

## significant news for christians

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

# THE Church Around the WORLD

February 2020



## Country in Focus: Djibouti <sup>(1)</sup>

Djibouti, home to one million people, is a desert enclave of 9,000 square miles between Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. Djibouti has possibly the highest average temperatures of any country on earth. The country's economic assets include the deep water port of Djibouti, the rail links to landlocked Ethiopia, and its status as a free trade zone, but lack of water, arable land, and natural resources make the country dependent on French aid and the large French and American military bases. Unemployment rates of 50 to 80 percent seriously impact the nation's ability to compete.

Serious social and economic issues exist in Djibouti, including widespread poverty and famine and rising urban issues of human trafficking, prostitution, and drug abuse. Islam is the state religion but there is considerable religious freedom for foreigners. The few native believers are often isolated and suffer extreme pressure from relatives, and there is no known church that ministers to the Afars, a primarily nomadic tribe. The hostile physical environment means that working conditions for missionaries are extreme. Djibouti is Africa's third-smallest state and is a haven of calm in a stormy region.

Prayer concerns:

- Pray that Djibouti resists efforts by extremist groups to shape its values and government.
- Pray for the evangelical fellowships that exist among immigrant groups.
- Pray for the native believers to be strong in their faith and that more would come to know Christ.
- Pray that the Bible translation work will continue—a New Testament is now available in Afar.

## Christianity Booming, Atheism Declining Worldwide, Report Says

The headlines might declare that Christianity is declining in the United States, but new research shows it's growing faster than the

population around the world—and atheism and agnosticism are on a gradual decline.

The 2019 Status of Global Christianity report shows there were 2.5 billion Christians in the world as of mid-2019—a major increase from the 1.98 billion Christians in 2000 and more than double

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the number of Christians (1.2 billion) in 1970. Much of Christianity's growth is due to its surge in other continents. Africa (119 million) and Asia (160 million) each have more Christians than North America (100 million). Christianity is growing worldwide at a rate of 1.27 percent each year and is outpacing general population growth (1.20 percent).

By comparison, there were 138 million atheists around the world in mid-2019—slightly more than the 137 million in 2000 but less than the 165 million in 1970. Atheism's annual growth (.04 percent) is less than that of the population, and the number of atheists worldwide is projected to decline to 132 million in 2025.

Agnostics and those affiliated with the “nonreligionists” category also are on the

descent, according to the report. There were 716 million agnostics in the world as of mid-2019, but by 2025 that is projected to fall to 707 million. Nonreligionists numbered 854 million this year but are expected to fall to 839 million by 2025.

## LGBT Protesters Impact Close of First British Chick-fil-A (2)

Barely one week after opening its first restaurant in the United Kingdom, Chick-fil-A is scheduled to close. It was the first permanent Chick-fil-A restaurant in the United Kingdom, although the chain had enjoyed success at pop-up locations.

Officials with The Oracle shopping center in Reading, England, said the restaurant's



## This month you can . . . Pray for Your Neighborhood

**S**omething transformational happens when we walk the streets of our community while conversing with God. This month, choose to believe that the gospel is transformative and that God's Spirit is at work in us and in our neighborhoods by intentionally praying for your community. Hopefully, this will stimulate a lifetime practice of prayer for the place where you live. Whether you reside in the heart of a major city, in suburbia, or in the middle of the countryside, God has people who live right where you are. Love deeply and give your life away for the sake of the Kingdom!

Over a seven-day period, take time to WALK, PRAY, PAY ATTENTION, and LISTEN.

Day One: Lord, please deepen my love for my neighborhood, this place I call home.

Day Two: Lord, help me to learn the names of those living by me.

Day Three: Lord, thank You for the gift of a new day! May You surprise me as I walk these streets and enjoy this time with You. May a “divine appointment” happen today!

Day Four: Lord, would You give me the time and capacity to practice hospitality this month.

Day Five: Lord, help me

be faithfully present in my neighborhood. May I intentionally say yes and no to the right things so I have more time for my neighbors.

