



### Week 1: Pray for Bakhrom Kholmatov (Tajikistan)



**Arrest and background** Bakhrom Kholmatov (42) is pastor of Sunmin Sunbogym (Good News of Grace) Protestant Church in Khujand, capital of the Soghd region of northwest Tajikistan. He was arrested and imprisoned in April 2017 after secret police officers raided his church, found song books and Christian literature and harassed and beat church members.

The police summoned Pastor Bakhrom for questioning and then arrested him and charged him with extremism, claiming that Christian songs found on his computer and the book *More Than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell are "extremist materials". In July, he was sentenced to three years in prison for "*singing extremist songs in church and so inciting religious hatred*". In August, the Soghd Regional Court upheld his sentence.

Pastor Bakhrom was held in secret police custody before being transferred to the Investigation Prison in Istaravshan, 80 km from his home in Khujand. He remained there until after his appeal hearing, and in October was moved to Yavan Prison in the southern Khatlon Region, 360 km from home.

Local Christians have suggested the pastor was arrested because the authorities want the building owned by his church: several months before the raid, the pastor was called to a meeting and asked to sign documents transferring the building to someone else, but he refused. There have been rumours in the past that officials also wanted to expropriate enterprises linked to the church – members of the network built a hospital, operated taekwondo gyms and ran a secondary school.

In February 2017, officials raided affiliated churches in the Soghd region, and in March 2017, officials closed down an affiliated church in Konibodom, 80 km east of Khujand, after torturing church members.

**Family** Pastor Bakhrom and his wife Gulnora have two sons, Firdavs (21) and Firus (19), and a daughter, Gulnoza (14). Relatives can visit and bring Pastor Bakhrom food and clothes, and he is allowed to have a Bible. Officials have threatened members of the family and church, telling them to remain silent about the case.

**Latest news** In January 2018, Pastor Bakhrom's wife Gulnora fell ill at the prison, on her way to visit her husband. She was taken to a local hospital, where doctors diagnosed a hypertension crisis, and was later transferred to a hospital nearer home. Gulnora began suffering from high blood pressure when her husband was arrested.

#### Prayer Diary

<b>Sunday</b>	Ask God to keep Pastor Bakhrom safe and well in prison.
<b>Monday</b>	Pray for an early release.
<b>Tuesday</b>	Ask God to encourage his faith.
<b>Wednesday</b>	Pray for his witness to other prisoners and guards.
<b>Thursday</b>	Ask God to bless Gulnora, Firdavs, Firus and Gulnoza.
<b>Friday</b>	Pray for Sunmin Sunbogym Church.
<b>Saturday</b>	Ask God to protect affiliated churches in Tajikistan.

