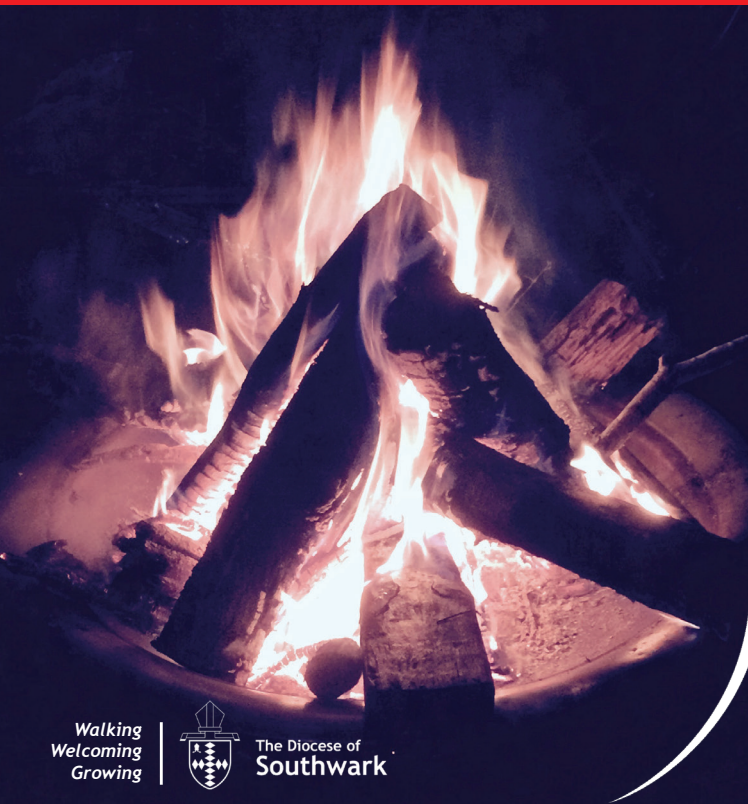




#Pledge2Pray

Thy Kingdom Come

Everyday Faith —
Hidden Church



*Walking
Welcoming
Growing*



The Diocese of
Southwark

Introduction

Thy Kingdom Come in our every day...

Inspired by the simple yet powerful words of the Lord's Prayer, Thy Kingdom Come is a global prayer movement which invites Christians around the world to pray, between Ascension and Pentecost, for God's Kingdom to come into their everyday lives.

We are also encouraged during this time to pray for others to experience God's love, whether that is friends and family, or those Christians around the world who must practise their faith in secret.

This booklet focuses on the Hidden Church, and Christians who are persecuted. It can be used during Thy Kingdom Come or at a time of your choosing. For more ideas on how to mark Thy Kingdom Come in other ways, see southwark.anglican.org/tkc.

Hidden Church. Imagine having to keep your faith secret. Let us go on a journey together...

When church becomes a secret, persecution is happening. It is when you cannot let anyone see your prayer, your worship, or your Bible being read. Imagine how hard that would make it to follow Jesus.



The Southwark Vision is to see “justice and peace built up, and violence challenged in our local and global community”. We have an opportunity during the nine days between Ascension and Pentecost to pray for anyone who is persecuted for their faith and for those who cannot freely pray.

The Apostle Paul wrote that when one part of the Body of Christ suffers, every part suffers with it, and if one part is honoured, every part rejoices (1 Corinthians 12:26).

You may like to light a candle each day as you read about someone somewhere who has only Christ to hold on to. Join them in their prayer.

The Revd Sue Thomas

Day 1: North Korea

For the persecuted church, fires are crucial. They make great hiding places. Imagine you had to hide your Bible to keep it out of sight should your house be searched.

Digging a pit in the ground, placing your Bible in a plastic bag, and burying it, then lighting a fire over it, will keep it safe.



North Korea is one place where this happens. Faith is under constant surveillance. Between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians, as well as many others, languish in camps. Secret faith thrives.

We cannot easily light a fire in our lounges but we can light a candle. Find one and light it. Say a prayer for those who hide their Bibles, that they may keep their faith strong.

Read this verse from your Bible for them:

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

John 1:5

Pray...

Loving Lord, we pray for those in darkness, that they may see the light of Christ surrounding them. May Christ's love be known in the camps, by our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Come Holy Spirit... *[Pause and listen to what God is saying to you.]*

Thy Kingdom Come.

Day 2: Syria

When symbols of hope come crashing to the ground in times of war, worship is difficult. Syria endured invasion by Isis. Broken crosses leaned at odd angles on the tops of church roofs. Places of worship were damaged. People scattered. Churches had to be rebuilt.



You may like to take some twine, two twigs and make a cross. Perhaps you could do this with others. Say a prayer holding the cross. Then untie it. Disassemble it. Pretend it was never there. Think what it is like to destroy a symbol most dear to you; to almost deny your faith. We can have crosses in our homes and not worry about anyone finding them.

