

Liberty said, “By mandating that Hannah and the other students hide when they pray, Principal Frost sends a message to Hannah and all the other students in the school that prayer is illegitimate, disfavored, and should not occur in public. . . . Principal Frost act[ed] with religious hostility impermissible under the Constitution and demean[ed] the religious beliefs of Hannah and her friends.”

The Department of Education points out: “Students may pray when not engaged in school activities or instruction, subject to the same rules designed to prevent material disruption of the educational [programs] that are applied to other privately initiated expressive activities.”

Bulgarian Evangelicals Warn of Parliament’s Move (5)

Bulgarian evangelicals have asked for prayer in the face of a new religion bill that threatens a draconian clampdown on minority faiths. The bill has passed its first reading through parliament, and evangelicals have warned that its impact on all faith communities will be serious if it becomes law.

A letter from Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance (BEA) president Pastor Rumen Bordjiev says: “By intending to control donations, to interfere with theological education, and to install state regulations on issues of clergy responsibilities, the Bulgarian state is wrongly assuming power into the internal life of religious communities. Almost every single article in the newly proposed bill erro-

neously and unfairly claims political authority over religious life.”

According to the BEA, the new law means Bulgarian citizens will only be able to carry out “liturgical activity” if they have had theological training in Bulgaria or their foreign school is approved, and only Eastern Orthodox and Muslim believers will be able to train clergy and run schools.

Foreigners will only be able to preach if doing so with a Bulgarian ordained minister. Foreign donations will only be allowed for building construction or social aid and will need government approval—so for example, no salaries of pastors could be paid from abroad. No religious activities can take place outside of buildings designated for them and only religious groups with more than 300 people will have legal status.

The World Evangelical Alliance issued a statement supporting the BEA. Should the law pass, it said, “existing theological seminaries are at risk of shutting down, evangelical church pastors may no longer be able to conduct worship services, and the acceptance and use of donations will be subject to government approval and limitations.”

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significant news for christians

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

THE Church Around the WORLD

March 2019



Country in Focus: Pakistan (6)

Tucked between Afghanistan and India, Pakistan is home to more than 200 million people—plus more than 1.4 million refugees from Afghanistan living on and near its western border. The vast number of ethnic and religious groups in the country makes understanding this complex country difficult. Literacy is said to be no more than 45 percent, depending on which socioeconomic and religious group is examined. High inflation, huge budget deficits, and widespread corruption at all levels are crippling factors in economic development. Poverty is widespread, especially in rural areas—more than 20 percent of Pakistan’s people live below the poverty line.

Pakistan is an Islamic republic with a Sunni majority. Sharia law is increasingly applied—even to Christians and Hindus. By law, there is religious freedom, but in practice, non-Muslims and non-Sunnis must practice their faith cautiously and under varying degrees of threat from Islamists. Fundamentalist Islam, driven by the Taliban, is practiced by a minority, but it impacts the whole nation. There is a proliferation of madrassas—schools which offer little education other than memorizing the Koran and pushing a militant version of Islam. Women face huge challenges to their health, education, and economic well-being, while discrimination against religious minorities, including Christians, takes many forms and is widespread. The country’s blasphemy law imposes the death penalty on anyone who defames Mohammed. Yet despite these obstacles, the Christian church continues to grow.

Prayer concerns:

- Leadership training is needed, but seminaries are difficult for most would-be pastors to afford.
- Pakistan lies at the heart of the unevangelized world—more than 350 castes and people groups can be considered unreached.
- Few believers come to Christ because the existing Christian church has grown from the lowest rungs of society and sharia law demands punishment for apostates.
- Over one half of the population is under 24 years old, a ripe field for witnessing and evangelizing.
- Over 7 million Pakistani people live abroad—a great mission field in the countries where they now live.

May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 15:5-6

Hub of Christian Persecution in Northern India (2)

Attacks on Christians that began in one area of Uttar Pradesh last summer have spiked and spread, instilling fear in congregations throughout the state. After several attacks in Jaunpur District in the summer, persecution of Christians spread to 32 of Uttar Pradesh's 75 districts, rights activist Dinanath Jaiswar said.

