

## Testimonies

### **China: "We will not leave prison without her!"**

The morning after the raid on their church site, over 1,000 faithful gathered in the pouring rain amongst the rubble and worshipped God. Twenty believers were seriously injured and over a dozen buildings on the Fushan Church's site were demolished the day before on September 13, 2009 by 400 officials and hired thugs. It wasn't the first time government authorities had targeted the house church community, and it wouldn't be the last.

In the weeks following the raid, authorities cracked down on the leaders of the Fushan Church, which is one of many church homes to the 50,000 members of the Linfen Church in Shanxi province. When the church's leaders called on the government to repay the damages and issue a public apology, authorities installed state police guards at numerous house church sites to prevent members from gathering for worship. Water and electricity were also cut off among the neighbouring house churches.

Fearing an uprising, officials eventually agreed to pay over a million Yuan in damages to the Linfen Church. But when they refused to release a detained Christian who reported on the raid via text messages, the Christians refused to accept the money. Money would not silence their voices. Instead, head pastor Yang Rongli and six other believers attempted to file a claim in the province's capital. Officials arrested all seven allegedly to "prevent disturbing the social order." While being held at the Yaodu Detention Centre in Linfen, the Christians took solace in their faith in Jesus. They shared their beliefs with other inmates, sang hymns and recited scripture. Meanwhile, members of their church community continued to gather for prayer and worship and issued a call to action on behalf of those imprisoned.

Eventually, one of the believers was released. Officials promised the remaining Christians their freedom the next day, holding only Yang Rongli captive. The believers refused. "We are one team in the one body of Christ!" they argued. "We won't leave her behind alone. We will not leave prison without her!" Two days later, 10 more church leaders were arrested. Officials attempted to break their spirits by threatening to arrest even more leaders and ransack their homes.

In early November, the Linfen Court informed the families of five of the imprisoned pastors – including Yang Rongli and her husband, Wang Xiaoguang – that a trial was scheduled for later that month. The rapid turnaround left the families in desperate need of legal aid. The days leading up to the case were fraught with difficulties, as the lawyers were granted little to no communication with their clients and had access to only 30 of the more than 100 documents submitted as evidence against the believers.

The five pastors endured the proceedings, which were riddled with far-fetched testimonies and inconsistencies. Though their lawyers had strong evidence and the law on their side, the court found the five pastors guilty of "unlawfully occupying agricultural land" and "gathering to disturb the traffic order." Their sentences ranged from seven years and a fine of 30,000 Yuan to three years with a fine of 10,000 Yuan.

The abuse endured by the Linfen Church is one of the most severe cases of persecution against Chinese house churches in the last decade, both in sentence and widespread impact.

Throughout the country, Christians who worship outside the government-sanctioned Three-Self Churches face harassment and arrests from authorities. The Three-Self Churches were established by the communists in the early 1950s and control many areas of Protestant church life through various regulations. For example, registered churches are not permitted to speak about the creation story in Genesis or Jesus' second coming. Despite the persecution, Christianity in China is growing at an incredible rate. Six million Catholics and 15 million Protestants are registered with the government, while approximately eight million Catholics and up to 50 million Protestants worship in unregistered house churches.

Just as the members of the Linfen Church refused to abandon one of their own, will you too stand alongside them as a fellow member of the Body of Christ?

### **India: "I will never quit this Good News ministry"**

Pastor Walter was at home with his wife and seven-year-old daughter on a Sunday afternoon when two Hindu men came to their home in the Geejghar Vihar suburb of Jaipur, India. When the men asked Pastor Walter if he would tell them about Jesus, he gladly began to share God's Word with them. During the discussion, one of the men asked the other, "Shall we start?" That's when the attack began.

It started with just the two men assaulting Pastor Walter, punching him again and again. But soon four militants wearing masks barged into Pastor Walter's home and joined in the violence, using wooden sticks to beat him all over his body while his family looked on in fear.

His family members wouldn't be the only ones to witness the shocking assault. The militants had taken video equipment into the pastor's home and had captured their brutal actions on film. The footage of the attack was later shown on a television network, along with video of the militants putting on their masks just before launching their attack.

