000 migrants per week has become 3,000 per day. So the Greek Evangelical Alliance gathered all the churches and ministries that represent the officially Orthodox nation's 40,000 evangelicals.

"For the very first time in our history, we were able to sit down and coordinate our efforts," says Kantartzis. "Some wanted to do evangelism and give out Bibles. Others said, 'No, let's just have a Christian aroma.' [This collaboration] is a new thing. And it is a good thing."

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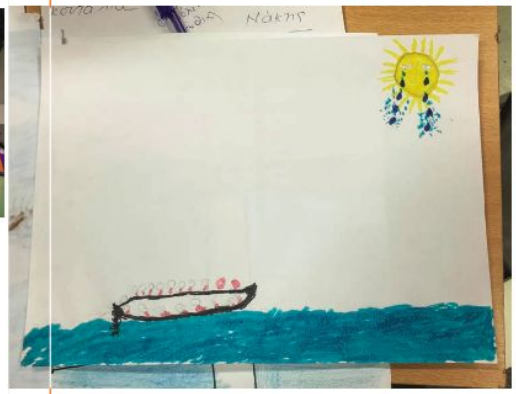

Greek evangelicals recognize that, living in one of the world's most "Christian" countries (legally and culturally), they are the first believers many refugees from Afghanistan and other Muslim-majority nations encounter. "I can't show them a film of Jesus' life," one leader told CT. "But bit by bit, it will all happen." (As a Plision driver puts it, "If they see Jesus in our face, it is enough.") A child's poem on the Galatsi wall of drawings suggests success: "I was in Iran. I saw a lot of Muslims but I didn't see [godly people]. When I came to Greece, I saw a lot of non-Muslims. But I saw [godly people]."

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"It is a wakeup call," he says. "Are we ready as the church to show who we are and what we believe?"

ARAB SPRING FROM ABOVE

Surveying Athens from its tallest peak, Fotis Romeos, general secretary of the Greek Evangelical Alliance, gestures to the New Testament sites nestled among the modern below. He believes American evangelicals can learn from their brothers and sisters at one of the world's major crossroads.

"Refugee ministry is not new for us. What is new is the pace." Previously, most refugees would stay in Greece for six months to one year to acquire their legal papers. Now they stay two or three days before moving on.

"We once had a chance to get to know them and share the gospel," says Romeos. No longer. So churches now focus on "helping them feel human" by offering showers, children's games, cell phone recharging—even free wifi. "Refugees are people, not a caste. We can serve them in what they need right now," he says. "We have the first opportunity to engage them with the best elements of our faith and our culture.

"We trust that the Lord will complete his work in other countries through the evangelicals there," says Romeos. "We look at these people as long-term residents of Europe, and we try to focus on being the best hosts at the entrance."

Given that Greek evangelicals are few in number, with their resources already stretched thin by their country's financial crisis, Romeos wants strategic, long-term partnerships with evangelicals in America and other nations. "It is a dilemma of short-term fireworks or long-term fire," he says. "We don't want to light the fireworks show; we want to fuel the long-term kingdom of God."

Since the Syrian and Iraqi families slowly reaching Western shores represent only 5 percent of the refugee crisis, church leaders in Iraq and Greece encourage US evangelicals to take their cues from those closer to the action.

"Why are you Christian brothers in the West afraid? We are here on the front lines and are not afraid," said an Iraqi pastor appearing via video at the Wheaton leader summit. "We believe in an Arabic spring, but not this Arab Spring. We believe in one that comes from above. And we know that spring comes after winter." CT

JEREMY WEBER is senior news editor of *Christianity Today* magazine. To get involved with the refugee crisis, visit wewelcomerefugees.com.

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PHOTOS BY JEREMY WEBER

ust beyond the still-under-construction ring road on the outer edge of Erbil, a group interview turns into a mutiny.

"You already understand why we are here," says one of the 15 displaced Christians and Muslims who have gathered at a World Vision food distribution site in the capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region. "Everyone in America should know about our crisis by now: ISIS."

This group is weary of telling NGOs and journalists why they fled their homes, and how hard and fragile life is among Erbil's abandoned buildings.

They are especially weary because this will be their second winter of displacement. Meanwhile, food aid has decreased from $25 to $16 to now $10 per month. Most refuse to give interviews, despite the fact that their stories could spur Westerners to send more aid. If their current visitors are not there to increase food vouchers, then, they say, everyone is wasting their time.

Some in the group fidget with 11 oz. bottles of water bearing blue caps and the word *life* spelled in red. The *i* is an upside-down exclamation point, a marketer's attempt at fun in a sad setting.

But such a mark fittingly punctuates the refugee crisis. The numbers—1 million refugees entering Europe by the end of 2015—surpassed comprehension long ago. The question is whether they have now also surpassed compassion.

The world now has more displaced people than during World War II. Beyond Europe, another 2.5 million refugees are in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, while 4.5 million people remain displaced within Syria and Iraq, where ISIS is most active.

As winter approached, *Christianity Today* traveled to Iraq and Greece to witness how Christian leaders are working along the "refugee highway" that now stretches from the Middle East to Europe and North America. The situation is so complicated, and the risks so high, that leaders are torn between two aid strategies: should they help Christians and other minorities stay in their historic homelands, or should they help them journey to safer Western democracies?

But Kurdish and Greek evangelical leaders agree on one thing: hope remains, because they see God at work all along the highway.

'THANK YOU, ISIS'

From his front steps, Hadi Ali has a great view of the winding ravine where many flock during Nowruz (a New Year celebration) to vacation and picnic alongside the river that descends from Lake Dukan, one of the largest lakes in Kurdistan. But Ali wishes he still lived 300 miles from here. He is one of hundreds of internally displaced persons now living in a jumble of unfinished homes on the slopes of the rugged red mountains that tower above the river.

In the shadow of a pale yellow mosque that sits atop the hillside community, Ali, 43, skirts pomegranate skins as he climbs the steps of an unfinished, concrete building. He has lived here with his family of 9 for the past 15 months. His wife and children, ranging from ages 5 to 18, fled from south of Baghdad after they were threatened at gunpoint.

"They took our homes and our money," he tells CT. "Everything is gone. We don't know when we will go back."

Ali, once a school bus driver, sold his bus to relocate his family. Now he's a day laborer, working on the three-story building next door that is even more unfinished than his own temporary dwelling. "I always think of going back home once peace comes. I wish it were tomorrow. But we don't know the future. I am waiting for God."

The crisis has gone on for longer than anybody anticipated—nearly five years now for many families. Almost all of the displaced women whom CT interviewed

GARMAWA CAMP, NINEVEH PLAINS, IRAQ

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HADI ALI, FATHER, NOW IN KURDISTAN

PHOTOS BY STEVE JETER / COURTESY OF WORLD VISION

across eight refugee camps have given birth to children since fleeing.

"We support each other," says the chief of Garmawa, a 250-year-old Christian town only 40 minutes from Mosul. Ever since ISIS seized Iraq's second-largest city in June 2014, the nearby town of 70 families has shared its land with about 500 mostly Muslim families. "It is part of our faith that we host them," says the chief. However, Garmawa residents expected to play host for two months. "This is the second winter," he says. "We did not dream of this."

Christians have faced significant and well-publicized persecution (notably in Mosul and other Nineveh Plains cities). Christian leaders told CT that other minorities such as the Yazidis, an ancient religious group, have suffered even worse. Thus, many churches are aiding more non-Christians than fellow believers.

In a UN camp in Khanke, seven Yazidi children tussle over the UNICEF-issued teal backpack found in almost every refugee dwelling and arrange its contents on the floor. It holds not school supplies but photos of their deceased older sister, Almas, killed when ISIS came to their hometown of Sinjar. Their four-month-old sister, born in this room of concrete walls and a tarp roof, is named in her honor. Their mother, Wadkha, says the memory makes it too painful to return to Sinjar, which was liberated from ISIS while CT was in Iraq. "When I make bread, I think of my daughter and weep."

Many refugees no longer hope to return home. "The Christians are tired here," says Ashty Alisha, chairman of the Evangelical Alliance in Kurdistan. At his most recent church service, a member explained how he plans to leave with his family because they have no money for rent or food; all they have is the memory of their son killed by ISIS. Alisha says, "I am not encouraging people to go. But I can't tell people to stay."

Father Daniel is more blunt. "The Middle East is lost for Christians," says the 25-year-old priest at Mar Elia Church, which hosts 570 displaced believers on its triangular compound in Ankawa, Erbil's Christian district. He just finished leading a service in Aramaic; Mar Elia is one of the few churches that preserve the language Jesus spoke. But Daniel says he would be fine if one day he had no flock to shepherd because they had all left for Europe or the United States.

"We should consider the lives and souls of these people," he says. "It's not just about the Christian history here. We don't want them to live as victims." A newlywed resident of the camp concurs: "This is truly a holy land here for us. But it is no longer a heartland."

By contrast, Abu Karam is likely one of the only displaced Iraqi Christians to ever turn down a visa to the West. The 66-year-old Mosul pastor became a UN refugee in Jordan and obtained a visa to Canada. But then, he says, God told him in a vision to go back to Iraq and serve the church. He declined the visa and returned to Mosul until ISIS arrived.

At the Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Ankawa, Karam now serves displaced Christians from a range of historic and newer denominations. He encourages them all to stay in Iraq. "Jesus tells us it won't be easy to continue our religion. But he says, 'No matter what happens to you, I win, so you will win,'" says Karam. "Ever since the third century, this has been our Christianity: one of suffering. If we live an easy life, what is our message?"

Notable efforts to help Christians stay include an evangelical church that rents a five-story building in Erbil for 170 people displaced from Qaraqosh. The Chaldean archbishop of Erbil, Bashar Warda, is trying to build a new Catholic university. (He explains: "How will they stay unless we show them that we are going to stay?") On the "go" side, a group from Slovakia—visiting Mar Elia at the

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FATHER DANIEL, PRIEST, ERBIL

same time as CT—brokered a deal to relocate 149 Christians to their Eastern European nation by Christmas.

"It is not a zero-sum game of stay or go. We can help people stay safer and go safer," says Jeremy Courtney, director of the Iraq-based Preemptive Love Coalition. "But if we are serious about helping Christians stay, we have to love Muslims more than we hate and fear Islam. We do bad for Christians if we don't do good for their neighbors."

One of the silver linings of the crisis is that most of Iraq's evangelical churches are now overflowing with displaced Christians. They more than make up for the families that emigrated to the West after the United States invaded Iraq 12 years ago. "God is using ISIS to shake the church," says a leader in Erbil who requested anonymity. "Christians who were nominal are now saying, 'We need to be the church.' "

Likewise, many pastors told CT the crisis presents an unprecedented opportunity for evangelism. "I've been here 20 years and shared the gospel with two people; one accepted, one did not," said a long-term missionary from Egypt who also requested anonymity. "These days, we can reach 2,000 people in one day. This is the time to be here, otherwise we'll lose the opportunity. I've heard many people say, 'Thank you, ISIS,' because they lost everything but have new life in Jesus."

