



Open Doors

FAITH OVER FEAR

THE OPEN DOORS MAGAZINE

**Faith that
defies fear**

**Meet the
survivors of the
Syria church
bombing**



2026 VOLUME 3

BJ's MyDay

Today, I put on the shoes of a Christian in the Middle East going to his church.

When you receive this magazine, most likely it's June, and a church in Damascus, Syria, is about to (or may have already) observed one year of their church being bombed. Exactly a year ago, a suicide bomber entered Mar Elias Church, detonated himself, and killed 22 worshippers inside.

Who would have thought that going to church can be that dangerous?

For so many of us, it was an "ordinary" Lord's Day: we prepared, dressed up, made our way to church, went to the Sunday School room if you were assigned that day, or backstage as part of the worship team, or simply sat in your favorite seat as you waited for the service to begin. Maybe some of us went straight to the mall or restaurant afterwards to spend the rest of the day with our families. Maybe for some it was our only rest day that week. Still, we went home *safe, our family complete*, and ended the day with anticipation of the coming new week.

But for those inside that church that day, loved ones were lost. Hundreds survived, daily bringing the trauma of what happened. A mother said that even after a year, her children panic and hide with the slightest sound.

Will you still go to church if it happened to you? Will you still follow Jesus?

"Even though we are afraid, we still go [to church]. Our ambition is to remain faithful," says the courageous remnant of the Mar Elias Church.

In Open Doors, our answer to that, anchored on God's call for the last 70 years in Rev. 3:2, is to *strengthen what remains* – to help them be faithful indeed, to inspire you to be faithful in your walk, and for one day, hear Jesus say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Come and share your Master's happiness!" (Matt. 25:23).



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DEFIANT FAITH, AND YOUR PRAYERS

Across the Middle East, persecuted Christians are holding on. Remaining, despite pressure to leave. Faithful, amid fear. They urgently need your prayers.

PRAY WITH SETAREH, IRAN

Setareh* froze, her heart racing. At the beauty salon where she worked, a woman had just walked in wearing a small cross around her neck. Setareh approached discreetly... "Do you believe in Jesus?" she whispered. "No, but I like him," replied the woman.

It was a crossroads moment.

"In that moment, I felt God's presence with me."

Should Setareh tell the woman about Jesus? What if she was a spy? There were rumours the Iranian government were cracking down on Christian converts. Was Setareh putting herself in terrible danger?

"In that moment, I felt God's presence with me," says Setareh – and she boldly shared the gospel.

The woman came to faith in Jesus, followed by two family members. Today Setareh is a courageous and powerful witness in Iran, leading groups of young believers

and providing home-cooked meals to street children and homeless adults.



Now, Setareh needs your prayers:

- Give thanks for Setareh's courageous faith, and ask God to strengthen her.
- Pray for protection and wisdom in her ministry. Pray Setareh will continue to see fruit.
- Pray for courage, protection, and perseverance amidst conflict in Iran and the Middle East.



Setareh is strengthened by the prayers of her brothers and sisters across the world.

PRAY WITH ZAID, YEMEN

Zaid* waited nervously on a street corner. What he was about to do could get him jailed. Even killed.

Soon Zaid spotted the man sent by Open Doors partner, Alaa*. They shook hands and walked together to a nearby public swimming pool. It was a busy day. The pair found a corner and slid quietly into the water. Zaid continues the story...

“The man asked me two simple questions about my faith. Then he baptised me. In and out of the water. Then we got out and left. I never saw him again. That was the first time I met a Christian face-to-face in Yemen.”

It was a milestone moment, the culmination of a long search for truth and meaning. Zaid had first encountered Jesus in a dream. He met Alaa online and, one text message after another, Zaid’s faith and understanding grew.

“The more time I spent with God, the more he changed me. I am a new creation in Him!”

“For 18 months I went on a discipleship journey with Alaa. I never met him, I didn’t even hear his voice,” says Zaid. “But the



Zaid and the faithful remnant in Yemen are counting on your prayers.

more time I spent with God, the more he changed me. I am a new creation in Him!”

The decision to be baptised was costly for Zaid. His father beat him, and his family disowned him and threw him out. But even though many Christians leave Yemen because of persecution, Zaid is determined to remain. “I want to stay and serve my people,” he says.