"Jaunpur District has emerged as the epicenter of violence against the Christian community," Jaiswar said. "The frequency and intensity of the incidents took us by surprise. There were days when at least two

or three incidents would be reported from different parts of Uttar Pradesh, and we would struggle on how to provide help to hapless Christians."

Many pastors went into hiding since last summer, though in many cases their congregations were able to keep meeting.

"There is a sense of fear in the atmosphere," a Christian leader said. "Which church would be attacked, and when, is a constant threat in the hearts of the pastors of Uttar Pradesh."

Persecution of Christians in Jaunpur District spread like wildfire to nearby districts, making Uttar Pradesh the state with the most violence against Christians. Pastors have been routinely



Church Around
the WORLD



This month you can . . . Pray for Christians in Pakistan

A Pakistani Christian mother who was convicted in 2010 for blaspheming the prophet Muhammad has been acquitted, and Pakistani Christians are now asking for prayer. According to Open Doors USA, a world persecution watchdog, violent protests have broken out across the country following Asia Bibi's acquittal and release.

Open Doors USA reports that Christians on the ground stated, "We call on Christians across the country and around the world to pray and proclaim, to demand our right to justice but to do so in a manner befitting Christians committed to being imitators of Christ.

Do not destroy property, do not violate people, do not fall into the trap of violent and aggressive behavior. . . . As a praying people, let us trust God and ensure that we demonstrate Him and His Good News at this time."

President and CEO of Open Doors USA David Curry made a statement about the situation, saying, "Pakistan is a highly tense climate for religious minorities, especially Christians who live in fear of persecution and attacks to themselves and their property. As this verdict is released, it is imperative that the government of Pakistan and its Supreme Court be on alert to protect against violence

threatened by Khadim Husain Rizvi and his followers. We call upon law enforcement agencies to beef up security and deploy military troops as needed to safeguard the lives and property of all religious minorities. Now is the time for Pakistan to send a message that the hate speech and threatening actions of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan and all similar extremist groups will not be tolerated. Religion should never be used as a tool to promote violence in society."

According to Open Doors USA, Pakistan is the fifth most difficult country for Christians to live in.

taken into police custody based on false allegations of forceful religious conversion, he said.

Toronto Hospital Says Parents Can Be Excluded from Assisted Suicide Decisions (3)

A Toronto children's hospital's proposed policy says that in some cases of physician-assisted suicide for children, parents may not be notified until after the child has died.

In a British Medical Journals' *Journal of Medical Ethics* paper, doctors at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children explained that "Usually, the family is intimately involved in this (end-of-life) decision-making process. If, however, a capable patient explicitly indicates that they do not want their family members involved in their decision-making, although health care providers may encourage the patient to reconsider and involve their family, ultimately the wishes of capable patients with respect to confidentiality must be respected."

The province of Ontario does not require parents to sign off if a "capable" minor decides to refuse treatment. The proposed policy says because minors can refuse treatment there is "no legal reason" for parental involvement in assisted suicide.

Texas High School Principal Bans Lunchtime Prayer (4)

A number of lawyers from First Liberty Institute, one of the nation's leading defenders of religious liberty, recently challenged the decision made by a Texas high school principal to isolate students who wished to gather and pray with one another when they had a break from classes. "The students were told that they could not pray in view of the other students," First Liberty clarified.

In early September 2018, Hannah Allen and a group of other students decided to pray for one of their former classmates who had recently been in an accident. During lunch when students are permitted to talk and move around the cafeteria, the students walked to an empty table, held hands, and quietly prayed with one another. Almost immediately after, Principal Lee Frost walked over to the students and told them, "Y'all don't do that again."

Keisha Russell, who serves as associate counsel for First Liberty, said, "Students should not have to hide or be exiled to pray for each other. School officials need to remember that students don't lose their First Amendment rights at the school house gate." In a letter to the school district, First