As many churches have become de facto refugee camps, cramming as many Christian families onto their properties as possible, the mixing of different denominations has produced what Pope Francis terms an "ecumenism of blood."

"Before ISIS came, we were divided. We thought we were the best Christians, and we could do everything on our own," says Daniel. "God does things for a purpose. He combined the churches together to handle the situation as one hand.

"Unfortunately, it was ISIS that united us. We can send a message to all the Christians around the world: Don't wait for bad things to unite you; unite now, under the name of Jesus Christ."

PHOTOS BY STEVE JESTER / WORLD VISION

PARALYZED BY PARIS

On CT's last day in Iraq, global sentiment toward refugees began shifting dramatically. Coordinated ISIS attacks killed 130 in Paris. Soon, the main emblem of the refugee crisis—the small body of a drowned Syrian three-year-old on a beach—was replaced by the specter of sleeper terrorists. More than half of US governors announced bans on refugee resettlement in their states. Polls suggested that many evangelicals supported the bans; only one-third of white evangelical Protestants told the Pew Research Center they favored the United States accepting more refugees—and that was prior to Paris. After the attacks, LifeWay Research found that 48 percent of self-identified evangelical pastors agreed there was "a sense of fear" within their congregation about refugees coming to America.

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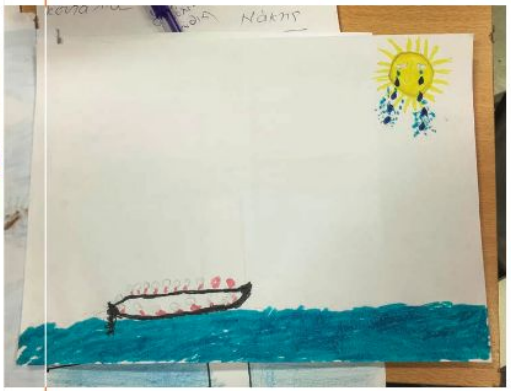

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Surveying Athens from its tallest peak, Fotis Romeos, general secretary of the Greek Evangelical Alliance, gestures to the New Testament sites nestled among the modern below. He believes American evangelicals can learn from their brothers and sisters at one of the world's major crossroads.

"Refugee ministry is not new for us. What is new is the pace." Previously, most refugees would stay in Greece for six months to one year to acquire their legal papers. Now they stay two or three days before moving on.

"We once had a chance to get to know them and share the gospel," says Romeos. No longer. So churches now focus on "helping them feel human" by offering showers, children's games, cell phone recharging—even free wifi. "Refugees are people, not a caste. We can serve them in what they need right now," he says. "We have the first opportunity to engage them with the best elements of our faith and our culture.

"We trust that the Lord will complete his work in other countries through the evangelicals there," says Romeos. "We look at these people as long-term residents of Europe, and we try to focus on being the best hosts at the entrance."

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Since the Syrian and Iraqi families slowly reaching Western shores represent only 5 percent of the refugee crisis, church leaders in Iraq and Greece encourage US evangelicals to take their cues from those closer to the action.

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PHOTOS BY JEREMY WEBER

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This group is weary of telling NGOs and journalists why they fled their homes, and how hard and fragile life is among Erbil's abandoned buildings.

They are especially weary because this will be their second winter of displacement. Meanwhile, food aid has decreased from $25 to $16 to now $10 per month. Most refuse to give interviews, despite the fact that their stories could spur Westerners to send more aid. If their current visitors are not there to increase food vouchers, then, they say, everyone is wasting their time.

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The world now has more displaced people than during World War II. Beyond Europe, another 2.5 million refugees are in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, while 4.5 million people remain displaced within Syria and Iraq, where ISIS is most active.

As winter approached, *Christianity Today* traveled to Iraq and Greece to witness how Christian leaders are working along the "refugee highway" that now stretches from the Middle East to Europe and North America. The situation is so complicated, and the risks so high, that leaders are torn between two aid strategies: should they help Christians and other minorities stay in their historic homelands, or should they help them journey to safer Western democracies?

But Kurdish and Greek evangelical leaders agree on one thing: hope remains, because they see God at work all along the highway.

'THANK YOU, ISIS'

From his front steps, Hadi Ali has a great view of the winding ravine where many flock during Nowruz (a New Year celebration) to vacation and picnic alongside the river that descends from Lake Dukan, one of the largest lakes in Kurdistan. But Ali wishes he still lived 300 miles from here. He is one of hundreds of internally displaced persons now living in a jumble of unfinished homes on the slopes of the rugged red mountains that tower above the river.

In the shadow of a pale yellow mosque that sits atop the hillside community, Ali, 43, skirts pomegranate skins as he climbs the steps of an unfinished, concrete building. He has lived here with his family of 9 for the past 15 months. His wife and children, ranging from ages 5 to 18, fled from south of Baghdad after they were threatened at gunpoint.

"They took our homes and our money," he tells CT. "Everything is gone. We don't know when we will go back."

Ali, once a school bus driver, sold his bus to relocate his family. Now he's a day laborer, working on the three-story building next door that is even more unfinished than his own temporary dwelling. "I always think of going back home once peace comes. I wish it were tomorrow. But we don't know the future. I am waiting for God."

The crisis has gone on for longer than anybody anticipated—nearly five years now for many families. Almost all of the displaced women whom CT interviewed across eight refugee camps have given birth to children since fleeing.

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"We support each other," says the chief of Garmawa, a 250-year-old Christian town only 40 minutes from Mosul. Ever since ISIS seized Iraq's second-largest city in June 2014, the nearby town of 70 families has shared its land with about 500 mostly Muslim families. "It is part of our faith that we host them," says the chief. However, Garmawa residents expected to play host for two months. "This is the second winter," he says. "We did not dream of this."

Christians have faced significant and well-publicized persecution (notably in Mosul and other Nineveh Plains cities). Christian leaders told CT that other minorities such as the Yazidis, an ancient religious group, have suffered even worse. Thus, many churches are aiding more non-Christians than fellow believers.

In a UN camp in Khanke, seven Yazidi children tussle over the UNICEF-issued teal backpack found in almost every refugee dwelling and arrange its contents on the floor. It holds not school supplies but photos of their deceased older sister, Almas, killed when ISIS came to their hometown of Sinjar. Their four-month-old sister, born in this room of concrete walls and a tarp roof, is named in her honor. Their mother, Wadkha, says the memory makes it too painful to return to Sinjar, which was liberated from ISIS while CT was in Iraq. "When I make bread, I think of my daughter and weep."

Many refugees no longer hope to return home. "The Christians are tired here," says Ashty Alisha, chairman of the Evangelical Alliance in Kurdistan. At his most recent church service, a member explained how he plans to leave with his family because they have no money for rent or food; all they have is the memory of their son killed by ISIS. Alisha says, "I am not encouraging people to go. But I can't tell people to stay."

Father Daniel is more blunt. "The Middle East is lost for Christians," says the 25-year-old priest at Mar Elia Church, which hosts 570 displaced believers on its triangular compound in Ankawa, Erbil's Christian district. He just finished leading a service in Aramaic; Mar Elia is one of the few churches that preserve the language Jesus spoke. But Daniel says he would be fine if one day he had no flock to shepherd because they had all left for Europe or the United States.

"We should consider the lives and souls of these people," he says. "It's not just about the Christian history here. We don't want them to live as victims." A newlywed resident of the camp concurs: "This is truly a holy land here for us. But it is no longer a heartland."

By contrast, Abu Karam is likely one of the only displaced Iraqi Christians to ever turn down a visa to the West. The 66-year-old Mosul pastor became a UN refugee in Jordan and obtained a visa to Canada. But then, he says, God told him in a vision to go back to Iraq and serve the church. He declined the visa and returned to Mosul until ISIS arrived.

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Notable efforts to help Christians stay include an evangelical church that rents a five-story building in Erbil for 170 people displaced from Qaraqosh. The Chaldean archbishop of Erbil, Bashar Warda, is trying to build a new Catholic university. (He explains: "How will they stay unless we show them that we are going to stay?") On the "go" side, a group from Slovakia—visiting Mar Elia at the

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same time as CT—brokered a deal to relocate 149 Christians to their Eastern European nation by Christmas.

"It is not a zero-sum game of stay or go. We can help people stay safer and go safer," says Jeremy Courtney, director of the Iraq-based Preemptive Love Coalition. "But if we are serious about helping Christians stay, we have to love Muslims more than we hate and fear Islam. We do bad for Christians if we don't do good for their neighbors."

One of the silver linings of the crisis is that most of Iraq's evangelical churches are now overflowing with displaced Christians. They more than make up for the families that emigrated to the West after the United States invaded Iraq 12 years ago. "God is using ISIS to shake the church," says a leader in Erbil who requested anonymity. "Christians who were nominal are now saying, 'We need to be the church.' "

Likewise, many pastors told CT the crisis presents an unprecedented opportunity for evangelism. "I've been here 20 years and shared the gospel with two people; one accepted, one did not," said a long-term missionary from Egypt who also requested anonymity. "These days, we can reach 2,000 people in one day. This is the time to be here, otherwise we'll lose the opportunity. I've heard many people say, 'Thank you, ISIS,' because they lost everything but have new life in Jesus."

As many churches have become de facto refugee camps, cramming as many Christian families onto their properties as possible, the mixing of different denominations has produced what Pope Francis terms an "ecumenism of blood."

"Before ISIS came, we were divided. We thought we were the best Christians, and we could do everything on our own," says Daniel. "God does things for a purpose. He combined the churches together to handle the situation as one hand.

"Unfortunately, it was ISIS that united us. We can send a message to all the Christians around the world: Don't wait for bad things to unite you; unite now, under the name of Jesus Christ."

PARALYZED BY PARIS

On CT's last day in Iraq, global sentiment toward refugees began shifting dramatically. Coordinated ISIS attacks killed 130 in Paris. Soon, the main emblem of the refugee crisis—the small body of a drowned Syrian three-year-old on a beach—was replaced by the specter of sleeper terrorists. More than half of US governors announced bans on refugee resettlement in their states. Polls suggested that many evangelicals supported the bans; only one-third of white evangelical Protestants told the Pew Research Center they favored the United States accepting more refugees—and that was prior to Paris. After the attacks, LifeWay Research found that 48 percent of self-identified evangelical pastors agreed there was "a sense of fear" within their congregation about refugees coming to America.

