

charges, including espionage and promoting hatred among or against sects, were formed months after authorities arrested the Reverend Yat Michael and the Reverend Peter Yein Reith in response to their efforts to encourage a North Khartoum church in the face of a government-aided takeover of the church's property.

Authorities arrested the pastors' attorney as he tried to defend the church from the government's demolition of a part of the church property. Even before the attorney's arrest, the court had barred him from meeting with his clients.

The charge of spying is punishable by death, life imprisonment, or prison and confiscation of property. The charge of promoting hatred among or against sects is punishable by up to two years in prison. The pastors are also charged with undermining the constitutional system.

Since 2012, Sudan has expelled foreign Christians and bulldozed church buildings on the pretext that they belonged to South Sudanese. Besides raiding Christian bookstores and arresting Christians, authorities threatened to kill South Sudanese Christians who do not leave or cooperate with them in their effort to find other Christians.

Couple Ordered to "Cease and Desist" from Speaking Publicly ⁽³⁾

When Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian completed his preliminary ruling against Aaron and Melissa Klein, owners of the now-closed bakery Sweet Cakes by Melissa, for

refusing to provide a wedding cake to a lesbian couple, he ordered the Kleins to "cease and desist" from speaking publicly about their motivation for refusal of service—their Christian beliefs. Avakian, an elected official, also ordered the Kleins to pay \$135,000 in emotional damages to the couple.

The gag order against the Kleins may be at odds with the 5-4 majority ruling of the US Supreme Court's *Obergefell v. Hodges* case. In addition to legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide, the ruling states, "It must be emphasized that religions, and those who adhere to religious doctrines, may continue to advocate with utmost, sincere conviction that, by divine precepts, same-sex marriage should not be condoned. The First Amendment ensures that religious organizations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives and faiths, and to their own deep aspirations to continue the family structure they have long revered."

The Heritage Foundation's senior legal fellow, Hans von Spakovsky, also decried the ruling, saying, "It is exactly this kind of oppressive persecution by government officials that led the pilgrims to America. Commissioner Avakian's order that the Kleins stop speaking about this case is . . . a fundamental violation of their rights to free speech under the First Amendment."

To check out books and other church resources, please visit www.TyndaleDirect.com.

significant news for christians

Some news that's encouraging—some disturbing. Read with discernment. Watch and pray.

THE Church Around the WORLD

October 2015



Country in Focus: Socialist Republic of Vietnam ⁽¹⁾



Vietnam, on the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia, is home to an estimated 90.5 million people. Decades of war, followed by Marxist economics and the loss of Soviet-bloc financial backing, left the country's economy in shambles. Reforms began in 1986, and a middle class has begun to emerge, yet there is a huge gap between city dwellers and the rural poor. The Communist Party still retains supreme control of all state policy including the military. The strong central authority does not look kindly on any dissent, either political, ethnic, or religious. The constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion is greatly diminished by the vast and powerful Bureau of Religious Affairs and Religious Practices. Official government registration is still denied to most churches.

Pray for:

- A growing and witnessing church despite acute persecution;
- More distribution of Bibles in tribal languages;
- Seminary training for native pastors and church leaders.

Chinese Police Shut Down Christian-Run Shelter ⁽²⁾

Two hundred local police and government workers disguised as volunteers broke into and shut down a shelter run by Christians for the homeless and disabled in the southern city of Shenzhen and removed as many as 30 disabled persons and workers from the shelter.

The action against the Guanai (Caring) Center followed notifications in April and May from the Shenzhen government ordering it to "end illegal religious activity." Guanai's founder, Cao Nan, said the "volunteers" who showed up outside the shelter's closed metal gates and used bolt cutters to break in "were policemen and security guards."

Guanai was founded in 2011 by Cao, a well-known pastor and evangelist, and its mission is to provide shelter to the homeless and to others who urgently need help. In the past four years, the center has helped 600-700 people.

Study: Is America a Christian Nation? ⁽³⁾

The majority of Americans believe that faith in God is an important component of being a true American but that the US is not a Christian nation, a new study has found. Data compiled by the Public Religion Research Institute found that 69 percent of Americans agreed with the statement that a belief in God is an "important part of being truly American." This view

Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.

COLOSSIANS 4:2

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was more popular among older people, held by 77 percent of seniors in comparison to 52 percent of young adults.

