

## significant news for christians

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

# THE Church Around the WORLD

November 2019



## Country in Focus: Argentina (1)

Argentina is Latin America's second largest country and has a wide range of climate, rainfall, and topography. The country has abundant natural resources and a highly educated workforce, but there is a huge gap between the rich and poor, and the middle class is under threat from a shifting economy. A series of inept and corrupt administrations took the nation from one of the world's richest in 1900 to almost total economic meltdown in the latter half of the 20th century. The current commitment to democracy and openness has helped erase the past errors of the military juntas.

Behind the nation's sophistication and postmodern façade, there is an intense struggle for souls—agnosticism, hedonism, materialism, and the occult combine to draw people away from the truth of the Bible. Trained and committed local church leaders are desperately needed, even while mission agencies have a continuing role in teaching the Bible and reaching minority groups. Large-scale evangelism and sustained intercession since 1983 have deeply affected the nation and touched the world, while prison ministries have continued to have a major impact on the nation's jails.

Prayer concerns:

- Pray for the economy to continue to improve.
- Pray for stable government.
- Pray for evangelism and missions efforts to be fruitful.
- Pray for Argentinean church leaders to be raised up.

## Illinois Pro-Choice Bill Requires Parents to Pay for Abortions (2)

Parents who object to their daughter's abortion would be required to pay for it and could be held liable under a pro-choice bill that passed the Illinois House. The bill,

HB 25, declares abortion a "fundamental right," and repeals language that explicitly protected parents from being forced to pay for their daughter's abortion if they didn't give consent.

Current law states: "No parent shall be liable for any expense incurred by his or her minor child when an abortion is performed

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on such minor child without the consent of both parents of such child.” The new bill, which passed 64–50, deletes that section of the law. The bill’s sponsor, Democratic Rep. Kelly Cassidy, responded that the bill is “treating abortion care like other health care.”

## China’s Schools Teaching Children to “Hate God” <sup>(3)</sup>

Children in China’s primary schools are now being taught that belief in God is abnormal and that parents who are religious should not be trusted. The shift is part of the country’s crackdown on Christianity under the new Regulations of Religious Affairs that took effect in February 2018. The new laws

have impacted what is taught in schools, beginning in kindergarten.

“Before starting school, I told my child about God’s creation, and he believed it. But after being taught at school, my child is like a different person. In atheistic China, these pure and innocent children have been taught to hate God,” a Christian mother said. Essentially, schools are grooming children to be atheists, teaching them that religion is “Xie jiao,” a Chinese expression that references anything that is heterodox and should not be trusted. Children are “taught to oppose their religious relatives” and to affirm that “believing in God is abnormal.”

“If your mom goes to church and believes in God, she doesn’t want you as her child anymore,” a teacher told her class.



## This month you can . . . Participate in Operation Christmas Child

**O**peration Christmas Child is a project of Samaritan’s Purse, an international relief organization. Their mission is to provide local partners around the world with shoeboxes filled with small toys, hygiene items, and school supplies as a means of reaching out to children in their own communities with the Good News of Jesus Christ. These simple gifts are distributed outside the United States to children affected by war, poverty, natural disaster, famine, and disease as well as to children living on Native American reservations in the US.

Local ministry partners distribute the shoeboxes to children in their communities. After receiving shoebox gifts, many boys and girls are invited to enroll in The Greatest Journey, a 12-lesson discipleship program. Through the program, local ministry partners are able to establish long-term, caring relationships with children and families by sharing the love of Jesus Christ.

Samaritan’s Purse and Operation Christmas Child seek to demonstrate God’s love in a tangible way through each shoebox gift. One of their core values is to never be manipulative. They

work in and through local volunteers who understand their context and are respectful to the people they serve. At the same time, they do seek to share the gospel wherever they go. In some regions, they are not permitted to distribute literature, but still choose to bless the children with gift boxes carefully prepared by people who love children. Boys and girls do not have to do or say anything to receive their gifts.