Today, Zaid depends on your prayers and support:

- Pray for believers like Zaid to be courageous and faithful witnesses to Christ.
- Ask the Lord to renew the strength of Yemeni believers amid conflict and isolation.
- Pray for deep fellowship, unity and encouragement among Yemeni Christians.

*Names changed for their protection

A silhouette of a man's head and shoulders in profile, facing left. His hands are raised in front of him, palms facing each other. The background is a warm, golden light with vertical streaks, suggesting a stage or a dramatic setting. The overall mood is one of hope and inspiration.

LIGHT IN DARK PLACES

**Zaid* has a vision:
40,000 active house
churches across
Yemen. Your support is
strengthening this brave
leader – and fuelling a
powerful ministry.**

Thank you for your gifts and prayers, which
are strengthening the church in Yemen.

Following Jesus in Yemen is about as hard as it gets.

This Islamic nation, south of Saudi Arabia, is among the top three most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian. Converts face death and most believers keep their faith secret. Meanwhile, years of war have left



Your support helps Zaid to secretly meet with other believers

the economy shattered. Hunger and hardship is rife.

But Yemen is where God has called Zaid* – and, in a tiny Christian community, your gifts and prayers are strengthening a remarkable leader.

“I remain here, with my family and my brothers, because it is

important to wake them up,” says Zaid, who grew disillusioned with Islam as a teenager and started searching for truth. “Yemen needs Jesus.”

Your support meant that when Zaid first came to faith, he was discipleshiped by an Open Doors partner. Now, your gifts are resourcing Zaid’s ‘discipleship house’, where new believers can meet, live together and learn about God.

“My vision is to have 40,000 house churches in Yemen,” he says, “One for every 1,000 Yemenis, so they can enjoy fellowship and grow together.”

Future hope

Zaid takes courage from Paul, in the New Testament. “Paul lived in a dangerous place, similar to me,” says Zaid. “He was surrounded by Pharisees; I’m surrounded by extremists. But Paul transformed his community from darkness

to light. If Paul can do it – and he is a human being, just like me – then I can also do it.”

In Zaid’s secret discipleship house, new Christians gather to study the Bible and discuss difficult questions. The country’s future house church leaders will come from here, Zaid hopes.

Your financial support is vital, of course. But above all, Zaid values your prayers.

“Not long ago, we asked for specific prayers and received a voice note on WhatsApp,” says Zaid. “We played the recording at our meeting. It was amazing... Like a spiritual recharge for our batteries. Not only for me, but for all present. We are very encouraged to know you are praying for us.”

“IF PAUL CAN DO IT, I CAN TOO.”

Thanks to your steadfast support, Zaid has fearless faith – and, because of you, he remains in Yemen. “God was with the early church, giving them the capability and resources,” says Zaid. “And he is with us. We should go to the dark places. We are the light, and we carry the light within us, so that everybody gets to see it.”

PLEASE PRAY

WWL
03

- Give thanks for Zaid’s courageous ministry, and pray for God’s protection on him.
- Zaid says, “Pray for peace in Yemen... peace from war but also spiritual peace.”
- Lift up the secret believers attending Zaid’s discipleship house. Pray for faith to grow.

*Name changed for his protection

FINDING HEALING

Thanks to you

Your support put Jenny on a path to healing after her father was killed. Now, she's helping other believers traumatised by violent persecution in Syria.

A bomb attack rocked Jenny's world. But your gifts and prayers are strengthening her faith – and empowering her to help others.

Jenny was chatting with a friend outside her home, enjoying the warm evening, when an explosion ripped through the peace – and her world changed in an instant.

Suddenly, messages started flying around. The blast was at Mar Elias Church... A suicide bomber... People were dead... Her father had been at Mass, he wasn't answering his phone...

"At that moment, I felt everything ceased to exist," remembers Jenny. "I was shaking all over. I sat down because I couldn't stand up."

"THE LORD IS ON OUR SIDE AND THE CHURCH WILL BE STRENGTHENED."

Jenny raced to the church, in the Dweila area of Damascus, Syria. It was a scene of chaos and desperation. Then to the hospital. Jenny's father was in surgery, badly wounded. But soon the news came: he had not survived.