Light a candle. Pray for families who have had to flee and for the rebuilding of churches and communities.

“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”

Isaiah 12:3

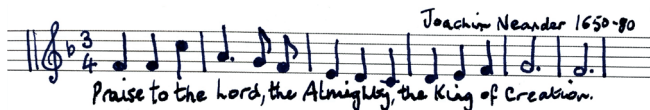
Pray...

Lord God, we pray for those rebuilding faith and community. May they draw strength in knowing the depth of Christ's love for them. Help me to know what I can do.

Come Holy Spirit... *[Pause and listen to what God is saying to you.]*

Thy Kingdom Come.

Day 3: Sudan



In Sudan, new Christians who have left another faith find singing at home dangerous. Their faith has to be kept secret. If their family finds out they will be put under house arrest.

Sudan's persecution happens at a social level, but Sudanese Christian and Muslim religious leaders are making great changes. They have declared that they will promote peace and freedom of worship among different faiths. It will take time for this to filter down to a local level. When you light your candle, think of those who cannot sing out loud. Sing your favourite hymn or worship song in a whisper or even try to sing it without making a sound. Maybe do this with others.

*"What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light;
and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the
housetops."*

Matthew 10:27

“Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Isaiah 12:6

Pray...

Lord, we pray that new faith is strengthened. Let silent worship be the loudest praise.

Come Holy Spirit... *[Pause and listen to what God is saying to you.]*

Thy Kingdom Come.

Day 4: Nigeria

I met Tirham* at Westminster Abbey's Chapter House (pictured right). She lives in Nigeria and told me about extremist Fulani herdsmen who target Christian



villages. I imagined what it would be like if people walked into my personal space to do unspeakable things.

Tirham set up a Trauma Centre to offer counselling, prayer and support for 16 Christian women every week. As we held hands, we realised the enormity of the situation. As we hugged, she whispered “Jesus”, knowing she was heard. She carried the great cost of supporting women who could not share what they had seen with their families.

Behind us, in the image, is a handmade petition of 16,000 fabric squares put together by the Christian charity Open Doors UK. It was handed to the UK

Government to seek an end to sexual violence in conflict. Each square says “I see you” to women persecuted for their faith. My church contributed 20 squares.

You may like to follow the links listed on page 23 of this book to find similar initiatives. As you light a candle, pray for Tirham and all traumatised, persecuted women.

“But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.”

Micah 7:7

Pray...

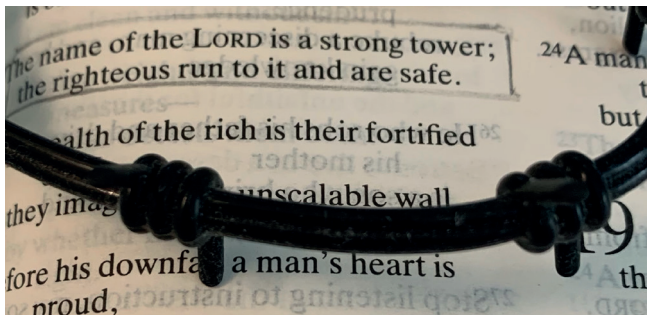
Lord God, we pray for peace and hope for Tirham and all traumatised, persecuted women.

Come Holy Spirit... *[Pause and listen to what God is saying to you.]*

Thy Kingdom Come.

**Tirham's name has been changed to protect her identity*

Day 5: China



The Church in China is growing with an estimated 90 million Christians. Churches have to be state-registered, with sermon content and congregations monitored by technology.

One 60-year-old pastor is in prison because his church is unregistered. He told a charity helping him that, in his prison cell, persecution strips everything away until it is just you. All he has to do is get to know Christ.

Having no Bible in a cell makes memory recall vital. Try recall for yourself. Find a verse, write it on a scrap of paper. Memorise it. Encourage others to do

the same. Destroy the paper. Recall it later and pray for someone who would have to do that.

As you pray, remember all Church leaders, and those of other faiths, who languish in prison cells. As you light a candle, recall your verse.

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe.”

Proverbs 18:10

Pray...

Lord, may the light of Christ be known in prison, in the cells. Give those imprisoned the courage to stand firm and hold on to Christ.

Come Holy Spirit... *[Pause and listen to what God is saying to you.]*

Thy Kingdom Come.

Day 6: Afghanistan

Afghans who follow Christ must hide their faith. They cannot be seen to be meeting together. There are no physical church buildings. They worship either in a house church or by going out to a place in the desert where they will not be found.



Most Christians in Afghanistan do not own a Bible. The danger of owning one is extreme. They may hide a Bible in the roots of a tree. Try to hide your Bible well —

not just tucked under the sofa. Perhaps wrap it in a duvet and push it deep into a cupboard. You could even put it in a plastic bag and hide it in the garden if you have one.

