

Conference hears the story of The Innocent of Acteal

The guest speaker at the annual *Church in Chains* conference in Athlone earlier this month was Al Schreuder, who has lived in Mexico for 30 years (Mexican pastor, Manuel Arias, was unable to come due to a visa problem). **Al told the story of The Innocent of Acteal, a group of 79 prisoners – mainly evangelical Christians – who have been imprisoned in Mexico for over twelve years on false charges.** The conference heard about the 29 men who were released last year (following a decision of the Mexican Supreme Court) and also of the continuing struggle for justice for the remaining 50 prisoners.



The released men have to live far away from their homes and families, in temporary rented accommodation, because of local opposition. Meanwhile, those who remain in prison feel discouraged, and Al spoke of recent difficulties they have experienced. Al is one of four people who provide pastoral care to all the men and their families and he regularly visits the prison. During the afternoon session, Al told delegates about the growth of the church in Chiapas.

The 140 conference delegates broke up into small groups to pray about what they had heard and wrote messages of encouragement to the prisoners, on cards that Al will deliver personally.

PRAY... that the Lord will encourage the 50 innocent men who remain in prison and bless all the continuing legal efforts to secure their freedom.



Joy and hope in midst of suffering in Pakistan

Baby Barnabas was born to Hina Gill who was rescued from a remote, flooded Punjab village when she was heavily pregnant. *Church in Chains* partner organisation, Barnabas Fund, took Hina to hospital and paid for her care, and in gratitude she and her husband, Aftab Masih, named their baby Barnabas. Christians are often overlooked in relief work, which is why *Church in Chains* has decided to provide support, through our partners in Barnabas Fund.

The birth of Barnabas is one ray of hope in a very desperate situation. An estimated 200,000 Christians are among the millions affected by the most severe monsoon floods to hit Pakistan in 80 years. Now, according to Yunis Lal Did, leader of the Fellowship of Brethren Churches in Pakistan, **"The situation is desperate, with many families having lost their homes and possessions. Many Christians were already in poor circumstances and are now doubly affected and do not know where to find help."**

Barnabas Fund is providing support to repair and rebuild damaged and ruined homes, to provide household items (such as beds, stoves and kitchen utensils), to buy seed and fertiliser and to provide start-up assistance for those whose shops and small businesses were destroyed.

***Church in Chains* made an initial grant of €3,000 from our General Fund to Barnabas Fund in August and will shortly be passing on a further €3,650 which has been sent to us by supporters.**

PRAY... for God's blessing on all involved in the relief effort in Pakistan and pray particularly for Barnabas Fund as it supports Christians who might otherwise be overlooked.

Over 100 attacks on Christians in India so far this year

A new report by the Evangelical Fellowship of India shows that the church in India continues to face serious persecution. The report lists 106 incidents of attacks on Christians, by state, for the months January to August 2010.

These attacks often take the form of Hindu extremists interrupting Christian meetings and beating pastors and worshippers, sometimes to the point of unconsciousness, and occasionally even to death. The highest number of attacks, 37, occurred in the southern state of Karnataka. It is one of the states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party), a conservative, Hindu nationalist party. States under its control often see an increase in violence against Christians.



The most recent incident reported from Karnataka occurred on 29 August. In Mysore, alleged Hindu extremists disrupted a meeting of Ebenezer Assembly of God Church. They beat up the pastor and one member of the congregation, who sustained such serious head and hand injuries that they had to be taken to hospital.

Earlier this year, Church in Chains sent a gift of €7,000 to South India Gospel Outreach to help operate a "safe-house" for pastors and evangelists in Karnataka. A fund-raising concert for this project held in Corcaghan, Co. Monaghan in late September raised over €4,900.

PRAY... for God's strength, comfort and guidance for each one of the victims of the attacks in India and pray that the "safe-house" in Karnataka will help many persecuted Christians.



85-year-old disabled Baptist woman convicted in Uzbekistan

Nadezhda Matyukhina, an 85-year-old disabled woman, has been convicted of "teaching religion without permission".

Following conviction at Tashkent's Criminal Court in August, the judge gave her an official warning. Nadezhda was tried because she held a Christian meeting in her flat. Igor Voloshin, who was present at the meeting, was fined the equivalent of €210 for the crime of teaching religious beliefs privately and without permission. Nadezhda and Igor are members of an unregistered church. Their trial followed a raid

on Nadezhda's flat on 4 August by police and local government officials. The police officer who led the raid said, **"I have worked for ten years at the local police, and I know these Baptists. They don't drink, and do not disturb others." When asked why he broke in without an official warrant, he said, "I was only doing my official duties, obeying the order given by my chiefs."**

Forty four years ago (in 1966) when Uzbekistan was under Soviet rule, Nadezhda was convicted of holding unauthorised religious meetings in her flat, and was imprisoned in a labour camp under severe conditions for three years.(Forum 18)

PRAY... that the Lord will strengthen Nadezhda and that she will not be afraid. Pray also for the church that meets at her flat and that Igor Voloshin will be able to pay this heavy fine.



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