Jenny was shocked, heartbroken and numb with grief. But in her darkest days, you were there – and your prayers and kindness put Jenny on a path towards healing.

Loved and supported

"We were shown affection by everyone, including all churches worldwide," says Jenny, when she thinks back to the days after her father's death. "We knew there were people who loved us, who shared our sadness, who were affected by what we'd been through."

Your support has helped to train trauma counsellors in Damascus – and Jenny is one of them. The techniques she learned helped her process her own grief. "I knew I was experiencing trauma and post-traumatic stress," says Jenny, "so I tried to help myself using methods that would support me."

Now, strengthened by you, this courageous woman is volunteering as a counsellor to help

other young victims of the Mar Elias Church bombing. "It's my duty to stand beside them and support them, just as I received support along the way," she says.

Your generous gifts mean trauma healing is available to children and adults, through group or individual sessions. The programme mixes biblical teaching with counselling methods, and the focus is on bringing people back to God. Faith can help people heal – but violence and persecution, like the church attack, can spark doubts.

"The fear people faced needs time, but time heals," says Jenny. "God is all goodness. When we go to him, there is no better place. We need to be in our church. I hope the churches will go back to being full to the brim."

She added, "Prayers are what we need most right now. We need divine help to get through what we are facing."



Your support helped Jenny return to Mar Elias Church.

**WWL
06**

PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for Jenny as she continues to heal from the grief and pain of the bomb attack.
- Give thanks for the Syrian Christians trained by Open Doors to provide trauma healing.
- Jenny says, "Pray for the children to be strong. It is hard for them to forget what they saw at Mar Elias Church."



FAITH OVER FEAR



Lives were ripped apart when a suicide bomber attacked this church. A year on, Elias and his family remain in Syria. But they need your help.

The attack took just 30 seconds.

Thirty seconds for a suicide bomber to kill 22 Christians. To destroy Saint Elias Church, in Damascus, Syria. And to leave this family

broken and reeling.

Elias, 56, and his wife Hanan, 39, will never forget what happened on Sunday June 22 last year. They lost seven family members. "It was a massacre," says Elias. "We went through 14 years of civil war, but an assault inside the church is unheard of."

The father-of-five thinks back to the moment when 300 people in the church were startled by the sound of gunshots...



Mar Elias Church, in the Dweila area of Damascus, Syria, after the devastating bomb attack. 22 Christians lost their lives.

A MASSACRE

“The door was thrown open, and we were assaulted by a terrorist shooting left and right,” remembers Elias. “My brothers, Boutros and Geryes, charged and tackled the terrorist. But he detonated his explosives.”

The blast killed people instantly – and plunged the church into chaos, confusion and fear. “You cannot imagine the scene,” says Elias. “The church turned red.”

A shard of metal hit Elias in the thigh, and he was bleeding badly. His two brothers and a sister were killed. Meanwhile, Hanan searched for the children in panic. “I started shouting for them, saying to myself, Lord, *please let me find one more child*,” she says, holding back tears.

“We experienced faith and fear.”

ELIAS

“I saw a girl with blood coming out of her eyes. Her face was swollen and her hair was burned. I looked down and recognised the shoes she was wearing – and realised it was my daughter.” Elias, Hanan and their children survived. But while the attack lasted only 30 seconds, this family lives with the trauma and memories every day.

DWINDLING CHURCH

Conflict and persecution have driven thousands of Christians to leave Syria in recent years. In 2011, there were around 1.8 million believers. Now, the church numbers just 300,000 people.

The bombing at Mar Elias Church struck at the very heart of a dwindling community. Many believers no longer feel safe going to church. But, even amid fear, faith is alive. Recently, 22 children were baptised at Mar Elias, the same number of Christians who lost their lives in the June 2025 attack.

“We go to church, but fear exists. Yet even if we are afraid, we will still go,” says Hanan, her words filled with fearless defiance. Leaving Syria may be an option in the future. But for now, they remain: “If it is God’s will, we will stay.”



Elias, 56, lights candles to remember his siblings killed in the bombing.