But a month after Paris, one prominent gathering told a different story about evangelical attitudes. On the campus of Wheaton College, more than 120 leaders representing major denominations and ministries gathered to discuss how US churches could best apply the Great Commandment and the Great Commission to the situation, and not repeat the mistakes of what speakers labeled a tardy response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Conference organizers had expected only one-fourth as many people to come, but the room overflowed. There, leaders took turns addressing the crowd. Wheaton president Philip Ryken said it was "hard to imagine a more important topic to be talking about a compassionate, Christ-centered response to right now." Southern Baptist International Mission Board president David Platt used Bible passages to exhort evangelicals to "act justly, love sacrificially, and hope confidently," given that God remains sovereign over the refugee crisis.

World Vision president Richard Stearns explained how, if the crisis were taking place proportionally in the States, "everyone west of Ohio would have to flee their homes." He described feeling "ashamed by the hateful rhetoric" from politicians, media, and some church leaders. "They've taken this terrible tragedy and somehow made it about us," he said. "We have an opportunity on the world stage to show what we stand for: not fear, but grace."

World Relief president Stephan Bauman said that while "this is a time of lament" as refugee resettlement groups receive criticism, his ministry has seen "more volunteers coming out from churches to help than ever" in its 35 years. "Not all Americans will be in favor," he said. "But as they understand that facts are our friends, and theology is a mandate, more will see we don't have to have security and compassion be mutually exclusive." (Two-thirds of evangelical pastors told LifeWay they agree.)

Prior to Paris, three-quarters of self-identified "committed Christians" in America said they were willing to help Syrian refugees, according to an Ipsos poll sponsored by World Vision. However, only 44 percent had already done so.

Of the one-quarter of committed Christians who were not willing to help, 34 percent said it was because they feared that refugees were potential terrorists, while 24 percent felt the problem was too big for them to make a difference.

Such findings were corroborated at Wheaton, where leaders took a straw poll to identify the main obstacles to mobilizing American evangelicals on refugee care. Only one word received a unanimous vote: *fear*. Church leaders agreed that they needed better information to circulate in better ways.

Few evangelical churches are currently caring for refugees internationally (18%) or locally (8%). Another 8 percent desire to get involved. But more than two-thirds of churches have not discussed it.

LifeWay also found that only 1 in 3 evangelical pastors have addressed the refugee crisis from the pulpit. A prior survey found that only 2 percent of evangelicals get their information on international migration to America from their local church, while 12 percent cited the Bible. The two combined were fewer than those who rely on the media. "Most evangelical Christians are not thinking as Christians on the issue," said Matthew Soerens, World Relief's church training specialist. "Most see newcomers as a threat or a burden. Only 4 in 10 see a gospel opportunity."

"We are being countercultural," said convener Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research. "The mood of many of our constituents is against refugees. But when we respond in an environment of fear with faith, we win an audience for the gospel."

GIVING AS MUCH AS THEY CAN

More than 80 percent of refugees enter Europe by crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey into Greece, due to its many islands (like Lesbos) and thus pourous border. Most pass through Athens en route to Germany, Sweden, and other popular refuges.

Greek evangelicals were actually leading refugee ministries decades before little Alan Kurdi—dressed in a red T-shirt, blue shorts, and Velcro sneakers—washed up on a Turkish beach and galvanized the world's attention on Syria and Iraq. And they remain at the forefront, even as their own nation weathers a 25 percent unemployment rate and a debt crisis that nearly brought down the Eurozone.

At a coffee shop in Athens, a family clasps their cups at a high street-side table while their three-year-old son plays with a yellow toy crane among a pile of backpacks. He is bundled up for the cold, but he also wears a blue life jacket. His younger sister wears a red one.

Here on the blocks around Piraeus, the main port of Athens, refugees who survived the dangerous crossing from Turkey to Lesbos (more than 800 drowned in 2015) outnumber Greeks 4 to 1. Dozens walk past closed shops to board a white double-decker bus bearing a Greek Islands ad of two smiling children lounging on a sunny beach. A blue bus soon pulls up, followed by a yellow one as the white bus prepares to depart.

It is likely headed to Victoria Square, a plaza lined with restaurant patios and trees decked with strands of gold Christmas

PHOTOS BY STEVE JESTER / WORLD VISION

LEFT • PHOTO BY MATEJ DIVIZNA / GETTY RIGHT • PHOTO BY LOUISA GOULIAMAKI / GETTY

lights. As the sun sets on Saturday night, almost 50 people wait in line at a food truck. But this is no gourmet hipster meal. They are all refugees, waiting here for the buses that will take them to Greece's northern border with Macedonia, then on through the Balkans to Germany. The truck belongs to Plision, a ministry where Greek evangelicals unite with other groups to offer aid. Tonight it is passing out 500 black bowls filled with beef, rice, and beans made by church volunteers.

Shortly after, Plision's leader, Christos Nakis, sits at the plastic-covered Communion table of his charismatic church, fittingly located next to Athens's central market where rows of vendors sell produce and meat. He explains how 10 teams from evangelical churches help feed about 1,700 migrants a day across Athens's three refugee camps.

One month ago, leaders of all of Greece's evangelical churches gathered with Nakis to agree to help non-Christians and Christians alike. "We think our mission as people of God is to help everybody the same. After all, God sends rain the same on the good and the bad," says Nakis, referring to Matthew 5:45.

"The refugee crisis is both new and not new," says Giotis Kantartzis, senior pastor of one of Greece's largest evangelical churches. "Greece has been receiving refugees for a long time. What is different is the intensity of it."

What was once 3,000 migrants per week has become 3,000 per day. So the Greek Evangelical Alliance gathered all the churches and ministries that represent the officially Orthodox nation's 40,000 evangelicals.

"For the very first time in our history, we were able to sit down and coordinate our efforts," says Kantartzis. "Some wanted to do evangelism and give out Bibles. Others said, 'No, let's just have a Christian aroma.' [This collaboration] is a new thing. And it is a good thing."

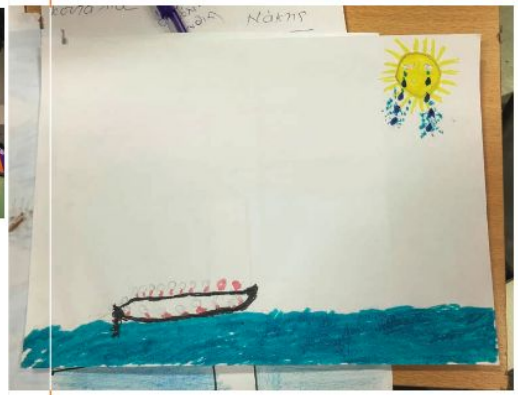
CT rides along as a church volunteer transports dinner to Galatsi Hall, once the Olympic stadium where Greece hosted the Summer Games in 2004. It lay in modern ruins until the government made it the largest refugee camp in late 2015.

Most Galatsi refugees are from Afghanistan. They spend a few days waiting for money from relatives in the West to arrive before continuing on. Most Syrians and Iraqis, including the Christians, have enough money to pass through Athens the same day, leaders explain.

Moinos Eleftheriou, 53, is tall with a mop of wiry hair and the energy to match in his role as camp leader. Galatsi provides food, bedding, clothing, medical supplies, English lessons, art therapy—even a "goodbye goodie bag" for those going farther up and farther into Europe once they obtain a bus ticket out of Athens. "We have to help them," says Eleftheriou. "They are our neighbors. They are not animals; they are human beings." The cavernous rooms that hosted the world's best gymnasts and table tennis players now house mostly Afghani women and children clustered on blankets. A lucky few have camping tents for privacy.

"We give them as much as we can," explains Eleftheriou. The parting gift is a grocery bag full of "things they like": juice, milk, biscuits, honey, tuna fish, toilet paper. The facility even has an elderly woman pushing a shopping cart around giving out sweets. "We do the small things to make them smile."

Just 45 days old, the camp has already hosted 10,000 refugees. One main wall showcases the drawings of the 3,000 Afghani children who have passed through Galatsi. "Some of them are very sad. We don't put those here," says Eleftheriou. Back in his office, he pulls out a drawing of a girl's family in a boat. Overhead, the sun is shedding tears. Earlier, walking through the middle of the gymnastics hall turned dormitory, a woman in a black robe and pink headscarf stood up from her family's three blankets and half bowed as he passed. Her two-year-old daughter, as well as her sister and seven-year-old niece, drowned when her family crossed the sea. When he first asked what the family needed, the mother replied tearfully, "The only thing I need is a stone with my daughter's name on it for the graveyard." Eleftheriou told her, "I will do this for you."



Greek evangelicals recognize that, living in one of the world's most "Christian" countries (legally and culturally), they are the first believers many refugees from Afghanistan and other Muslim-majority nations encounter. "I can't show them a film of Jesus' life," one leader told CT. "But bit by bit, it will all happen." (As a Plision driver puts it, "If they see Jesus in our face, it is enough.") A child's poem on the Galatsi wall of drawings suggests success: "I was in Iran. I saw a lot of Muslims but I didn't see [godly people]. When I came to Greece, I saw a lot of non-Muslims. But I saw [godly people]."

On the question of whether Christian refugees should remain in the Middle East or leave for the West, Kantartzis quickly shoots down the question as not worth pondering. (This is noteworthy, given an Athens tourism campaign coins the term "philosofa" for "the Athenian habit of lounging around and philosophizing.") "It's the wrong question. These people came; they left already," he said. "The question is a kind of avoidance; an alibi to dodge the responsibility in front of us.

"It is a wakeup call," he says. "Are we ready as the church to show who we are and what we believe?"

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same time as CT—brokered a deal to relocate 149 Christians to their Eastern European nation by Christmas.

"It is not a zero-sum game of stay or go. We can help people stay safer and go safer," says Jeremy Courtney, director of the Iraq-based Preemptive Love Coalition. "But if we are serious about helping Christians stay, we have to love Muslims more than we hate and fear Islam. We do bad for Christians if we don't do good for their neighbors."

One of the silver linings of the crisis is that most of Iraq's evangelical churches are now overflowing with displaced Christians. They more than make up for the families that emigrated to the West after the United States invaded Iraq 12 years ago. "God is using ISIS to shake the church," says a leader in Erbil who requested anonymity. "Christians who were nominal are now saying, 'We need to be the church.' "

Likewise, many pastors told CT the crisis presents an unprecedented opportunity for evangelism. "I've been here 20 years and shared the gospel with two people; one accepted, one did not," said a long-term missionary from Egypt who also requested anonymity. "These days, we can reach 2,000 people in one day. This is the time to be here, otherwise we'll lose the opportunity. I've heard many people say, 'Thank you, ISIS,' because they lost everything but have new life in Jesus."

As many churches have become de facto refugee camps, cramming as many Christian families onto their properties as possible, the mixing of different denominations has produced what Pope Francis terms an "ecumenism of blood."

"Before ISIS came, we were divided. We thought we were the best Christians, and we could do everything on our own," says Daniel. "God does things for a purpose. He combined the churches together to handle the situation as one hand.

"Unfortunately, it was ISIS that united us. We can send a message to all the Christians around the world: Don't wait for bad things to unite you; unite now, under the name of Jesus Christ."

