

GENERAL SYNOD

The Persecuted Church in the World

To move on behalf of Lichfield Diocesan Synod

That this Synod request that:

- a. the Church of England not only prays for the persecuted church, but that its dioceses offer support to link dioceses where the church is facing persecution, and
- b. the next Lambeth Conference addresses the issue of the persecution of Christians.

Summary

This motion was originally brought to Lichfield Diocesan Synod by one of its lay members, and his passionately expressed view summarises its aims. He wrote: *‘For many Christians in the U.K. the idea of being persecuted for being a follower of Jesus is unexpected. Perhaps some experience a raised eyebrow or a surprised reaction when sharing the fact that they go to church. Some have experienced tensions in employment situations when asked to perform duties regarded as conflicting with Christian values. Many church attenders do not share this fact with others and generally find it hard to speak about their faith, regarding it as a “private thing”. Therefore the question of opposition does not arise. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that many parishioners would be shocked to discover that Christians in other countries of the world are persecuted just for being a follower of Jesus Christ, in ways that range from discrimination in education and employment through to violent assault and even murder.*

Many Christians worldwide are unable to attend church because there are none in their country. Many live in fear of discovery and are obliged to be secret believers. Some Christian communities are regularly attacked by armed groups who are violently opposed to the Christian gospel.

The New Testament has numerous references to organised practical support from believers in one locality to those in another. Synod is asked through this motion or another with similar aims to draw attention of the person in the pew to the plight of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world in order to stimulate prayer and practical help’.

Introduction

1. This motion draws attention to intensely important questions of Freedom of Religion and Belief, and its denial in many parts of the world, leading to the persecution of people of faith. As we are Christians, we have a particular focus for our Christian brothers and sisters experiencing persecution, but we fully recognise the importance of affirming Freedom of Religion and Belief as a fundamental human right for all. It is often the case that an ecumenical and an inter faith approach to these matters is the right one to adopt – both in acknowledging that people in other faith communities can also experience persecution, and also in allying with people in other faith communities to combat such persecution. We recall the important debate on Freedom of Religion and Belief at General Synod in April 2021, and we value both the work done by the Bishop of Truro’s 2019 review on persecution of Christians and the ongoing work of the

Mission and Public Affairs Department as part of the Freedom of Religion and Belief Network. We believe that this motion provides a timely opportunity to reaffirm this work, particularly in relation to the persecuted Church, ahead of the UK Government hosted Freedom of Religion and Belief ministerial conference and the Lambeth Conference, both in July this year.

2. Link dioceses.

A] Our debate and personal experiences called for a commitment to prayer and action for those in our link dioceses who are experiencing persecution, whether that is the result of abuse of Human Rights and government inaction or personal dislike or hatred of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Other denominations have an International Day of Prayer on the first Sunday in November.

B] Actions. There are dedicated websites which have suggestions, such as www.opendoorsuk.org. There are calls for Bibles and worship and teaching materials, financial help, disaster relief, food parcels, letter writing, schools' assistance etc. Dioceses may wish to issue prayer cards or dialogue with their link dioceses online and record those conversations or have dedicated sermons.

C] World Watch List has an annual update on 19th January of the top 50 countries where persecution of Christians takes place, dominated by countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Last year their statistics reveal:

- 340 million Christians around the world were persecuted for their faith.
- 4472 churches and church buildings were attacked.
- 4761 Christians were killed, 91% taking place in Africa.
- 90000 North Korean Christians were given emergency food and medicine through Chinese networks.

Covid 19 has enabled persecution in denial of aid relief and as a justification for increased surveillance.

North Korea tops the list for 2021 and has done so for 20 years, followed by Afghanistan [even before the Taliban takeover], Somalia, Libya and Pakistan.

3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts in Articles 1, 2 and 18 that:

Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should **act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.**

Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. [extract]

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

The essence of our faith, as taught to us by Jesus Christ, is to love and care for others. John 13v34 says 'I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must love one another'. The second commandment is 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.

4. Speakers in General Synod

- a] Archbishop Angaelos' presence among us at each General Synod is a reminder of the conflict zones and he has spoken movingly of the plight of Christians in his country.
- b] We have also heard from the Archbishop and Primate of Pakistan, who urged us passionately to pray for his country and his people in the last quinquennium of General Synod.

4. Lambeth Conference

- a) Unique opportunities present themselves to discuss and propose support for those who experience persecution at every level.
 - The Archbishop of Canterbury in his extensive worldwide travels in support of Christians around the world has given us a unique view of the violence and the consequences of it in many countries. We have seen photos of him in the embers of churches and at mass graves. He has been able convincingly to hold this advocacy together with a strong commitment to inter faith understanding and inter-communal reconciliation. We have seen his sympathy and empathy for those whose lives are lived in areas of the world in continual conflict and heard his call for the Peace of Christ to be shared. He has given us a window on the world to enable our prayers.
 - This Lambeth Conference comes at a time of deepening anxieties and tensions. We are facing political aggression on the part of different alliances and renewed calls for democracy and respect for others. We hear and understand the uncertainties of the churches in the Middle East, in Iraq, Syria, in China and in many other countries. Both the Lambeth Conference itself and the pre-Lambeth hospitality programmes should provide opportunities to focus on those who need our support and prayers.

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