“FAITH BUILT ON ROCK”

Recently, the family returned to Mar Elias Church for the first time since the bombing. Workmen pause while the family light candles at the altar.

Elias leans on a crutch, and metal pins protrude from his leg. The children, Elen, Sarah, Taqla, Ibrahim and Christina, are nervous. A car horn

sounds outside, and Ibrahim panics and flees with his siblings. Their trauma is raw and easily triggered. "The children fear the smallest sound. They think they're being attacked," explains Hanan, sadly.

This family carries deep scars, but they know one thing for certain...

"No matter what happens, we will come to church."

HANAN

"We experienced faith and fear here. But we know the Lord will not forsake us," says Elias. "Our faith is built on rock, not bubbles of soap."

At Open Doors, our vision is to strengthen the bold faith of Christians like Elias, Hanan and

their children. Dozens of church leaders in Syria have been trained to run trauma healing workshops, and Elias and Hanan's children regularly attend sessions in Damascus.

Raneen*, a trained psychologist who leads Open Doors' trauma healing in Syria, says "True healing is found in Jesus Christ. We want to bring people back to God." But this vital work can only happen with your gifts and prayers. Families like Elias and Hanan's depend on your support.

Back at his home, Elias picks up an icon of Jesus as the Good Shepherd that he saved from the church rubble, still marked with dried blood. "We live day by day," he says. "We have no ambition but to remain faithful."

*Name changed for their safety

Will you support faith that defies fear?

PLEASE GIVE

Every PHP 1,500 supports a Persecuted Christian to attend a persecution-preparedness training.

Every PHP 2,500 supports our trauma care ministries for Persecuted Christians.

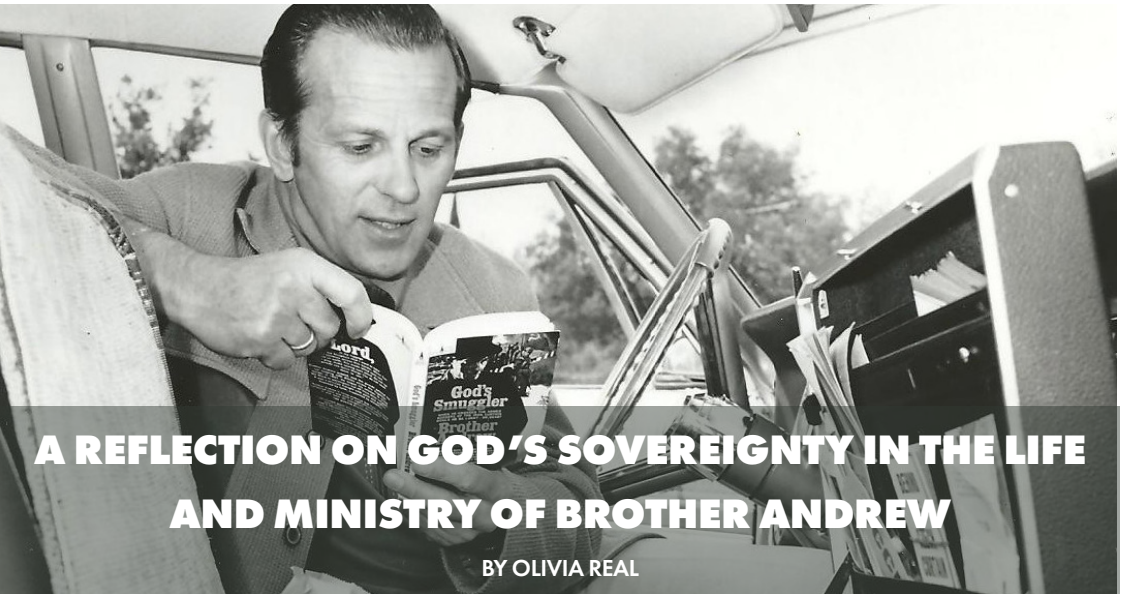
Every PHP 3,500 supports a Christian family who fled or lost sources of income due to persecution.

PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for Elias, Hanan and their five children. Ask God to strengthen their faith, heal their wounds, and empower them as witnesses to the Lord's goodness.
- Pray for Open Doors' local partner in Syria, who has lived through war, violence and disasters. Give thanks for their service to the Syrian church and pray for strength.
- Pray for faithful remnants of believers everywhere, who keep following Jesus despite fear, loss and persecution. Pray they will know they are not alone.



