

significant news for christians

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

THE Church Around the WORLD

October 2019



Country in Focus: Zambia ⁽¹⁾

Zambia is a landlocked country in central south Africa. Copper mining and refining have provided most of the country's foreign exchange, but the fall of copper prices, the lack of access to seaports, mismanagement and corruption, huge World Bank debt repayment amounts, and the continuing scourge of AIDS have combined to drive Zambia's economy down. Some 90 percent of its citizens live below the poverty line, yet renewed agricultural investment and a rise in copper prices have indicated that there may be better times ahead.

In 1991, the government declared the country a Christian nation. In 1996, full religious freedom for all faiths was written into the country's constitution. Christianity continues to be widely accepted, even in public institutions and the media. The percentage of evangelicals rose from 4 percent in 1960 to 26 percent in 2010.

Prayer concerns:

- While Zambia remains at peace, many countries surrounding it have been rocked by war, strife, and terrorism.
- The poor economy and corruption in the government contribute to impoverished conditions for the people of Zambia and hamper religious freedom.
- Poverty is widespread—between a third and half of all the children are malnourished, and illiteracy in the rural areas is over 90 percent.
- Many of the best and brightest citizens emigrate to richer nations, leaving a void of educated, capable leadership.
- There is a dire need for Christian literature and training—there are few qualified Zambian pastors and church leaders.
- The use of Christian radio and television ministries has expanded rapidly—pray that they will be able to reach into the rural areas, ill-served by most ministries.

Book Publishers React to Tariffs on Bibles Made in China ⁽²⁾

Book publishers are asking President Donald Trump to reject a proposal for what many are calling a “Bible tax.” The proposed tariffs, about 25 percent, are on \$300 billion of Chinese goods and include printed materials, such as Bibles and children’s

books. These materials are printed in China because of “the unique paper, printing technology and skills needed.”

“We believe the administration was unaware of the potential negative impact these proposed tariffs would have on Bibles and that it never intended to impose ‘a Bible tax’ on consumers and religious organizations,” said Mark Schoenwald, the chief executive officer of HarperCollins



This month you can . . . Talk about Christmas in October

Recent surveys indicate that 82 percent of the unchurched are likely to attend church if a friend, coworker, neighbor, or family member invites them. That means that if you have ten unchurched friends, family, coworkers, or neighbors, eight of them would come to church with you if you asked.

If your church is like most, a Christmas service is one of the most natural times to offer an invitation. Many churches print up invitations and flyers around mid-December. But that may be too late. Christmas is a busy season, full of parties, travel, and lots of obligations. The earlier invitations are provided, and the earlier the congregation is encouraged to use them, the better. Having the invitations ready just after Thanksgiving may provide those few extra days needed.

Here are five reasons why Christmas is a prime time for

invitations to be accepted:

1. The Christmas season brings church and unchurched family members together. The unchurched are often encouraged to go to a Christmas Eve service with their Christian family members.
2. The unchurched may not be overtly religious, but most have some warm memories of Christmas Eve and the entire Christmas season.
3. Most unchurched know and like the songs of Christmas. They are confident they can go to a church service on Christmas Eve and hear those songs.
4. The unchurched are looking for hope in the Christmas season. Many of them come on Christmas Eve expecting to hear a message of hope.
5. Christmas is one of the few times tradition

is embraced by most people, especially the unchurched. Thus, the unchurched fully expect to walk into a Christmas Eve service and to sense, hear, and embrace those traditions.

Here are some additional points to consider:

- Keep Christmas Eve services traditional, simple, and brief. Any message or preaching should be brief as well.
- Remember that most churches do not have child-care for the service, since they promote it as a family service. That’s another reason to keep it brief.
- Sing the well-known songs of Christ’s birth. Many churches end the Christmas Eve service with a candlelight song, typically “Silent Night.”
- Make certain you have a way to capture guest information, and have a plan in place to follow up, even if it’s just a brief email.



Christian Publishing. He said production could not move to another country because China uses materials that other countries do not have.

China Forces Churches to Sing Songs Praising Communist Regime ⁽³⁾

China continues its war against the Christian faith by forcing churches to replace hymns and spiritual songs with those praising the country. Earlier this year, the Chinese government required all believers to sing from Newly Compiled Hymns, a hymnal published by China's Two National Christian Councils. The new required singing includes Bible chapters through a secular lens.

"The hymns published by the government only promote political, secularized content," director of a Three-Self church in China said. "All believers are unwilling to sing them." One of the hymns reads: "China is beautiful; China is great; the sons and daughters of China love China. . . . Bless China, O Lord."

Despite persecution, the Christian population in China continues to rise. China will have the world's largest Christian population by 2030. In 1980 there were approximately 3 million Christians in China. By 2010 that number had risen to 58 million. By 2025, there could be 255 million Christians in China.

Protestant Churches in Cuba Launch New Alliance ⁽⁴⁾

Seven Protestant denominations in Cuba, including the five largest in terms of membership, joined together to launch a new Cuban Alliance of Evangelical Churches in a show of interdenominational unity unseen on the island since the 1959 revolution. A statement signed by the leaders of the seven denominations said, "The primary reason behind the creation of this alliance is that the denominations . . . do not feel represented by the Cuban Council of Churches before the authorities and the Cuban people and feel motivated to work united in the defense of Biblical values."

The move to unify under a new evangelical alliance follows an unprecedented campaign led by the same denominations against a new constitution which was approved in a general referendum recently. The new constitution contains significantly weakened language on freedom of religion or belief and freedom of conscience as compared to the previous constitution. Since the referendum, the five largest Protestant denominations have said that the Cuban government has barred them from receiving any visits from abroad.

Christian Leaders in Sri Lanka Condemn Attacks on Muslims (5)

Following widespread reports of anti-Muslim violence in Sri Lanka, the country's Christian leaders have released a statement condemning the violence. These leaders have called on Sri Lanka's Christians to practice Christ-like forgiveness and reconciliation to overcome the communal tensions currently plaguing many areas of the country.

"After the tragic and senseless bombings targeting Christians, we are grieved to hear of further attacks, this time against Muslims," Efraim Tendero, Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), said. "As followers of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, we unequivocally condemn any violence, whether against Christians, Muslims or any other group of people of different or no faith."

On Easter Sunday, suicide bombers attacked three churches and three hotels across Sri Lanka, killing more than 250 people, many of whom were Christians attending services. In the days that followed, ISIS claimed responsibility for the deadly attacks, and anti-Muslim violence across Sri Lanka surged. Muslim homes, businesses, and places of worship have been targeted by mob violence. In an effort to curb the growing violence, security forces have imposed a nationwide curfew and Christian leaders have called on their communities to not participate in the confrontations.

GPs Want More Chaplains in UK Hospitals (6)

General practitioners (GPs) in the United Kingdom are requesting more in-house chaplains to provide a growing number of patients with spiritual care. Patients struggling with conditions that cannot be treated solely through medical means are being referring to local chaplains, in a bid to address issues of brokenness and self-worth that could be impacting people's physical health.

Dr. Ross Bryson, Head of the Karis Medical Centre, is one GP who sees spiritual ministry as a vital part of patient care and has secured funding for a chaplain to serve the spiritual needs of patients at his West Birmingham surgery. "There are factors in our humanity which are not emotional: they are issues to do with meaning and belonging and connectedness, and hope, and being valued. We are all overwhelmed in general practice with distressed people. And when we know there is someone who can be trusted to help with this person and walk alongside them, then I think we all want that."

The Royal College of General Practitioners has endorsed the concept, acknowledging the importance of spiritual care for patient recovery.

The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.

ROMANS 8:26