Day Six: Lord, please bring to mind specific Scripture that speaks to loving people and the expansion of the gospel.

Day Seven: Lord, please help me identify “people of peace”—people who care deeply about my neighborhood.

*(This material has been developed by the Navigators. For the full list of a 30-day program and more, go to <https://www.navigators.org/resource/30-days-praying-neighborhood/>.)*



six-month lease would not be extended. It had opened eight days earlier but faced protests and opposition from LGBT groups, the BBC reported.

“We always look to introduce new concepts for our customers, however, we have decided on this occasion that the right thing to do is to only allow Chick-fil-A to trade with us for the initial six-month pilot period,” The Oracle said in a statement.

Reading Pride, an LGBT group, pointed to the chain’s donations to faith-centric groups, including to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the Paul Anderson Youth Home, and the US Salvation Army. “Companies like this have no place here in Reading and they have no place anywhere,” Kirsten Bayes of Reading Pride told protesters.

“Our giving has always focused on youth and education,” Chick-fil-A told the BBC. “We have never donated with the purpose of supporting a social or political agenda. There are 145,000 people—black, white; gay, straight; Christian, non-Christian—who represent Chick-fil-A.”

Protests haven’t slowed Chick-fil-A’s growth in the United States, where its sales have doubled since a boycott against it began in 2012. It is the third-largest fast-food chain in the United States in sales.

## China Demolishes 3,000-Seat Megachurch <sup>(3)</sup>

Communist authorities destroyed a 3,000-seat megachurch over a recent weekend, using a large excavator to tear apart the building as members watched helplessly. The large building was located in the province of Anhui, in the eastern part of the country.

According to China Aid, which monitors religious persecution in the country, the congregation was part of China’s officially recognized network of churches. Communist officials lacked the proper legal paperwork to order the destruction, China Aid reported.

“This is yet another clear example showing the escalation of religious persecution today by the Chinese Communist regime,” said Bob Fu, president of China Aid. “The total disregard of religious freedom’s protection as enshrined in the Communist Party’s own Constitution tells the whole world President Xi is determined to continue his war against the peaceful Christian faithful.”

The officials also detained the church’s pastors on suspicion of “gathering a crowd to disturb social order,” China Aid reported.

## Algeria Closes Country's Largest Churches (4)

Authorities in Algeria closed the Tafath (Light) church building in Tizi-Ouzou, a day after sealing shut the country's largest



church despite resistance, sources said.

A third church in northern Algeria, Source of Light church in Makouda, was also closed. One of the pastors said he was surprised how rapidly police acted. After summoning him to the police station, they quickly drove him to the church site, where more than a dozen officers were about to seal the main door.

"As soon as I arrived at the scene, . . . I asked the officer, a lady, to give me the time to look for the keys to be able to recover a few items," Pastor Krireche told Morning Star News. "The officer told me, "I'll give you half an hour; if you're not back then, we go into action and close everything."

The closures bring to 15 the number

of worship buildings sealed since the government launched a campaign against Algeria's Protestant-affiliated churches and other Christian institutions in 2017. The closure orders are based on a 2006 ordinance requiring non-Muslim worship buildings to be licensed, but all applications to do so have remained unattended.

## Christian Tourists Warned to Not Display Bibles in Saudi Arabia (5)

Tourists who display a Bible or take more than one into the country could face possible arrest in Saudi Arabia, according to the Barnabas Fund.

"The new regulations for tourists state that a Bible may be brought into the country provided it is for personal use only," the statement said. "Bibles must not be displayed in public and anyone found bringing a large number of Bibles will face 'severe penalties.'"

Saudi Arabia is a strict Islamist country that forbids anyone from converting to Christianity. Citizens discovered as Christians may face execution by the state for apostasy. Christians from other nations who live in the country worship privately at home at risk of being arrested or deported if caught.

Recently, Saudi Arabia launched a new visa to encourage tourism in the country and avoid heavy dependence on the oil industry, according to the Christian Post.

**May your ways be known throughout the earth,  
your saving power among people everywhere.**

PSALM 67:2