PARALYZED BY PARIS

On CT's last day in Iraq, global sentiment toward refugees began shifting dramatically. Coordinated ISIS attacks killed 130 in Paris. Soon, the main emblem of the refugee crisis—the small body of a drowned Syrian three-year-old on a beach—was replaced by the specter of sleeper terrorists. More than half of US governors announced bans on refugee resettlement in their states. Polls suggested that many evangelicals supported the bans; only one-third of white evangelical Protestants told the Pew Research Center they favored the United States accepting more refugees—and that was prior to Paris. After the attacks, LifeWay Research found that 48 percent of self-identified evangelical pastors agreed there was "a sense of fear" within their congregation about refugees coming to America.

But a month after Paris, one prominent gathering told a different story about evangelical attitudes. On the campus of Wheaton College, more than 120 leaders representing major denominations and ministries gathered to discuss how US churches could best apply the Great Commandment and the Great Commission to the situation, and not repeat the mistakes of what speakers labeled a tardy response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Conference organizers had expected only one-fourth as many people to come, but the room overflowed. There, leaders took turns addressing the crowd. Wheaton president Philip Ryken said it was "hard to imagine a more important topic to be talking about a compassionate, Christ-centered response to right now." Southern Baptist International Mission Board president David Platt used Bible passages to exhort evangelicals to "act justly, love sacrificially, and hope confidently," given that God remains sovereign over the refugee crisis.

World Vision president Richard Stearns explained how, if the crisis were taking place proportionally in the States, "everyone west of Ohio would have to flee their homes." He described feeling "ashamed by the hateful rhetoric" from politicians, media, and some church leaders. "They've taken this terrible tragedy and somehow made it about us," he said. "We have an opportunity on the world stage to show what we stand for: not fear, but grace."

World Relief president Stephan Bauman said that while "this is a time of lament" as refugee resettlement groups receive criticism, his ministry has seen "more volunteers coming out from churches to help than ever" in its 35 years. "Not all Americans will be in favor," he said. "But as they understand that facts are our friends, and theology is a mandate, more will see we don't have to have security and compassion be mutually exclusive." (Two-thirds of evangelical pastors told LifeWay they agree.)

Prior to Paris, three-quarters of self-identified "committed Christians" in America said they were willing to help Syrian refugees, according to an Ipsos poll sponsored by World Vision. However, only 44 percent had already done so.

Of the one-quarter of committed Christians who were not willing to help, 34 percent said it was because they feared that refugees were potential terrorists, while 24 percent felt the problem was too big for them to make a difference.

Such findings were corroborated at Wheaton, where leaders took a straw poll to identify the main obstacles to mobilizing American evangelicals on refugee care. Only one word received a unanimous vote: *fear*. Church leaders agreed that they needed better information to circulate in better ways.

Few evangelical churches are currently caring for refugees internationally (18%) or locally (8%). Another 8 percent desire to get involved. But more than two-thirds of churches have not discussed it.

LifeWay also found that only 1 in 3 evangelical pastors have addressed the refugee crisis from the pulpit. A prior survey found that only 2 percent of evangelicals get their information on international migration to America from their local church, while 12 percent cited the Bible. The two combined were fewer than those who rely on the media. "Most evangelical Christians are not thinking as Christians on the issue," said Matthew Soerens, World Relief's church training specialist. "Most see newcomers as a threat or a burden. Only 4 in 10 see a gospel opportunity."

"We are being countercultural," said convener Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research. "The mood of many of our constituents is against refugees. But when we respond in an environment of fear with faith, we win an audience for the gospel."

GIVING AS MUCH AS THEY CAN

More than 80 percent of refugees enter Europe by crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey into Greece, due to its many islands (like Lesbos) and thus pourous border. Most pass through Athens en route to Germany, Sweden, and other popular refuges.

Greek evangelicals were actually leading refugee ministries decades before little Alan Kurdi—dressed in a red T-shirt, blue shorts, and Velcro sneakers—washed up on a Turkish beach and galvanized the world's attention on Syria and Iraq. And they remain at the forefront, even as their own nation weathers a 25 percent unemployment rate and a debt crisis that nearly brought down the Eurozone.

At a coffee shop in Athens, a family clasps their cups at a high street-side table while their three-year-old son plays with a yellow toy crane among a pile of backpacks. He is bundled up for the cold, but he also wears a blue life jacket. His younger sister wears a red one.

Here on the blocks around Piraeus, the main port of Athens, refugees who survived the dangerous crossing from Turkey to Lesbos (more than 800 drowned in 2015) outnumber Greeks 4 to 1. Dozens walk past closed shops to board a white double-decker bus bearing a Greek Islands ad of two smiling children lounging on a sunny beach. A blue bus soon pulls up, followed by a yellow one as the white bus prepares to depart.

It is likely headed to Victoria Square, a plaza lined with restaurant patios and trees decked with strands of gold Christmas

LEFT • PHOTO BY MATEJ DIVIZNA / GETTY RIGHT • PHOTO BY LOUISA GOULIAMAKI / GETTY

PHOTOS BY STEVE JETER / WORLD VISION

lights. As the sun sets on Saturday night, almost 50 people wait in line at a food truck. But this is no gourmet hipster meal. They are all refugees, waiting here for the buses that will take them to Greece's northern border with Macedonia, then on through the Balkans to Germany. The truck belongs to Plision, a ministry where Greek evangelicals unite with other groups to offer aid. Tonight it is passing out 500 black bowls filled with beef, rice, and beans made by church volunteers.

Shortly after, Plision's leader, Christos Nakis, sits at the plastic-covered Communion table of his charismatic church, fittingly located next to Athens's central market where rows of vendors sell produce and meat. He explains how 10 teams from evangelical churches help feed about 1,700 migrants a day across Athens's three refugee camps.

One month ago, leaders of all of Greece's evangelical churches gathered with Nakis to agree to help non-Christians and Christians alike. "We think our mission as people of God is to help everybody the same. After all, God sends rain the same on the good and the bad," says Nakis, referring to Matthew 5:45.

"The refugee crisis is both new and not new," says Giotis Kantartzis, senior pastor of one of Greece's largest evangelical churches. "Greece has been receiving refugees for a long time. What is different is the intensity of it."

What was once 3,000 migrants per week has become 3,000 per day. So the Greek Evangelical Alliance gathered all the churches and ministries that represent the officially Orthodox nation's 40,000 evangelicals.

"For the very first time in our history, we were able to sit down and coordinate our efforts," says Kantartzis. "Some wanted to do evangelism and give out Bibles. Others said, 'No, let's just have a Christian aroma.' [This collaboration] is a new thing. And it is a good thing."

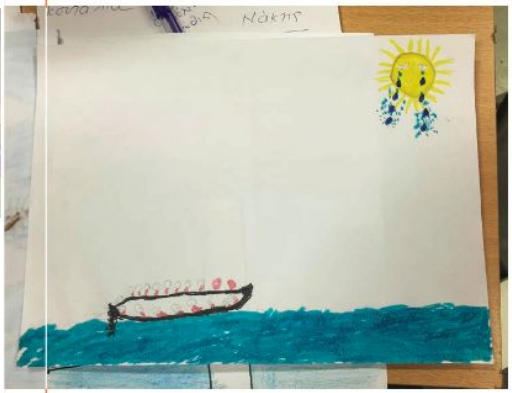
CT rides along as a church volunteer transports dinner to Galatsi Hall, once the Olympic stadium where Greece hosted the Summer Games in 2004. It lay in modern ruins until the government made it the largest refugee camp in late 2015.

Most Galatsi refugees are from Afghanistan. They spend a few days waiting for money from relatives in the West to arrive before continuing on. Most Syrians and Iraqis, including the Christians, have enough money to pass through Athens the same day, leaders explain.

Moinos Eleftheriou, 53, is tall with a mop of wiry hair and the energy to match in his role as camp leader. Galatsi provides food, bedding, clothing, medical supplies, English lessons, art therapy—even a "goodbye goodie bag" for those going farther up and farther into Europe once they obtain a bus ticket out of Athens. "We have to help them," says Eleftheriou. "They are our neighbors. They are not animals; they are human beings." The cavernous rooms that hosted the world's best gymnasts and table tennis players now house mostly Afghani women and children clustered on blankets. A lucky few have camping tents for privacy.

"We give them as much as we can," explains Eleftheriou. The parting gift is a grocery bag full of "things they like": juice, milk, biscuits, honey, tuna fish, toilet paper. The facility even has an elderly woman pushing a shopping cart around giving out sweets. "We do the small things to make them smile."

Just 45 days old, the camp has already hosted 10,000 refugees. One main wall showcases the drawings of the 3,000 Afghani children who have passed through Galatsi. "Some of them are very sad. We don't put those here," says Eleftheriou. Back in his office, he pulls out a drawing of a girl's family in a boat. Overhead, the sun is shedding tears. Earlier, walking through the middle of the gymnastics hall turned dormitory, a woman in a black robe and pink headscarf stood up from her family's three blankets and half bowed as he passed. Her two-year-old daughter, as well as her sister and seven-year-old niece, drowned when her family crossed the sea. When he first asked what the family needed, the mother replied tearfully, "The only thing I need is a stone with my daughter's name on it for the graveyard." Eleftheriou told her, "I will do this for you."



PHOTOS BY JEREMY WEBER

Greek evangelicals recognize that, living in one of the world's most "Christian" countries (legally and culturally), they are the first believers many refugees from Afghanistan and other Muslim-majority nations encounter. "I can't show them a film of Jesus' life," one leader told CT. "But bit by bit, it will all happen." (As a Plision driver puts it, "If they see Jesus in our face, it is enough.") A child's poem on the Galatsi wall of drawings suggests success: "I was in Iran. I saw a lot of Muslims but I didn't see [godly people]. When I came to Greece, I saw a lot of non-Muslims. But I saw [godly people]."

On the question of whether Christian refugees should remain in the Middle East or leave for the West, Kantartzis quickly shoots down the question as not worth pondering. (This is noteworthy, given an Athens tourism campaign coins the term "philosofa" for "the Athenian habit of lounging around and philosophizing.") "It's the wrong question. These people came; they left already," he said. "The question is a kind of avoidance; an alibi to dodge the responsibility in front of us.

"It is a wakeup call," he says. "Are we ready as the church to show who we are and what we believe?"

ARAB SPRING FROM ABOVE

Surveying Athens from its tallest peak, Fotis Romeos, general secretary of the Greek Evangelical Alliance, gestures to the New Testament sites nestled among the modern below. He believes American evangelicals can learn from their brothers and sisters at one of the world's major crossroads.

"Refugee ministry is not new for us. What is new is the pace." Previously, most refugees would stay in Greece for six months to one year to acquire their legal papers. Now they stay two or three days before moving on.

