

CPRC Newsletter

The Church with Open Doors

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Remember the Christians in Iraq

Christianity is under siege in the very place where it was born. In 1947 there were 4 million Christians in Iraq – 12% of the Iraqi population at that time. In 2003 it was estimated that there were 1.5 million left. In 2015, after the employment of the militant Muslim movement called Islamic State (ISIS), estimations put the number to 300 000 – 200 000. But no one really knows.

Compared to some other countries in the Middle East, Christians living in Iraq had been historically in a relative strong position. They had been in Iraq (then a region called Mesopotamia – the “land between the two rivers”) from the first century AD, 600 years before the region was subjected to Muslim reign in 660 AD.

When Muslim armies came from the South West (today’s Saudi Arabia) they did not force the Christian population (then the majority religion in what is today called Iraq) to convert to Islam.

The main purpose of Muslim invaders was to establish a Muslim political rule. Many Muslims were not eager to convert the inhabitants of Bagdad, Mosul and other cities – their main purpose was to establish Muslim political rule, which they did. Some scholars are of the opinion that initially, Muslims were not eager to convert Christians to Muslims because they thought of their own Islam religion as too superior for the Christians living in the Mesopotamia.

Eventually, the majority of people living in what is today called Iraq did convert to Islam, but a sizeable part of the popu-

lation held on to their Christian faith. When Arabic was introduced as the only official language of Mesopotamia, the Christians had to accept Arabic as their first language, but in certain churches they continued to use Aramaic (a Semitic language related to Arabic and Hebrew) as their language of worship.

Most of the churches in Iraq today belong to the Orthodox cluster of churches (to which the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches also belong) – but a minority are part of the Catholic Church. In Bagdad there is even an Anglican church – St George’s Church, which uses Arabic as its language of worship.

Most Christians live in larger cities like Baghdad, Mosul, Arbil and Kirkuk and in Assyrian towns and regions such as the Nineveh Plains in the north.

Today most of those Christians are living in fear of their lives, because of the military success of the militant Islamic group ISIS, who has set it as its goal to destroy churches in the areas they occupied, and who have killed many Christians who refused to convert to Islam.

Christos anéthe! Christos aléthos anéthe! Christ has risen! Christ has risen indeed!

Ironically, Christians were much better off during the cruel reign of Saddam Hussein, whose government was toppled by American forces. Hussein's government did not interfere with Christian worship. One of his ministers was Tariq Aziz, himself a Christian. Aziz (whose Christian name is Youkhana) was not sentenced to death after Hussein's government fall, partly because of a plea from the Catholic Church to spare his life.

Mosul, a city in northern Iraq, now controlled by ISIS, once was city with a large Christian community. According to Patriarch Sako, there are no Christians remaining in Mosul today – for the first time in the nation's history.

Pray for the Christians in Iraq. Pray that not all of them would have to leave Iraq, but that, despite the difficult circumstances they would be able to continue to live in the country they were born – and pray they would be in a position to remain a witness that Christ rose from the dead and is alive.

NEWS

Last Sunday, 30 August, we said goodbye to **Istvan Berko**, who left on Tuesday 1 September for the USA. Istvan will continue to work for the South African company Dimension Data, but from now on in California, USA. It was not an easy goodbye. Istvan, together with his sister Irenke and brother Johan, have been part of CPRC from the day they were born. CPRC, said Istvan in his farewell message, was the church where he was baptised, where he went to Sunday School (where his late mother was one of the teachers), where he was confirmed and in which he was married and served as a deacon. Naldine, Alexa and Kiara will follow later.

Thanksgiving Sunday 6 September

Yes – it is again that time of the year!

The Sunday when the sermon is not brought by the pastor – but by those who have to worship – and that includes YOU!

It is time to sit down and think... for what am I grateful? For what would I like to give thanks to God on Thanksgiving Sunday? Time for the Sunday when the pastor is rested and the worshippers provide the sermon, which can be in any of the different formats.

- You can say or read a prayer of thanksgiving
- You can share – in your own words – why you want to give thanks
- You can give a gift in kind or in money.

Since it is the beginning of spring, many people bring vegetables and fruit. Bags of potatoes or oranges, apples etc are very popular. That is also very helpful to the hostel of Alta du Toit School for mentally handicapped children in Kuilsrivier.

Please think about that – especially those who did not take the opportunity last year. The gifts in kind will go towards the Alta du Toit School .hostel. The gifts in money will go to CPRC ministry, unless otherwise specified.

Continuing CPRC's ministry in 2016

At the church council on 6 August, we spent much time thinking about CPRC's future. As many of you know, Francois Wessels is employed by CPRC on a 50/50 basis – 50% of his time he focuses on the Simcha Ministry to Jewish people and 50% on his ministry to CPRC, and is paid accordingly on a 50/50 basis – by CPRC and by the DRC Synod of Western Cape. The person who should take over from him, will however only be employed by CPRC on 50% basis, since the synod decided not to continue with their 50% part. That means that CPRC cannot simply call some another pastor – we should seek a partner like Simcha Ministry to share a pastor on a 50/50 basis.

The good news is that there are a few candidates available. One of them is a student who has completed his studies in 2014, has already a 50% job with a Christian organization, and is also a musician – very important, since we want to continue the Sunday evening youth ministry started by *55KLF*, who has now moved to another venue. Pray that the Lord will bring the right person to CPRC.

The church council will discuss the matter further on its next meeting, on Tuesday 8 September.