However, most Americans do not believe that America is a Christian nation. Around 59 percent said that it isn't, though 45 percent agreed that it once was. Just 35 percent said that American is currently a Christian nation, perhaps pointing to the decline of Christianity across the US.

Vietnam Crushing Christian Minorities ⁽¹⁾

A new report from Human Rights Watch claims the oppression of Vietnam's Christian Montagnards (mountain people) has reached a critical state, with one official promising to put an end to Christianity, or "the evil way," among them. The report says government authorities have arrested Montagnard Christians, detaining them sometimes for days and sometimes for months. Many of the

detainees, who follow a form of evangelical Protestantism not recognized by the government, have been beaten.

The report states, "The current persecution is being carried out against what Vietnamese authorities call 'objects' (*doi tuong*) of security force suspicions. These include those who subscribe to beliefs the Vietnamese government maintains are 'set up by the reactionaries' to oppose Communist Party rule and achieve other 'dark purposes,' such as to 'abuse the freedom of belief to sow division among the national great unity.'"

Periodic bouts of harsh persecution are nothing new among Vietnam's Christian minorities, but according to the report, persecution of the evangelical Christian minority became official policy in 2013 when the government passed "Decree 9," clamping down on unregistered religious groups. It also prohibited the "manipulation of freedom of belief and religion" and outlined "propaganda

This month you can... Help Christian Refugees in Iraq and Syria

Persecution watchdog group Open Doors says Christian refugees fleeing ISIS in Iraq and Syria are among the last groups to receive help and necessities for their survival. The group is calling on churches and Christian communities throughout the world to step up and provide for their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Open Doors CEO David Curry said that refugees in northern Iraq and Syria are facing "huge food shortages," with close to 300,000 Christians having limited means to pay for food. With millions of people displaced across the

region, the group estimates that \$20 million will be needed to provide food for the refugees in the next 18 months.

Curry said that one of his biggest concerns is that Christians "will be the last" among the refugees to receive vitally needed help. He called on Christians around the world to partner with Open Doors and to remind those who are suffering that they are not forgotten. Christians and other religious minorities have suffered greatly at the hands of ISIS, which has forced them to choose between converting to Islam, paying a special tax,

or being killed for their faith. The persecution has forced hundreds of thousands of Christians to flee their long-established homes, such as in the city of Mosul, Iraq.

Open Doors has been providing emergency food, hygiene kits, medical kits, safe houses, Christian spiritual resources, and trauma counseling and has been partnering with churches in the region for nearly 25 years. Please visit www.opendoorsusa.org for more information on how you can help.



against the state" and threats to national unity. Vietnam's constitution contains a guarantee of religious freedom, but it only extends as far as the government allows.

Cal State Reinstates InterVarsity Ministry ⁽³⁾

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship chapters are returning to California State University's system. The Christian group moved off all state university campuses in September 2014 after being asked to open leadership positions to all students, regardless of beliefs. Now school officials are inviting the Christian group back. InterVarsity vice president Greg Jao said that after a series of meetings with school officials, they were able to agree that while every student would be welcome at InterVarsity, it is important for students who hold leadership positions to embody the group's values. Jao told CBN News why the ministry was successful in working with the California State University system and how Christian groups in similar situations can learn from their experience. "Environmental groups should be able to ask potential leaders about their position on global warming. Democrat and Republican groups want people who agree with their platform," he explained. "Not using religion as a criterion doesn't make sense for a religious group."

Despite being off-campus last year, InterVarsity has continued to thrive among the Cal State community. This last year the group recorded its largest number of new believers.

Islamic Theologian Asks for Bible ⁽⁴⁾

Voice of the Martyrs radio host Todd Nettleton interviewed a missionary, known only as "Julian," who shared the following incredible story from Lebanon:

"There was a taxi driver," said Julian, "who was a believer up at the border with Syria, and into his taxi gets this guy with a big beard. The guy with the beard says, 'Take me to the airport, I'm flying home to Saudi [Arabia].



But on the way, I want to find a Bible. Can you find me a Bible?"

When the taxi driver asked why, the passenger replied, "I'm from Saudi. I'm a sheikh (which means a teacher of Islam). I've been in Syria teaching the ISIS fighters 'Jihad 101' . . . I'm sick of the killing. There must be something better than this."

South Sudanese Pastors to Be Charged with Capital Crimes ⁽⁵⁾

A judge in Sudan ruled that there was enough evidence to charge two South Sudanese pastors with crimes punishable by death. The