"We once had a chance to get to know them and share the gospel," says Romeos. No longer. So churches now focus on "helping them feel human" by offering showers, children's games, cell phone recharging—even free wifi. "Refugees are people, not a caste. We can serve them in what they need right now," he says. "We have the first opportunity to engage them with the best elements of our faith and our culture.

"We trust that the Lord will complete his work in other countries through the evangelicals there," says Romeos. "We look at these people as long-term residents of Europe, and we try to focus on being the best hosts at the entrance."

Given that Greek evangelicals are few in number, with their resources already stretched thin by their country's financial crisis, Romeos wants strategic, long-term partnerships with evangelicals in America and other nations. "It is a dilemma of short-term fireworks or long-term fire," he says. "We don't want to light the fireworks show; we want to fuel the long-term kingdom of God."

Since the Syrian and Iraqi families slowly reaching Western shores represent only 5 percent of the refugee crisis, church leaders in Iraq and Greece encourage US evangelicals to take their cues from those closer to the action.

"Why are you Christian brothers in the West afraid? We are here on the front lines and are not afraid," said an Iraqi pastor appearing via video at the Wheaton leader summit. "We believe in an Arabic spring, but not this Arab Spring. We believe in one that comes from above. And we know that spring comes after winter." CT

JEREMY WEBER is senior news editor of *Christianity Today* magazine. To get involved with the refugee crisis, visit wewelcomerefugees.com.

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>
> FOTIS ROMEOS, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE GREEK EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE, ATHENS

Grapes of Wrath: Refugees Face Steinbeck Scenario in Lebanon's Napa Valley

While US debates resettling 10,000 Syrians, a country smaller than Connecticut struggles with hosting 1.5 million.

JEREMY WEBER IN BEIRUT | AUGUST 22, 2016

PHOTO BY JON WARREN / COURTESY OF WORLD VISION

In Depth

Grapes of Wrath

In Lebanon's Napa Valley, Syrian refugees face a Steinbeck scenario. By Jeremy Weber in Beirut

Faysal stands amid the rolling fields of the Bekaa Valley. Just down the road are award-winning, decadent vineyards—a product of the fertile agricultural region's 5,000-year head start on Napa Valley. The Romans even chose to build their temple to Bacchus here. Above loom the snow-covered slopes of Mt. Hermon, where many today place Jesus' transfiguration. Surveying the sea of green plants rustling in a pleasant breeze, the 43-year-old describes what he feels: "A knife in my heart."

For Faysal, a Syrian refugee, the scene is not one of grandeur but of guilt; in the field before him are three of his children—his 15-year-old son and 13- and 11-year-old daughters—bent in half as they weed potatoes instead of attending school.

"I have no choice," says the father of six. In Aleppo, one of Syria's most war-torn cities, his job as a truck driver once provided a four-room house and a middle-class, urban life. Now, having injured his back in his own efforts at day labor, he can't pay the rent for their cobbled-together shelter on a farmer's property. So he just stands and watches his children. And cries.

"As a father, what is the purpose of my life if I can't provide for my children?" he says. "I'm ashamed of the present and the future."

On the shores of the Mediterranean Sea just north of Israel, Lebanon once enjoyed a reputation as the Switzerland of the Middle East, a land of milk and honey. On the eve of Ramadan, *Christianity Today* visited with World Vision to witness how the Bekaa Valley now recalls John Steinbeck's Great Depression–era description of the Dust Bowl and California. In the Bekaa, many refugees struggle to survive as tenant farmers, as did the Joads of *The Grapes of Wrath*. But unlike the Joads, many used to be urban, middle-class families.

↑ Lebanon does not allow official UN refugee camps, so many Syrians live in what aid workers call "informal tent settlements." Displaced for three years or more, many families pay rent to farmers through their children's labor.

While Americans agonize over plans to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees this year, Lebanon is straining under the weight of 1.5 million. And it's a nation of only 4.5 million, smaller than Connecticut and with fewer people than Kentucky. Today, 1 in 3 people in Lebanon is a refugee. As a Beirut taxi driver put it: "Now you fear that when you go home, you will find a refugee sleeping in your bed."

On the Corniche, Beirut's famed boardwalk perfect for watching the sun set over the Mediterranean, most of the evening crowd are not Lebanese or tourists, but Syrian refugees. Families fill the mosaic-covered benches while men fish for dinner from the algae-covered rocks at the seawall's base. Stretching along the coast is the long ridge of Mount Lebanon. Its dense clusters of terraced white houses evoke snow-covered slopes even in the summer heat.

These days, most of the street vendors on bustling Hamra Street, one of Beirut's main tourist strips for shopping, are refugees. At Cafe Younes, open since 1935 and famous for its specialty coffee roasts and the cigar-smoking communists always on hand to drink it, a dirt-streaked boy navigates the sidewalk tables in the leafy shade. About six years old, he is raggedly dressed in the colors of the Syrian flag: a red polo shirt, black pants that stop well above his ankles, and white-striped sneakers.

He repeatedly gestures to his mouth, saying "C'mon please" as he peddles green and yellow packs of Chiclets gum. Three sidewalk tables decline before two shoppers in a black Audi across the street finally say yes. A few minutes later, a girl around age eight with her hair in a frazzled braid starts retracing the boy's path with just a bare, outstretched hand.

Lebanon does not permit official refugee camps—a vestige of its refusal to accept its many Palestinian refugees from Israel as permanently displaced. So, many Syrians settle in what aid workers call "informal tent settlements" (ITS). Most hold one or two dozen families; the largest has about 100 families. Landowners in the Bekaa charge about $200 per month; most families reluctantly have their children work the farm as payment.

The Bekaa was the main feature of the in-flight magazine of Lebanon's national airline when CT visited. Indeed, its sprawling vineyards and fields surrounded by dusty mountains evoke the scenic Napa Valley. But it's a Napa dotted with military checkpoints, mosques, and tent cities. Open-air trucks can be seen taking day laborers to the fields; they ferry more workers than usual because the truck beds are packed with children.

The farmer supervising Faysal's children explains that before Syria's civil war, the field hands in the Bekaa were only 20 percent Syrians, and all were 15 or older. Today, 100 percent are Syrians, and even six-year-olds can be found in the fields. The children work a five-hour shift for $3. They do two shifts a day.

"It wounds me deep in my heart to see the child labor," says the farmer, himself

> 'MANY PEOPLE ASK, "WHY GET PREGNANT DURING SUCH TROUBLES?" I WANTED A BROTHER FOR MY OLDEST BOY. WE DON'T WANT TO STOP OUR LIVES.'
>
> HIVIN, SYRIAN REFUGEE MOTHER

PHOTOS BY BILAL JAWICH

Left: The fertile Bekaa Valley offers lots of opportunities for day labor. But working in the vineyards and other fields means refugee children aren't attending school. Right: Faysal and Hivin have done their best to make their tent-city shelter feel like home for their six children. But cockroaches, rats, and rain make it a tenuous situation.

a father of three. It's also inefficient: "A 6-year-old cannot carry as many potatoes as a 15-year-old." But he says offering them work is better than their parents having no way to pay rent.

Hours later, Faysal and the children host World Vision guests in their tent, No. 11 in an oval of 26 jury-rigged shelters the size of American mobile homes. The mother, Hivin, explains how the family was displaced from Aleppo when life became too hard. First they could not get bread or other food due to blockades. Then their house was bombed. They've been displaced in Lebanon for three years now.

Hivin, 34, rests her 18-month-old daughter, Elva, on her knee while her youngest, 4-month-old Youssef, is asleep in the next room. Both were born in the tent.

"Many people ask, 'Why get pregnant during such troubles?'" she says. "I wanted a brother for my oldest boy. We don't want to stop our lives."

Yet much has stopped. She recalls how her teenage son, Abdo, loved school so much, he would fall asleep holding a textbook in his hands. The family paid for a private driver to take their children to school. Now the siblings are years behind. They crowd with a dozen other children between their World Vision–built latrine and front door around a small board donated by a church, and give each other impromptu lessons learned from World Vision. They snack on the leftover peas that their mother shells in order to earn $1 a day.

"Every time I send them to work in the fields, I cry," says Hivin. "But I don't cry in front of them. I act strong." She tells them that working in the fields is a better fate. If they had stayed in Syria, her son would have been kidnapped and the girls would have been abused, she says.

Their 11-year-old daughter, Nisreen, the second oldest of the four sisters, comes into the room wearing rose sunglasses and gold bangles. One would have no idea that hours before, she was weeding potatoes. "It's tough, and I get exhausted and dirty," she says. "But I want to help my father pay for food. It's okay that I get exhausted, because he is exhausted too."

In a nearby ITS lives another Syrian family that also fled Aleppo nearly four years ago. A 25-year-old mother of three, Leila tearfully explains how she lies to her parents, saying that they live in a house like their old one, with multiple rooms and a kitchen. In reality, she, her husband, and their children (ages eight, six, and three) live in a tent city with cockroaches and mice, accessible only through the field where she harvests zucchini.

"When my parents ask for photos of the kids playing in our house, I find 100 reasons not to send the photo," she says, grabbing tissues from a black and red box that matches her jacket and headscarf and evokes Syria's flag.

While CT interviews her, word comes that her eight-year-old son, Hasan, has been beaten up while playing soccer. "See what I mean?" she says. "Such situations make me say I won't stay in this tent one extra minute. But when you think about other options, you just shut your mouth and sit back down."

Leila and her husband, who paints cars for income, have agreed that risking their lives on the journey by boat

across the Mediterranean to Europe is not worth the risk.

Yostinos Boulos Safar, the Syriac Orthodox archbishop of the Bekaa, estimates that one-third of the hundreds of families who have passed through his diocese since 2011 have chosen to try the illegal sea route. He knows of at least a dozen who drowned.

"It's a difficult decision, but it's coming from their suffering," says Safar. "If you want to stay, we will do our best to help you. If you want to leave, we can't stop you." His church helps hundreds of families with housing and education. "But it is not enough."

One example: On a busy street corner, up two flights of stairs lined with potted plants, lives Budur, a 27-year-old Syrian mother of five. Her family fled Homs after neighbors were kidnapped and bombs hit their street. She also has given birth while displaced—to twins, now two. "It is true that we are refugees, and that we are still displaced," she says. "But we need to continue in any way possible."

However, the births were difficult and the family incurred a lot of medical debt. So months later, Budur decided to have her husband, Johny, cross the sea to Europe. He finally made it to Germany, but only after he "saw death" four times. Johny's been gone nearly two years, waiting for legal status, so still no remittance for Budur—or means to join him.

"A large part of my life is missing. I am doing everything I can, but I'm exhausted, dividing myself into too many parts: working, raising the children, taking care of the house," she says. "What I put in front of my eyes when I feel sad is the image of him safe and secure. And the idea that he may take us with him one day."

Safar says many refugees in tents think the ones in houses are living well, while many refugees in houses think the ones in tents are receiving more aid from NGOs. "Both groups have needs and challenges in their own way."