Then go to it during the day and read it without anyone seeing you. Close it. Re-hide it. Say a prayer. Make sure no one sees you.

“Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them.”

Psalm 91: 14-15

Pray...

Lord God, We pray for your protection for those who love you. May they find shelter under your wings; may they know your faithfulness and hear you answer their call.

Come Holy Spirit... *[Pause and listen to what God is saying to you.]*

Thy Kingdom Come.

Day 7: Sri Lanka — Part 1



I met a Mum and her two children in my local woods as I prayed Morning Prayer on my phone. I spotted that she was doing the same. I said, “I’m doing what you’re doing”, and we laughed.

As we got talking she said that her relatives in Sri Lanka were suffering. They were

Christians. COVID-19 had brought jobs to a halt. They were hungry today and she couldn’t do anything. When people queued for government aid in Sri Lanka, the family found themselves at the back and got little to eat. Food distribution at worship centres meant Christians got overlooked.

I mentioned organisations that might help. COVID-19 food insecurity like this is common across many nations and you may like to consider supporting an organisation that provides food packs for people like

this family. Perhaps share this story about being at the back of a food queue with someone today. As you light your candle, pray for all who suffer persecution because of COVID-19.

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’ And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.”

Matthew 19: 14-15

Pray...

Lord God, give me the compassion of heart to take practical action to see change happen.

Come Holy Spirit... *[Pause and listen to what God is saying to you.]*

Thy Kingdom Come.

Day 8: Sri Lanka — Part 2

Easter services at three churches in Sri Lanka were bombed in April 2019.

Father Nishantha Cooray, a Franciscan who helped minister to the injured and dying from those attacks, said at Aid to the Church in Need's annual Westminster event in 2019: "People need healing. We are accompanying them through their pain. They have lost so much but they are still full of love for the Lord."

A pastor from one of the bombed churches spoke at the Parliamentary launch of the 2020 World Watch List, Open Doors' annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution. Rehman Chishti MP (pictured above), then the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief, told the pastor, "We stand by you."



Sharing stories like this with our MPs helps them to understand our concern and encourages them to try to bring about change. A 10-minute meeting with my own MP led to two debates on Christian persecution. I never thought this would happen. Perhaps think about writing or speaking to your MP.

“Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

Luke 24:39

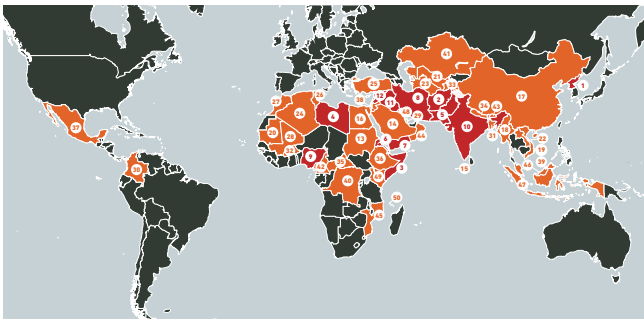
Pray...

Lord God, May those who hurt know your healing touch. Give us courage to speak out for those who hurt and have no voice.

Come Holy Spirit... *[Pause and listen to what God is saying to you.]*

Thy Kingdom Come.

Day 9



Open Doors UK World Watch List 2021 top 50 most persecuted nations

Over these nine days we have looked at seven nations, six of which are on 2021's World Watch List. Choose five countries or one of your own...then pray for them:

Another way to pray is to write the name of each country on five stones and scatter them around your home. Perhaps put one by the kettle, one in the bathroom, one by the phone, one by the front door, one on the sofa.

Think of the individuals whose lives have touched you: perhaps think of Tirham, or the Sri Lankan pastor, or the Chinese pastor. Pray for those in positions of power, the MPs, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Pray...

Lord God, we pray for persecuted Christians across the world. We pray for people of all faiths and none who face persecution. May we have the deep compassion and love of Christ for your “Hidden Church”.

Come Holy Spirit... *[Pause and listen to what God is saying to you.]*

Thy Kingdom Come.

What will I do next?

Perhaps make a decision to pray, speak out, or act in some way and write that down. Give yourself a time limit.

Follow up

You may like to find out something more about the persecuted church. Here are some links to follow:

Aid to the Church in Need

www.acnuk.org

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

www.csw.org.uk

Open Doors UK

www.opendoorsuk.org

Bible extracts are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)



The Diocese of
Southwark

**Together we are called
to be a living witness
to others in our homes,
schools, workplaces,
churches and communities.**

Find your local church at
AChurchNearYou.com



The Diocese of Southwark

Loving God
Walking with Jesus
Led by the Spirit

Luke 24:13-35

***Walking
Welcoming
Growing***