Your support can provide trauma healing to children who survived the attack on Mar Elias Church.



A REFLECTION ON GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF BROTHER ANDREW

BY OLIVIA REAL

In the spring of 1945, World War 2 ended. The Germans left and the people wept for joy in the streets of Witte, Netherlands. Among them was a young boy, named Andrew van der Bijl, who had run for five miles to a Canadian encampment just to beg for a bag of dry crusts. As his mother gnawed the dry crusts, tears of gratefulness rolled down her cheeks. They realized the war was finally over.

Later, Brother Andrew would be used by God to bring Bibles to the most dangerous and persecuted countries. He knew that coming to these countries would endanger his life, but he believed that God will protect him throughout his mission. One unforgettable moment was when he travelled into Communist Poland with many hidden Bibles in his Volkswagen. Border guards carefully searched vehicles for illegal items, the Bible was one of them. Before crossing the checkpoint, Brother Andrew prayed this prayer:

“LORD, I have Scriptures to take to your children. When You were on earth, You made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind.” God answered. People received Bibles.

Brother Andrew's life reminds us of God's sovereign grace, protection, and provision. It shows us that hardships such as poverty, afflictions, disastrous circumstances, and the struggle to survive do not and will not hinder nor change God's plans. God was, God is, and God will remain wisely, purposefully, and lovingly in

control of all things. Everything is ordained by Him and Him alone!

He used Brother Andrew - one person to bring hope and comfort to those being persecuted. A pointer to that One Person who is called Blessed Hope and Fountain of all Comfort for all eternity - Christ Jesus, who promises to stay with us through every trial. Even in times of trouble, God accomplishes things for our good and for the display of His glory. Yes, we may think that we are hopeless and even feel like it's over, when it isn't. God is always there for us, and He is with us, even to the end of time.

**Olivia is from Guiding Light Christian Church in San Carlos, Pangasinan. Open Doors PH visited their church in May for ministry updates and facilitate a prayer time for the Persecuted Church.*



Brother Andrew, 1928-2022

BRING OPEN DOORS TO YOUR CHURCH!



BJ Candole at Odiongan Fourquare Gospel Church



Ptr. Nap Aguinaldo Jr. at GCF Naga

Help us spread the word about our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ by inviting Open Doors to share in your Worship Service, Prayer Meeting, or Missions Month!

What you will hear:

- The latest information and statistics on today's worldwide Christian Persecution
- Moving stories and (video) testimonies of believers pressing on the Great Commission despite severe persecution
- How Open Doors has been strengthening the faith of Persecuted Christians in the last 70 years
- And how you and your church can be involved!

Plus: a ministry booth display with exclusive Open Doors-merchandise to support Persecuted Christians!

Message us with your church name, possible date or month, and church event (Worship Service, Prayer Meeting, etc.) to: **SMS/Viber: 0998-8830821** or **e-mail: philippines@od.org.**

See you in your church this 2026!

June 2026

Caloocan Christian Church, Caloocan City

United Evangelical Church of the Philippines, City of Manila

Gerizim Evangelical Church, City of Manila

July 2026

PCEC Prayer and Retreat, Tagaytay

September 2026

Living Word Christian Churches, Cebu City

Living Word-IT Park, Cebu City

October 2026

UECG-Metro East, Marikina City

Christ the Blessed Hope Christian Church, Cainta

November 2026

Bethany Church, Cebu City



STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS

REVELATION 3:2

Will you support faith that defies fear?

Elias and his family were in church when a suicide bomber attacked. 22 Christians were killed. Their lives were ripped apart. But they're still here. Faithful. Now they urgently need your support.

Every PHP 2,500 supports our trauma care ministries for Persecuted Christians.

“We experienced faith and fear here,” says Elias. “But the Lord will not forsake us.”

Give now at www.opendoors.ph/donate

Or scan here with your phone

Or message us at 0998-8830821 (Viber/SMS/WhatsApp), or philippines@od.org (e-mail).



Thank you.

 **OpenDoors**