And don't overlook the Lebanese, he says. With about 300,000 Lebanese in the Bekaa now competing with about 400,000 Syrian refugees for work, Safar says many Lebanese are also struggling because they can't compete with Syrians who work for lower wages or whose businesses don't pay taxes.

"Some aid groups think of the refugees as the only ones with problems," he says. "It is our duty as a church and as Christians; Jesus said you have to help everybody who comes to you. But both of us are suffering. We have to find a solution for both of us."

The crisis has deeply impacted Lebanon's churches. "Every church that has shown compassion for Syrian refugees has been overwhelmed with their presence," says Martin Accad, director of the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut. Most have added more services, where headscarves—previously unseen on Sundays—now dot the crowd. "It's become like the Lebanese version of America's 'seeker-friendly' movement," he says. "You're not required to be committed to Christianity to be part of the church."

> 'THE MOST IMPORTANT THING CHURCHES CAN DO IS TO BE HOSPITABLE. THIS FEAR OF ISIS INFILTRATION IS RUBBISH.'
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> MARTIN ACCAD, DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

Accad believes that most churches are communicating that receiving charity is not a reward for church attendance. His bigger concern: that in the "whirlwind of relief work," Lebanese churches will lose their spiritual focus.

"It's important for churches to not forget that they are a church," says Accad. "We can objectify refugees when we try to function like an NGO. The church should remain the church."

This summer, IMES gathered 230

World Vision's Child-Friendly Spaces have offered 14,000 refugee children a colorful, positive respite from their work in the fields.

LEFT PHOTO BY BILAL JAWICH RIGHT PHOTO BY JON WARREN / COURTESY OF WORLD VISION

experts in its largest-ever consultation of Middle Eastern churches on how to balance the needs of refugees with building the body of Christ. One takeaway for Western churches: Welcome the refugees in limbo in Europe or North America. "Waiting for papers, they are very lonely, out of their element, with a deep need for community," says Accad. "If left alone, they risk radicalization."

"The most important thing churches can do is to be hospitable," he says. "This fear of ISIS infiltration is rubbish. The church is called to be hospitable, regardless of consequences. And when churches are the church to refugees, they are actually preventing the greatest fear we have of refugees: radicalization."

Among the many NGOs working to address such concerns in the Middle East is World Vision, a leader in offering Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS). There, refugee children can get an education and psychological support.

At one CFS in the Bekaa, about two dozen Syrian children sport handmade paper hats—bumblebees for the boys and butterflies for the girls—as they sing a song about the winged insects. Taped on the wall by the door is a cardboard spinning wheel of cartoon faces showing different emotions. Each day, when the children come from their shift in the fields, they select the face that corresponds with how they feel. They repeat the exercise when they leave the CFS.

The teacher, Mohammed, a 33-year-old Syrian refugee, says most pick "sad," "angry," or "anxious" faces. He hopes they will pick "happy" by the time they leave.

Children attend the CFS for three months, then are rotated out for a new batch due to the large number of at-risk youth. During class they color, sing, and play—all to help them process their feelings and develop resilience.

"Even though they are working in the fields, this center can make them remember that they are children," says Mohammed. "At first, some don't talk. Some only fight with others. Over time, they become kids again."

These children are halfway through the cycle. When they arrived, their drawings were of bombs destroying houses; today they are drawing the CFS in lots of happy hues. They switch from the silly song about bees and butterflies to an earnest song that is equal parts patriotism and plea. A rough translation:

You children of the world, look at us.
We are the children of Syria.
Our future is in your hands.
We call for you to help us and protect us,
So we can grow like the grass.

As the Syrian conflict stretches from year to year, such sentiment becomes harder to muster. But with the aid of World Vision and Lebanese churches, Syrian refugees are clinging to hope.

Back in Budur's sparse apartment, above her head on the wall is one of the few objects she brought from Syria: a black cross made of seven pieces of wood connected by small chains. It is a metaphor for her family of seven: separated, yet still hanging together.

Inscribed on the cross is the Lord's Prayer. Its familiar words of "daily bread" and "thy will be done" have become poignant. "Despite passing through such hard moments, our faith remains strong," she says. "We live day by day. But we know that Jesus is next to us." CT

JEREMY WEBER is CT senior news editor. To get involved, visit worldvision.org/refugees and wewelcomerefugees.com.

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"I have no choice," says the father of six. In Aleppo, one of Syria's most war-torn cities, his job as a truck driver once provided a four-room house and a middle-class, urban life. Now, having injured his back in his own efforts at day labor, he can't pay the rent for their cobbled-together shelter on a farmer's property. So he just stands and watches his children. And cries.

"As a father, what is the purpose of my life if I can't provide for my children?" he says. "I'm ashamed of the present and the future."

On the shores of the Mediterranean Sea just north of Israel, Lebanon once enjoyed a reputation as the Switzerland of the Middle East, a land of milk and honey. On the eve of Ramadan, Christianity Today visited with World Vision to witness how the Bekaa Valley now recalls John Steinbeck's Great Depression–era description of the Dust Bowl and California. In the Bekaa, many refugees struggle to survive as tenant farmers, as did the Joads of The Grapes of Wrath. But unlike the Joads, many used to be urban, middle-class families.

While Americans agonize over plans to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees this year, Lebanon is straining under the weight of 1.5 million. And it's a nation of only 4.5 million, smaller than Connecticut and with fewer people than Kentucky.

Today, 1 in 3 people in Lebanon is a refugee. As a Beirut taxi driver put it: "Now you fear that when you go home, you will find a refugee sleeping in your bed."

On the Corniche, Beirut's famed boardwalk perfect for watching the sun set over the Mediterranean, most of the evening crowd are not Lebanese or tourists, but Syrian refugees. Families fill the mosaic-covered benches while men fish for dinner from the algae-covered rocks at the seawall's base. Stretching along the coast is the long ridge of Mount Lebanon. Its dense clusters of terraced white houses evoke snow-covered slopes even in the summer heat.

These days, most of the street vendors on bustling Hamra Street, one of Beirut's main tourist strips for shopping, are refugees. At Cafe Younes, open since 1935 and famous for its specialty coffee roasts and the cigar-smoking communists always on hand to drink it, a dirt-streaked boy navigates the sidewalk tables in the leafy shade. About six years old, he is raggedly dressed in the colors of the Syrian flag: a red polo shirt, black pants that stop well above his ankles, and white-striped sneakers.

He repeatedly gestures to his mouth, saying "C'mon please" as he peddles green and yellow packs of Chiclets gum. Three sidewalk tables decline before two shoppers in a black Audi across the street finally say yes. A few minutes later, a girl around age eight with her hair in a frazzled braid starts retracing the boy's path with just a bare, outstretched hand.

Lebanon does not permit official refugee camps—a vestige of its refusal to accept its many Palestinian refugees from Israel as permanently displaced. So, many Syrians settle in what aid workers call "informal tent settlements" (ITS). Most hold one or two dozen families; the largest has about 100 families. Landowners in the Bekaa charge about $200 per month; most families reluctantly have their children work the farm as payment.

The Bekaa was the main feature of the in-flight magazine of Lebanon's national airline when CT visited. Indeed, its sprawling vineyards and fields surrounded by dusty mountains evoke the scenic Napa Valley. But it's a Napa dotted with military checkpoints, mosques, and tent cities. Open-air trucks can be seen taking day laborers to the fields; they ferry more workers than usual because the truck beds are packed with children.

The farmer supervising Faysal's children explains that before Syria's civil war, the field hands in the Bekaa were only 20 percent Syrians, and all were 15 or older. Today, 100 percent are Syrians, and even six-year-olds can be found in the fields. The children work a five-hour shift for $3. They do two shifts a day.

"It wounds me deep in my heart to see the child labor," says the farmer, himself a father of three. It's also inefficient: "A 6-year-old cannot carry as many potatoes as a 15-year-old." But he says offering them work is better than their parents having no way to pay rent.

Hours later, Faysal and the children host World Vision guests in their tent, No. 11 in an oval of 26 jury-rigged shelters the size of American mobile homes. The mother, Hivin, explains how the family was displaced from Aleppo when life became too hard. First they could not get bread or other food due to blockades. Then their house was bombed. They've been displaced in Lebanon for three years now.

Hivin, 34, rests her 18-month-old daughter, Elva, on her knee while her youngest, 4-month-old Youssef, is asleep in the next room. Both were born in the tent.

"Many people ask, 'Why get pregnant during such troubles?' " she says. "I wanted a brother for my oldest boy. We don't want to stop our lives."

Yet much has stopped. She recalls how her teenage son, Abdo, loved school so much, he would fall asleep holding a textbook in his hands. The family paid for a private driver to take their children to school. Now the siblings are years behind. They crowd with a dozen other children between their World Vision–built latrine and front door around a small board donated by a church, and give each other impromptu lessons learned from World Vision. They snack on the leftover peas that their mother shells in order to earn $1 a day.

"Every time I send them to work in the fields, I cry," says Hivin. "But I don't cry in front of them. I act strong." She tells them that working in the fields is a better fate. If they had stayed in Syria, her son would have been kidnapped and the girls would have been abused, she says.

Their 11-year-old daughter, Nisreen, the second oldest of the four sisters, comes into the room wearing rose sunglasses and gold bangles. One would have no idea that hours before, she was weeding potatoes. "It's tough, and I get exhausted and dirty," she says. "But I want to help my father pay for food. It's okay that I get exhausted, because he is exhausted too."

In a nearby ITS lives another Syrian family that also fled Aleppo nearly four years ago. A 25-year-old mother of three, Leila tearfully explains how she lies to her parents, saying that they live in a house like their old one, with multiple rooms and a kitchen. In reality, she, her husband, and their children (ages eight, six, and three) live in a tent city with cockroaches and mice, accessible only through the field where she harvests zucchini.

"When my parents ask for photos of the kids playing in our house, I find 100 reasons not to send the photo," she says, grabbing tissues from a black and red box that matches her jacket and headscarf and evokes Syria's flag.

While CT interviews her, word comes that her eight-year-old son, Hasan, has been beaten up while playing soccer. "See what I mean?" she says. "Such situations make me say I won't stay in this tent one extra minute. But when you think about other options, you just shut your mouth and sit back down."

Leila and her husband, who paints cars for income, have agreed that risking their lives on the journey by boat across the Mediterranean to Europe is not worth the risk.

Yostinos Boulos Safar, the Syriac Orthodox archbishop of Zahle (the Bekaa's second-largest city), estimates that one-third of the hundreds of families who have passed through his diocese since 2011 have chosen to try the illegal sea route. He knows of at least a dozen who drowned.

"It's a difficult decision, but it's coming from their suffering," says Safar. "If you want to stay, we will do our best to help you. If you want to leave, we can't stop you." His church helps hundreds of families with housing and education. "But it is not enough."

