

Ottoman conquest in 1453. In 1934, however, it became a museum and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

“By deciding to convert the Hagia Sophia back to a mosque you have reversed that positive sign of Turkey’s openness and changed it to a sign of exclusion and division,” Sauca said.



Morocco’s Christians Face Arrest and Harassment ⁽⁶⁾

A clampdown on Christianity in Morocco has led to repeated arrests and harassment of Christian converts, according to Jawad Elhamidy, president of the Moroccan Association of Rights and Religious Liberties. During police interrogations, they are harassed and brought under pressure to abandon their Christian faith. When they refuse, they face abuse. In some cases, police have also threatened their spouses and children with arrest, Elhamidy said. Christians accused of blasphemy report being subjected to violence and to being held by police for several days. Morocco only recognizes two faiths: Islam and Judaism. Foreign Christians living in the country can freely worship according to their faith, but Moroccans cannot.

Christians form a tiny minority in Morocco,

accounting for around 8,000 out of the country’s population of 34.6 million. Converts to Christianity often have to worship in secret house churches to avoid harassment and state sanctions, Elhamidy said.

Christians Celebrate Sudanese Abolishment of Apostasy Law ⁽⁷⁾

Sudan recently abolished the death penalty for apostasy. Prior to this change, Muslims in Sudan could be sentenced to death for converting to Christianity, and even discussing other religions could lead to arrest. This greatly limited Christian evangelism, and Christians were routinely persecuted for their beliefs—including having their property seized by the state. Sudan has long been one of the worst countries in the world for Christian persecution and is listed as number seven in Open Doors’ World Watch List. But campaigners are hoping for greater freedom under the new government.

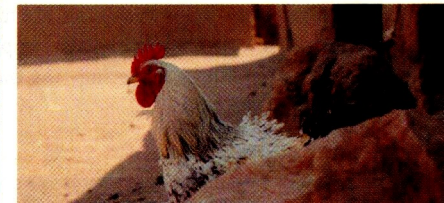
Paul Robinson, CEO of Christian charity Release International, said this regarding the change: “The direction of travel in Sudan was towards ever-tighter Islamic law and restrictions on religious freedom. Today that direction of travel is being reversed. There is freedom in the air.” An Open Doors expert on sub-Saharan Africa called it “an answer to years of fervent prayer by Christians around the world. We applaud the government for showing firm intent in ensuring respect for the human rights of all Sudan’s citizens no matter faith, gender, or ethnicity.”

significant news for christians

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

THE Church Around the WORLD

November 2020



Country in Focus: Malawi ⁽¹⁾

Malawi, a small, landlocked country in central Africa, is densely populated and heavily dependent on agriculture. Because of that dependence, and little other development, cycles of drought and heavy rainfall can have disastrous consequences. The democratic country is relatively peaceful in a region plagued by wars and civil strife, but high population growth continues to exert pressure

on the nation’s ability to feed itself. Malawi faces additional challenges, including high levels of national debt and unemployment. AIDS continues to be a problem—treatment is expensive and health care availability is sporadic.

Malawi has experienced steady spiritual growth, and decades of outreach have led to a widespread evangelical presence. Christian literature is sought after but often very expensive.

Prayer concerns:

- Pray for Christians in the country as Islamic activity increases.
- Pray that the local seminaries and Bible schools in Malawi will continue to teach appropriate theology and train effective church leaders.
- Pray for the unreached expatriate workers who have little or no access to the gospel.

NY Planned Parenthood Removes Margaret Sanger’s Name ⁽²⁾

Acknowledging founder Margaret Sanger’s ties to the eugenics movement as well as her “racist legacy,” Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY) said it would remove her name from a building and also work to scrub her name from an honorary street sign. In a statement, PPGNY said the announcement “reflects the first of many

organizational shifts to address Sanger’s legacy and system of institutional racism.”

“The removal of Margaret Sanger’s name from our building is both a necessary and overdue step to reckon with our legacy and acknowledge Planned Parenthood’s contributions to historical reproductive harm within communities of color,” said Karen Seltzer, board chair at PPGNY.

Sanger’s support of eugenics has long been criticized by pro-life activists. Sanger opened the first Planned Parenthood clinic

Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.
Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

