Interceding for – and inspired by – the persecuted church

Persecution of Christians is increasing and during 2014, with the close link between international conflicts and persecution, we have found ourselves praying for the persecuted church a lot. We are deeply concerned for them. But also inspired and challenged by many of their examples.

Sometimes we are simply interceding for them as Canon Andrew White (the Vicar of Baghdad) urges us – under the headings of protection; provision and perseverance. Sometimes we have found written prayers helpful when we have run out of words. But sometimes we have found more creative approaches helpful because it’s hard for many of us to imagine what it might be like to be in a context so different to our own. We share them here because they have been powerful for inspiring us to go deeper in our faith – as well as to intercede more for our brothers and sisters facing persecution.

We’ve not specified a time length for each of these ideas because they vary so much depending on how many people are present and how engaged they are. But many of them could be used very flexibly to fit the time and people you have. You may also be interested in our other resources – including songs and written prayers – interceding for and inspired by the persecuted church. Find them all grouped together at www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-search

Narrow path worship song

1. Show this worship song and video from the Minya Diocese in Egypt and leave a few minutes silence afterwards for people to reflect www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTD6TZN7qi4
2. Ask the group for their reactions – what stood out to them?
3. Pray for Christians in Egypt and other countries where persecution is a problem:
   o for God to protect them, provide for them and help them to persevere
   o for God to grow their witness to his glory in the midst of their suffering
   o for many more to come to know him.
4. Pray for yourselves and your church that you would be inspired by the Christians of Minya’s witness – and for the church in the UK and other nations where persecution is not so prevalent – to have their perspectives realigned when necessary and to be bolder in standing for Christ. (Pray also for individuals in these countries who are living radically and finding it difficult to be counter-cultural in the church as well as in the world.)

Valuing the word

This activity was first inspired by stories from Open Doors’ 2014 ‘Live like a North Korean’ campaign.

1. Before your time together, get together paper and pens and some torn and photocopied sheets from the Bible. For the latter, open the Bible at several random points and photocopy... then tear each one in half unevenly. (Make enough fragments for everyone to have one.)
2. Explain that in many places where people are persecuted they have no Bibles or – sometimes – just a fragment of the Bible.
3. Give each person a piece of paper and pen and give them about twenty minutes to write down every verse or passage they can remember literally, or have a sense of, from memory...
4. Bring the group back together and ask them for their reactions. You might not need any prompt questions beyond this to get some discussion going, but if you do, here are some suggestions:
   - What scriptures could you remember word for word and why?
   - Were you surprised by how much or how little you could remember?
   - What would help you and other people to remember more scripture?
   - How could a group of Christians remembering different parts help each other?
5. Now give each person one of the fragments of photocopied scripture and give them a few minutes to read it and meditate on it:
   - How might your passage encourage people in situations of persecution?
   - Does it remind you of any other passages that you had forgotten about?
6. Bring the group back together and ask them to share their reflections to the questions you asked them to think about – and to the exercise in general.
7. Have an open time of prayer in response to your time together, using some or all of the following points – or others that the group feel led to raise:
   - Thank God for all the Bibles and other resources at the disposal of many Christians and pray for an increased hunger for God’s word among your group and his people in general.
   - Pray a blessing on all projects working to translate or distribute the Bible more widely – especially amongst persecuted Christians.
   - Pray for Christians who are facing persecution and must hide their Bibles that they would remain unseen.
   - Pray for Christians who don’t have Bibles to be able to remember scripture, learn it from each other and have God bring to mind in prayer what they need to hear from him.

**Worship on mute**

This activity was also first inspired by stories from Open Doors’ 2014 ‘Live like a North Korean’ campaign.

1. For this exercise to have the best impact, it is best if you have had no opening worship preceding it – especially not sung.
2. Explain that in many places believers have to meet secretly, not at all or only in family groups.
3. Ask people what difference it would make to their faith if they could not worship or pray with other Christians regularly?
4. Then tell the group that any meetings that do take place – even in homes – often need to be very quiet.
5. Divide the group into twos or threes as maximum group sizes and ask them to pray very quietly – in whispers at the loudest – together. They should spend time praising God and also praying for those who cannot meet openly to worship and/or who cannot raise their voices in prayer or song.
6. Bring the group back together to talk about the experience. You could follow this with a time of worship including more deeply aware thanksgiving of being able to meet openly. Or you could remain in quiet for the rest of your time together.
Creative prayer ideas

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He prepares a table for us

1. Update people about current situations and places where persecution is being experienced by Christians. (See www.opendoors.org; www.csw.org.uk; and www.bbc.co.uk/news/world)
2. Introduce and read Psalm 23 as an example of a psalm to cling to in different times.
3. Comment on the fact that verse 4 celebrates God's presence with the believer in the midst of difficult times. And that verse 5 says he prepares a table for them in the midst of their enemies – i.e. in the midst of the struggle.
4. Invite people to spend a few minutes imagining themselves at the table with God and one of the groups of Christians you spoke at – knowing that that table is in the midst of the situation they are experiencing:
   a. What do they want to say to God?
   b. What do they want to say to their brothers and sisters?
   c. What might their brothers and sisters be saying to God – and what is he saying first, or in response?
5. After a time of silence, lead a time of open prayer, inviting people to pray out of what they have been thinking about.

Testimonies of blessing...

1. Read Matthew 5:10-12.
2. Give the group a few minutes to think about stories from their own lives – or that they have heard – about blessing coming out of persecution; either because God’s presence or power was experienced to a greater extent or because people who didn’t know Jesus before came close to him.
3. Invite people to share the stories and use them as encouragement to pray for all Christians facing persecution to experience the truth of Matthew 5:10-12
   o as they experience God’s presence and miraculous provision and protection
   o in seeing others come to Christ.
2. Now pray for yourselves and others in the wider church to understand this truth better.

Seeing the global picture

We have often found using maps in different ways helpful for visualising – and connecting with – the situation facing our brothers and sisters. There are many different ways that you could do this including:

1. Getting hold of the World Watch-list from Open Doors – you can see this online at http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/country_profiles.php or contact them for an A3 poster presenting the same information.
2. Using a large map to lay hands on different countries and/or put tea lights or post it note prayers on them.
3. Cutting up a world map with persecuted nations marked on it and giving different sections to different people so between you everywhere in the top fifty nations is prayed for. And then putting all the pieces back together and having a time of open prayer that the global church would be ‘healed by Christ’s stripes’.