*For more information on how to start a program in your church this season, go to [www.samaritanspurse.org](http://www.samaritanspurse.org).*



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## Christians Wearing Crosses Executed in Burkina Faso <sup>(4)</sup>

Anti-Christian violence has continued to spread across the West African nation of Burkina Faso, with a further four believers shot dead.

According to Open Doors USA, heavily armed militants were spotted entering the village of Bani with the aim of hunting down followers of Jesus. The militants proceeded to order everyone in the village to lie down. The terrorists had one clear mission: find those who claim Jesus as their Lord. They searched tirelessly for anything that might identify the individuals as Christ-followers.

Then, tragically, they succeeded—four men were found to be wearing crosses around their necks. As soon as it became clear that these men were Christians, they were dragged away and executed.

The militants then headed through another town, Pougrenoma, where they warned residents, under pain of death, against reporting the incident to any government or military officials. The militants also ordered that any Christians in the community must convert to Islam or risk execution.

Some 27 Christians have been murdered in Burkina Faso since February.

## Eight Christians on Death Row in Pakistan <sup>(5)</sup>

At least eight Christians remain on death row in Pakistan after being convicted under Islamic blasphemy law. No Christians have been executed for blasphemy, but many of them have been languishing in prison for years.

In 2018, Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five who had spent eight years on death row under blasphemy charges, was acquitted by the Pakistan Supreme Court and released. It remains uncertain if the ruling will improve the plight of Pakistan's Christian minority—around 2 percent of the population, or about 4 million. The court freed Asia Bibi because of flimsy and contradictory evidence, while simultaneously confirming that those who break the blasphemy law should be punished.

In Pakistan, even an accusation of blasphemy against Mohammed is often enough to incite a vigilante killing. If not, a Christian so accused will be arrested and charged with defiling the name of Mohammed, a crime that carries a mandatory death penalty. Christians are often falsely accused of blasphemy by Muslims and the superiority given to a Muslim's testimony compared to a non-Muslim makes it difficult for Christians to receive justice.

## Russian Christians Fleeing Persecution Can Stay in Germany <sup>(6)</sup>

Evangelicals have increasingly become the target of Russia's severe anti-evangelism laws, which bar adherents from sharing their faith anywhere but designated church



sites. A German court ruled recently in favor of a Baptist family who fled Russia after suffering repeated insults, physical violence, and threatening phone calls over their missionary activities. Police refused to offer protection to the family, who said they were followed by young men in black uniforms.

Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) initially rejected the Russian Christians' asylum application because it did not consider their persecution to be the result of the Russian government, which guarantees freedom of belief in its constitution. But a Düsseldorf court overturned the decision in early July. The decision cited Russia's 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witnesses and concluded that Baptists, as a fellow

evangelistically oriented faith group, might suffer government persecution as well. The family has been granted the right to stay in Germany.

## One-Fifth of Netherland's Churches Are No Longer Churches <sup>(7)</sup>

Over a fifth of all churches in the European nation of the Netherlands are no longer being used as places of worship. Despite being a traditionally Christian country, the Netherlands has seen a rapid decline in the faith since the 19th century. A vast number of churches have now been converted into apartments, offices, and libraries, or are being utilized for other social or cultural activities. Staggeringly, around 1,400 of the 6,900 registered church buildings are now being used for non-religious purposes.

Among the Catholic denomination, however, churches are more likely to be seen as holy and consecrated spaces and are therefore rarely repurposed into non-worship facilities. "For Roman Catholics the Church is sacred; for Protestants the church is useful," said an observer. "As a result, Roman Catholics are more reluctant to give their churches a different function."

Church attendance in the Netherlands has also seen a dramatic decline. In 1971, 37 percent of the population would attend a religious service on a regular basis. In 2017, this figure was sitting at just 16 percent.

**You faithfully answer our prayers with awesome deeds, O God our savior.**

PSALM 65:5