One example: On a busy street corner, up two flights of stairs lined with potted plants, lives Budur, a 27-year-old Syrian mother of five. Her family fled Homs after neighbors were kidnapped and bombs hit their street. She also has given birth while displaced—to twins, now two. “It is true that we are refugees, and that we are still displaced,” she says. “But we need to continue in any way possible.”

However, the births were difficult and the family incurred a lot of medical debt. So months later, Budur decided to have her husband, Johny, cross the sea to Europe. He finally made it to Germany, but only after he “saw death” four times. Johny’s been gone nearly two years, waiting for legal status, so still no remittance for Budur—or means to join him.

“A large part of my life is missing. I am doing everything I can, but I’m exhausted, dividing myself into too many parts: working, raising the children, taking care of the house,” she says. “What I put in front of my eyes when I feel sad is the image of him safe and secure. And the idea that he may take us with him one day.”

Safar says many refugees in tents think the ones in houses are living well, while many refugees in houses think the ones in tents are receiving more aid from NGOs. “Both groups have needs and challenges in their own way.”

And don’t overlook the Lebanese, he says. With about 300,000 Lebanese in the Bekaa now competing with about 400,000 Syrian refugees for work, Safar says many Lebanese are also struggling because they can’t compete with Syrians who work for lower wages or whose businesses don’t pay taxes.

“Some aid groups think of the refugees as the only ones with problems,” he says. “It is our duty as a church and as Christians; Jesus said you have to help everybody who comes to you. But both of us are suffering. We have to find a solution for both of us.”

The crisis has deeply impacted Lebanon’s churches. “Every church that has shown compassion for Syrian refugees has been overwhelmed with their presence,” says Martin Accad, director of the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut. Most have added more services, where headscarves—previously unseen on Sundays—now dot the crowd. “It’s become like the Lebanese version of America’s ‘seeker-friendly’ movement,” he says. “You’re not required to be committed to Christianity to be part of the church.”

Accad believes that most churches are communicating that receiving charity is not a reward for church attendance. His bigger concern: that in the “whirlwind of relief work,” Lebanese churches will lose their spiritual focus.

“It’s important for churches to not forget that they are a church,” says Accad. “We can objectify refugees when we try to function like an NGO. The church should remain the church.”

This summer, IMES gathered 230 experts in its largest-ever consultation of Middle Eastern churches on how to balance the needs of refugees with building the body of Christ. One takeaway for Western churches: Welcome the refugees in limbo in Europe or North America. “Waiting for papers, they are very lonely, out of their element, with a deep need for community,” says Accad. “If left alone, they risk radicalization.”

“The most important thing churches can do is to be hospitable,” he says. “This fear of ISIS infiltration is rubbish. The church is called to be hospitable, regardless of consequences. And when churches are the church to refugees, they are actually preventing the greatest fear we have of refugees: radicalization.”

Among the many NGOs working to address such concerns in the Middle East is World Vision, a leader in offering Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS). There, refugee children can get an education and psychological support.

At one CFS in the Bekaa, about two dozen Syrian children sport handmade paper hats—bumblebees for the boys and butterflies for the girls—as they sing a song about the winged insects. Taped on the wall by the door is a cardboard spinning wheel of cartoon faces showing different emotions. Each day, when the children come from their shift in the fields, they select the face that corresponds with how they feel. They repeat the exercise when they leave the CFS.

The teacher, Mohammed, a 33-year-old Syrian refugee, says most pick “sad,” “angry,” or “anxious” faces. He hopes they will pick “happy” by the time they leave.

Children attend the CFS for three months, then are rotated out for a new batch due to the large number of at-risk youth. During class they color, sing, and play—all to help them process their feelings and develop resilience.

“Even though they are working in the fields, this center can make them remember that they are children,” says Mohammed. “At first, some don’t talk. Some only fight with others. Over time, they become kids again.”

These children are halfway through the cycle. When they arrived, their drawings were of bombs destroying houses; today they are drawing the CFS in lots of happy hues. They switch from the silly song about bees and butterflies to an earnest song that is equal parts patriotism and plea. A rough translation:

You children of the world, look at us.

We are the children of Syria.

Our future is in your hands.

We call for you to help us and protect us,

So we can grow like the grass.

As the Syrian conflict stretches from year to year, such sentiment becomes harder to muster. But with the aid of World Vision and Lebanese churches, Syrian refugees are clinging to hope.

Back in Budur's sparse apartment, above her head on the wall is one of the few objects she brought from Syria: a black cross made of seven pieces of wood connected by small chains. It is a metaphor for her family of seven: separated, yet still hanging together.

Inscribed on the cross is the Lord's Prayer. Its familiar words of "daily bread" and "thy will be done" have become poignant. "Despite passing through such hard moments, our faith remains strong," she says. "We live day by day. But we know that Jesus is next to us."

Articles we covered:

Incredible Indian Christianity: A Special Report on the World's Most Vibrant Christward Movement
https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/november/incredible-india-christianity-special-report-christward-mov.html?share=bJwV5Dw9hGFfxblgvKqPbdrPqiJG%2bloA

No Cheeks Left to Turn: The Double Persecution of Africa's Largest Church
https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/november/nigeria-fulani-boko-haram-no-cheeks-left-to-turn.html?share=bJwV5Dw9hGGls8Y3DWLE84v3IzzMthv9

Hope on the Refugee Highway: A Special Report on Christians in Iraq and Greece
https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/march/hope-on-refugee-highway-christians-iraq-greece-syria-isis.html?share=bJwV5Dw9hGEEbw13uFbz3gA0MqG%2fhWEg

Grapes of Wrath: Refugees Face Steinbeck Scenario in Lebanon's Napa Valley
https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/september/grapes-of-wrath-syrian-refugees-lebanon-bekaa-valley.html?share=bJwV5Dw9hGH8qP1kZSaxJJT%2bZUP21JAj

Headlines: Worth More Time Than Your Lede

REPORTING BY
JEREMY WEBER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
GARY S. CHAPMAN

OUTPACING PERSECUTION

WHY IT'S THE BEST OF TIMES AND THE WORST OF TIMES FOR INDIA'S BURGEONING CHURCHES.

COVER STORY

Incredible Indian Christianity: A Special Report on the World's Most Vibrant Christward Movement

Why it's the best and worst of times for India's burgeoning churches.

JEREMY WEBER | OCTOBER 21, 2016

'HOW LONG WILL IT BE?'

AMID BOKO HARAM AND FULANI ATTACKS, NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS HAVE NO CHEEKS LEFT TO TURN.

BY JEREMY WEBER IN JOS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARY S. CHAPMAN

COVER STORY

No Cheeks Left to Turn: The Double Persecution of Africa's Largest Church

Weary of attacks by Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen, Christians in Nigeria ask how long they're supposed to "count it all joy."

JEREMY WEBER IN JOS | OCTOBER 19, 2018

Steps for coming up with the perfect title

- List key words, concepts, phrases, quotes.
- Start with a couple straightforward headlines.
- Do not settle for “first idea, best idea” mentality.
- Think of elements of wordplay to incorporate.
- Add more “risky” or creative variations.
- Evaluate your options.
- Consider social media shareability.
- Seek feedback.
- Double-check your final option for SEO.

Using first-person, front-loading big names:
Benny Hinn Is My Uncle, but Prosperity Preaching Isn’t for Me

Powerful quote:
Kay Warren: 'We Were in Marital Hell'

Pop culture reference:
Forgiveness: Muslims Moved as Coptic Christians Do the Unimaginable

Wordplay:
Caste Aside: India’s New President Has ‘No Room for Christians’

Curiosity-inducing:
Trump Inauguration’s Bible Reading Is Not in Your Bible

Effective question:
Who’s In Charge of the Christian Blogosphere?

What to keep in mind if you’re stuck

- The old standbys still apply: active verbs better than passive, specifics better than vague generalizations.
- Avoid summarizing the whole story in the headline and deck.
- When appropriate, tease a particular detail and leave audiences wanting to know more.
- No exciting angle to tease out in a headline? Consider whether the story was newsworthy or a good fit for your audience in the first place.
- Think about effective headlines hat you felt compelled to click or share.

DISPLAY HEADLINES

SAY WHY IT MATTERS

CONVERSATIONAL

PEOPLE NOT POLICY

USE ARTICLES

AVOID JOURNALESE

QUESTION W/ CAUTION

FIND SPECIFICS

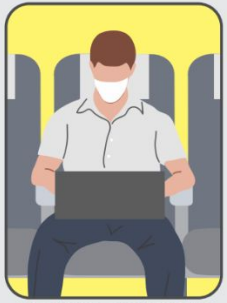
WHO, WHERE, HOW, ETC.

unless hed makes sense without getting the pun

Goal: Be clicked
Fun when appropriate

SEO HEADLINES

NO KEYWORD SALAD

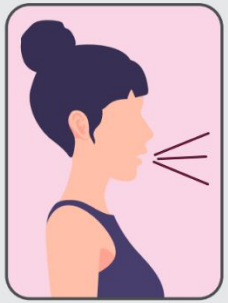


WRITTEN FOR HUMANS

CLEAR AND DIRECT

Goal: Be found AND clicked 50 to 60 characters max

IN HEADLINE EMERGENCY



SAY IT IN A SENTENCE

IDENTIFY KEY POINTS

WHAT STANDS OUT?

INTERNATIONAL

‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’: Ukrainian Orthodox Church Ruptures Relations with Russia

Possible manufacture of holy oil a signal of declaration of independence from Moscow patriarchate, while still opposing rival breakaway church.

JAYSON CASPER | MAY 30, 2022 04:15 PM

РУССКИЙ УКРАЇНСЬКА

INTERNATIONAL

Thou Shalt Not Kirill: Ukrainian Orthodox Church Ruptures Relations with Russia

Possible manufacture of holy oil a signal of declaration of independence from Moscow patriarchate, while still opposing rival breakaway church.

JAYSON CASPER | MAY 30, 2022 04:15 PM

РУССКИЙ УКРАЇНСЬКА

Titles:

Timing

Narrow vs wide

Show vs. hide

Alliteration

Search trends

NEWS

How Russian Christians View the ‘Special Military Operation’ in Ukraine

Torn between “pro-Putin” and “pro-prayer,” only a minority have spoken out publicly against the invasion. Ukrainian seminary leaders call for repentance.

JAYSON CASPER | APRIL 22, 2022

NEWS

Parsing Pacifism: Ukraine’s Mennonite Heritage Shapes Evangelical Responses to Russia

Anabaptists shaped the Slavic revival. The Sermon on the Mount encouraged endurance under Soviet persecution. But how does nonviolence work in a war?