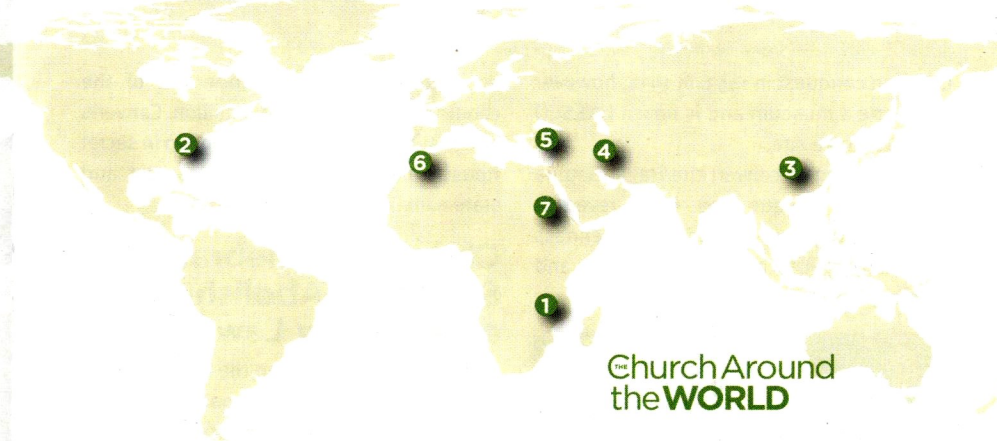
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in 1916 and is considered the founder of the national organization. Pro-life activist and president of Susan B. Anthony List Marjorie Dannenfelser said it was the "first time" in Planned Parenthood's 104-year history "that they've acknowledged their racist roots."

"The next step for Planned Parenthood is recognizing that Margaret Sanger's racist legacy continues today, as abortion continues to disproportionately impact minority communities, especially the black community," she said.

China Withholds Welfare from Christians ⁽³⁾

Christian citizens in China who receive social welfare payments have been ordered to abandon their faith or risk losing government support, according to Bitter Winter, a watchdog organization that monitors reports of persecution in China. Officials from several villages were called together for a meeting and ordered by the government "to remove crosses, religious



This month you can . . . Be a Gracious Christian Online

In one of the most tumultuous years in its history, America is suffering from a "goodwill deficit," especially online. We tend to see those we disagree with as not merely wrong, but evil. But how should Christians behave in this environment? Scripture gives us quite a bit of guidance on how we should use our words and treat those with whom we disagree.

1. Be slow to speak. We should follow James 1:19 and be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (ESV). Before we retweet or post that story that confirms our worst ideas about those with whom we disagree, we should wait to get the whole story. Regardless of what anyone says, we are not required to speak on every topic, at all times, on every platform.

2. Be measured. We should consider how we want to speak and ask ourselves how our words might be misunderstood.

3. Be accountable. We might ask a friend or two before we post, for example, by having a text thread of close friends to try out our hottest takes.

4. Be reasonable. Perhaps most importantly, we should consider Philippians 4:5, which urges us to "let [our] reasonableness be known to everyone" (ESV). The idea of being reasonable seems so out of fashion. Love, however, requires us to strive to be reasonable.

Writing to a warring congregation of Corinthians, Paul says that love "believes all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). Love gives the benefit

of the doubt. It demands that we not see the worst in that person we disagree with. This is not a natural impulse for sinners. It's something God has to do in us. But it's sorely needed in our world.

There is a better way. The way of love. This doesn't mean we never engage in meaningful public debates or write public polemics. This doesn't mean we don't hold the powerful accountable. But we should resist the urge to cancel, to hurt, and to crush. We can pause before we post. And we might consider that we are not always as right as we think we are.

(This selection was adapted from an article by Daniel Darling. His new book is A Way with Words: Using Our Online Conversations for Good.)

symbols, and images from the homes of people of faith who receive social welfare payments" and replace them with portraits of former Chinese leader Mao Zedong and current President Xi Jinping.

"All impoverished households in the town were told to display Mao Zedong images," a house church pastor said. "The government is trying to eliminate our belief and wants to become God instead of Jesus."

In Jiangxi province, government officials withdrew a monthly disability allowance and a living subsidy from a man who is disabled and Christian. A Christian woman in her eighties lost her government assistance after she said "thank God" while receiving her subsidy.

Amid Pandemic, Thousands in Iran Accept Christ ⁽⁴⁾

In Iran, even as the pandemic rages and internal turmoil and violence escalate, hope is rising among Iranian citizens who are finding salvation in Jesus Christ. There has been a remarkable revival, with thousands of Muslims turning to Christianity in the midst of COVID-19.

"That's why we are calling this a pandemic of hope," said Mike Ansari, who runs Mohabat TV, one of the most popular Christian satellite channels in Iran. Ansari

said that Mohabat TV has been recording 10 times more online salvations than this time last year. "We are registering around 3,000 personal decisions by Iranian Muslims to leave Islam for Christianity during this revival," Ansari said. "That's 3,000 people each month who've decided to follow Jesus Christ since the pandemic began in March."

Iran is one of the world's most dangerous places for Christians. Yet, Christianity is growing faster in Iran than in any other country in the world.

Turkey to Convert Hagia Sophia into Mosque ⁽⁵⁾

The head of the Geneva based World Council of Churches (WCC) has written to Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressing "grief and dismay" at his decision to convert the world-famous Hagia Sophia into a mosque. Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Sauca, interim WCC general secretary, said that since 1934, "Hagia Sophia has been a place of openness, encounter, and inspiration for people from all nations and religions. It has been a "powerful expression" of Turkey's commitment to secularism and inclusion and of its desire to leave behind the conflicts of the past."

Hagia Sophia was first built 1,500 years ago as an Orthodox Christian cathedral and was converted into a mosque after the