Pastor Walter was severely injured in the violence. Although the militants had broken his body, they did not break his resolve to share Christ throughout India and raise awareness for the nation's persecuted believers. "I am not scared," he said. "I will continue the work I have been doing for the last 17 years." Persecution is commonplace for many Christians in the largest democracy in the world. While individuals like Pastor Walter

face attacks and threats, whole communities have also been targeted. Christians face continued opposition due to the deterioration of freedoms under the influence of militant Hinduism, or Hindutva. This Hindu extremism, which strives for a Hindu-only society in India, has fueled anti-conversion laws that are now enforced in five states — Gujarat, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh — and have been passed but not yet implemented in the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan. Such legislation was created to curb religious conversions allegedly made by "force," "fraud" or "allurement." However, Christians and human rights groups believe the laws actually obstruct all conversions, as Hindu nationalists invoke it to harass Christian workers with arrests and imprisonments, which are often accompanied with violence against the accused. Anti conversion laws can carry severe penalties for believers. In Gujarat, for example, those convicted of "forcible conversion" could be jailed for up to three years.

Prior to Pastor Walter's attack, about 10 families, most of them of Hindu background, were regular members at the church he leads out of his home. Afterwards, however, some of the newer families stopped attending, saying they were too scared to take part in the services. Such a change would be hard for any pastor to bear. But Pastor Walter hoped his determination to carry on his work of evangelism would bring more Hindus to his church. "I will never quit this Good News ministry," he said.

Amidst violence and oppressive anti-conversion laws, Christians in India are continuing to stand up for the cause of Christ and bear witness to His truth and love.

### **Pakistan: "All the time we were praying and asking Jesus to save us"**

Mehnga Masih was locked in his house with his wife and nine children when the mob came.

“Convert to Islam or die!” shouted the mob outside his home.

Frightened, Mehnga and his family did the only thing they could do: pray. Soon, their prayers were answered. Managing to flee their home, they hid in the long grass as they watched homes in their village of Korian go up in flames.

The violence in Korian began when a boy had allegedly cut up pages of an Arabic textbook that contained words from the Qur'an. The cut-up pages were used as confetti at a Christian wedding. But apparently, Muslims already had a long-standing grudge with the boy's father, and some speculate that the incident at the wedding may have been an opportunity to snatch the Christians' land, which had become valuable since the government had apportioned it between the Muslims and Christians years earlier.

The area mosque announced that Christians had disgraced the Qur'an and Muslims should kill them. One pastor said that the mosque was calling them to come with their weapons and was threatening to burn Christians' homes. Armed with guns and explosives, the mob quickly grew to 800. Witnesses say some of the attackers

included members of radical organizations linked to the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

But the terror did not end at Korian's borders. Two days later in the neighboring village of Gojra, the growing mob attacked. Mosque loudspeakers fanned the flames of violence proclaiming, "Kill the American dogs."

Christians cried out for help from police, but only a small number responded and were no match for the well-armed attackers. When more police arrived, the mob opened fire on the Christians' protectors.

In a matter of hours, a hundred homes were burned, and seven Christians were killed—burned alive.

Among the dead were Walter Masih's wife, grown daughter and her unborn child. "We are very scared," he said. "These people can attack again whenever they want. We can do nothing—only believe in Jesus. We have a strong trust in Him."

Christians in Pakistan are well-acquainted with violence and injustice. Though their nation was founded in 1947 on the promise of equal rights to religious minorities, they are treated as second class citizens, often doing the most menial jobs. Many are street-sweepers and brick-kiln workers, with young girls working for Muslim employers, some of whom have beaten and raped them. Pakistan's blasphemy laws, contained in section 295 of the penal code, have made it criminal for insulting Islam, Mohammed and the Qur'an. These laws have often been used against Christians to settle personal grievances.

Many Christians are not without hope or forgiveness. One pastor who has rebuilt a church destroyed in the Korian attack said, "I pray for the Muslim attackers who destroy our houses. We cannot fight them, because Jesus said forgive your enemies." Walter echoes the heart behind the pastor's words, saying, "We are the followers of Jesus. If He says forgive your enemies, then we forgive them."