JAYSON CASPER | APRIL 20, 2022

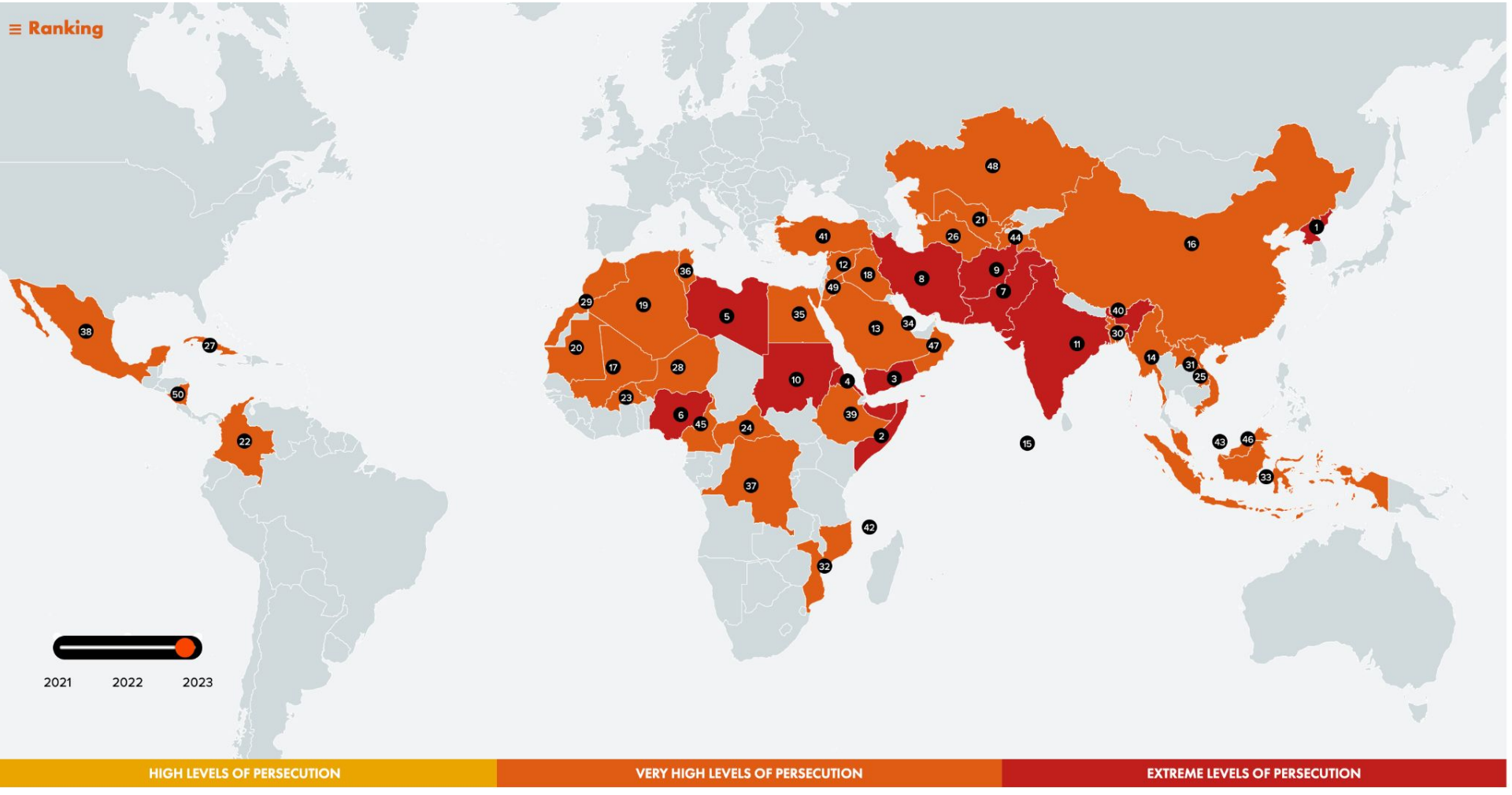
NEWS

Pysanky and Prayer: US Churches Use Ukrainian Easter Eggs for Solidarity

Though American churches are trying out the art of making pysanka, Ukrainian Christians say it is not a religious tradition.

EMILY BELZ | APRIL 8, 2022

Titles vs Timing


Ranking
2021
2022
2023
HIGH LEVELS OF PERSECUTION
VERY HIGH LEVELS OF PERSECUTION
EXTREME LEVELS OF PERSECUTION

INTERNATIONAL

The 50 Countries Where It's Hardest to Follow Jesus in 2023

Latest report on Christian persecution finds Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa the epicenter of jihadist violence, while China leads effort to redefine religious rights.

CT EDITORS | JANUARY 17, 2023 06:01 PM

ESPAÑOL PORTUGUÊS العربية FRANÇAIS 简体中文 한국어 ITALIANO INDONESIAN 繁體中文 РУССКИЙ 日本語

Image: Illustration by Mallory Rentsch / Source Image: Benne Ochs / Getty Images

Sudan, Nigeria Rise Most in 2011 Persecution Rankings

Open Doors' 2012 World Watch List ranks countries where Christians suffered in 2011.

Compass Direct News CP [POSTED 1/4/2012 03:58PM]

African Nations Surge Up Ranks of World's Worst Persecutors

Mali, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Niger make debuts on Open Doors's 2013 World Watch List.

Melissa Steffan [POSTED 1/8/2013 06:59AM]

Aiming for ‘Effective Anger’: The Top 50 Countries Where It’s Hardest to Be a Christian

(UPDATED) Christian martyrdoms doubled in 2013, reports World Watch List in revealing its methodology for the first time.

Katherine Burgess [POSTED 1/8/2014 11:41AM]

‘Not Forgotten’: The Top 50 Countries Where It’s Most Difficult to Be a Christian

Open Doors says 2014 saw the worst persecution of Christians in the 'modern era'—but not because of violence.

Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra [POSTED 1/7/2015 08:54AM]

North Korea Gets Competition: The Top 50 Countries Where It's Now Hardest to Be a Christian

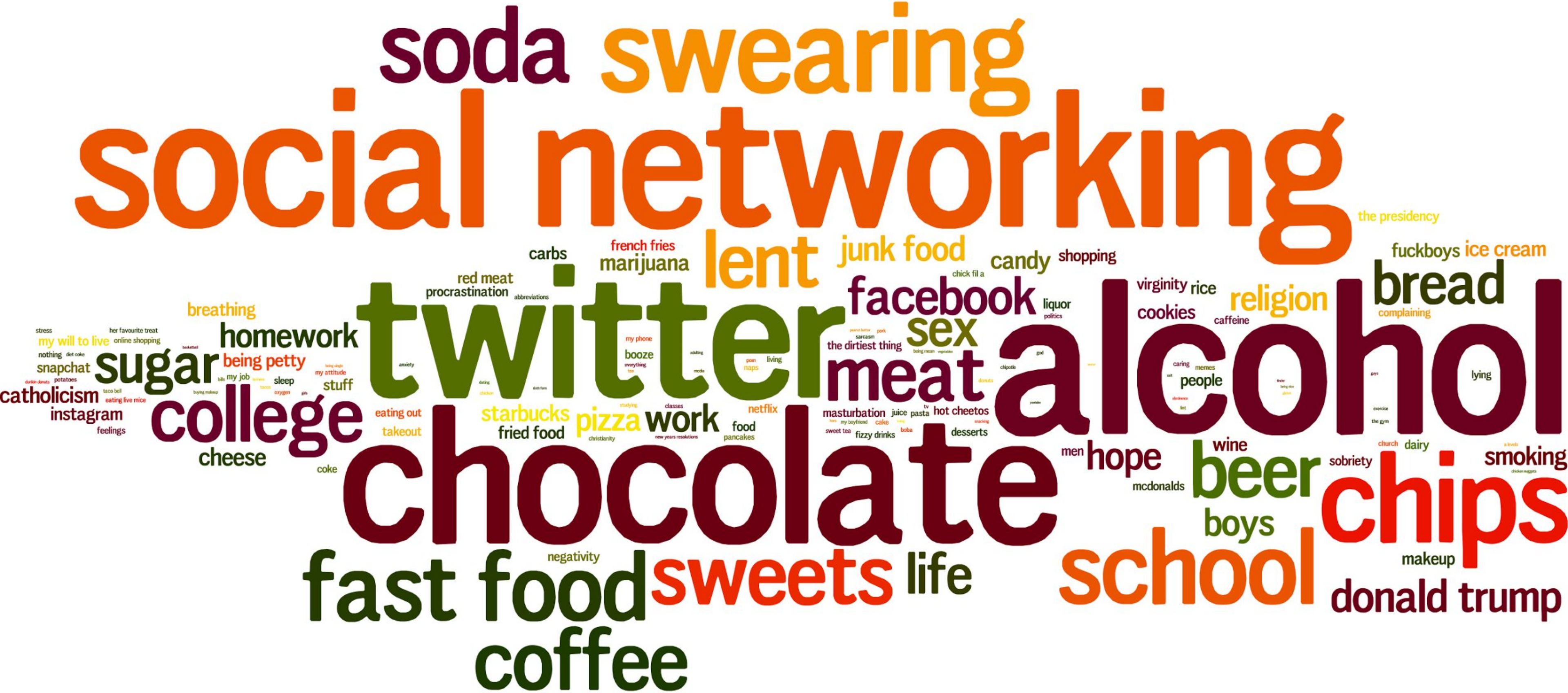
(UPDATED) Hermit Kingdom losing lead as modern persecution hits record high, according to 2016 World Watch List.

Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra [POSTED 1/13/2016 08:32AM]

'Worst Year Yet': The Top 50 Countries Where It's Hardest to Be a Christian

Islamic extremism now has a rival, according to 2017 World Watch List.

Jeremy Weber [POSTED 1/11/2017 09:00AM]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my will to live
online shopping
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alcohol
sugar
being petty
my phone
booze
the dirtiest thing
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sobriety
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dairy
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mcdonalds
chips
boys
negativity
makeup
fast food
sweets
life
school
donald trump
coffee

What People Gave Up for Lent, According to Twitter

Social network sites and chocolate topped the list again.

Stephen Smith [POSTED 4/14/2011 09:36AM]

What People Gave Up For Lent 2012 (According to Twitter)

Chocolate and social media once more top the list. And folks seem to have given up giving up Bieber.

Stephen Smith [POSTED 2/27/2012 03:45PM]

What People Gave Up for Lent 2013 (According to Twitter)

The final results are in. Whatever happened to giving up chocolate?

Kate Shellnutt [POSTED 2/18/2013 10:05AM]

What to Give Up for Lent 2016? Consider Twitter's Top Ideas

(UPDATED) Here's the final tally of the top 100 choices of 2016, plus charts on how Lenten abstinence has changed over time.

Morgan Lee [POSTED 2/5/2016 01:01PM]

What to Give Up for Lent 2017? Consider Twitter's Top Ideas

(UPDATED) Trump ranks between Facebook and hope in analysis of 73,000 tweets.

CT Staff [POSTED 2/27/2017 12:16PM]

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