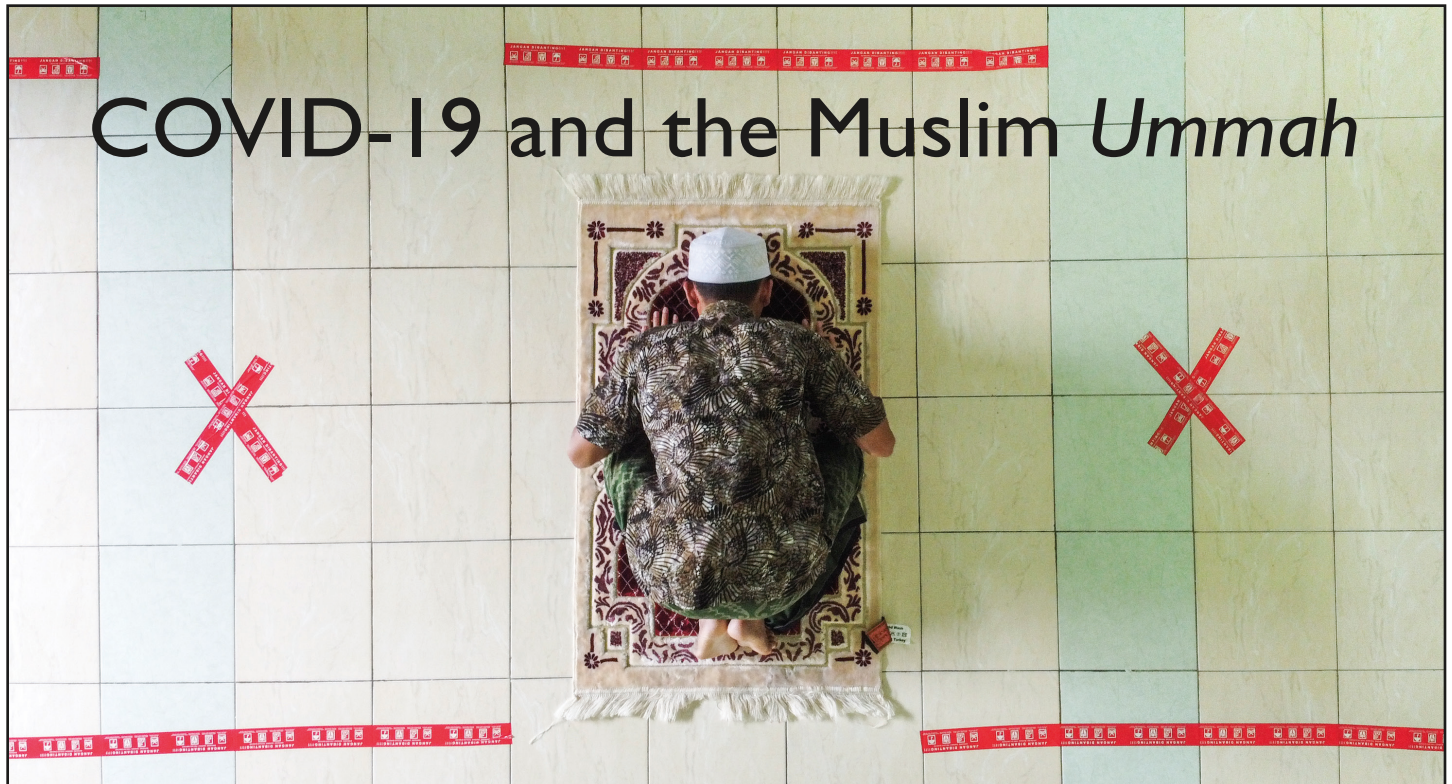


# INTERCEDE

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By Lynda Hausfeld

It is no coincidence that I would be researching and writing this *Intercede* article just weeks and days before my husband and I would find ourselves in the midst of a COVID experience. Now, on the day I'm supposed to be tying together research and a message, my husband has been taken by ambulance to the hospital because of worsened COVID symptoms. Today each of us will be facing COVID's physiological uncertainties separately but from a distance.

Today's sadness feels somewhat like the somber day in March of 2020, when our church leadership held an emergency meeting to work through the Center for Disease Control's early mandates for drastically reduced room-occupancy allowances for all gatherings. Our spirits groaned the moment we realized things at church were not going to be the same for a while. We groaned in unison, but separately—without any way of knowing how painfully the word “distanced” would play into our future.

Our church features a ministry to a specific cohort of Muslim university students in our city. For the past few years separate groups of students have come from abroad for nine

months of rigorous teacher education. Most of them are already professionals who intend to hone their teaching skills. They bring their whole families for the enrichment experience, and our lives have been blessed by the opportunity to serve them while they are here. Twice a month, we host the students for conversation and activity nights that are great for learning, fun, and spiritual dialogue.

In March, COVID brought the outreach to a full stop and significantly altered the year these students had anticipated. They had worked very hard to achieve their placement with this cohort. Because of COVID, they stood to lose all they had vested in the experience. At first, they were not sure if they would all be called back to their home countries or if the program would continue. Then travel bans meant they could not board a plane for home even if they wanted to do so. Before long, their kids' schools shut down, and parents and kids were all at home, figuring out the workings of online schooling for everyone at the same time. Our friends were glad to be engaged in classes again, but they worried about getting sick so far from home, or that family overseas would get sick and be out of reach. The only mosque in town had

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# Until All Have Heard

*How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14*

**Mark Brink**

International Director  
Global Initiative:  
Reaching Muslim Peoples



**“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer”** (1 Peter 4:7). Prayer is our first response to uncertain times!

Pentecostals have been accused of focusing on the return of the Lord to the point of neglecting the concerns of suffering people. Historically, this does not reflect the reality of the Pentecostal church. From the early days, the Assemblies of God has focused on reaching both the spiritual and physical needs of people. We have focused on the harvest fields of the



world—whether next door or in places where the gospel and the church does not yet exist.

The end is near—not only eschatologically but also personally. The end is near for each person’s life, and eternal things, rather than temporal things, are of utmost importance. As Christians, we should constantly ask ourselves a probing question: **“Why do I cling to things that are just a passing vapor?”**

The Apostle Peter challenges us to recognize that the end is near. He also instructs us to embrace a three-fold response. First, we must be sober-minded or clear-thinking regarding the present realities. Second, we are told to be watchful. Third, we are instructed to be habitually in prayer.

D. M. Carlson, preaching on this passage of Scripture in 1949, spoke a timely word about the importance of prayer in the life of the church:

If we are to exert a mighty influence in our generation, it will not be by our vast numbers, or by our great institutions, but it will be by the heartfelt supplication of righteous men and women. They are the people who shall shake this world and bring glory to God. All men of God who have brought glory to the name of Jesus, who have exerted a mighty influence in the world, have been people of prayer, people of intercession.

I recently received an email from a former student, who lives in a Muslim-majority nation and participated in a Global Initiative training program. He shared how the Lord has blessed his outreach and church planting efforts. He now has ten house gatherings where people meet to worship the Lord! *Prayer plays a key role in the advancement of the gospel among Muslim people.*

**Join Global Initiative as we think soberly, watch intently, and pray fervently as the end of all things is at hand.** Specifically, let’s make intercession for the lost Muslim world a priority because there are over 1 billion Muslims living in darkness with no light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

# Muslim World News



## Uganda: Pastor Killed

Muslim extremists killed a pastor in northern Uganda on October 31, 2020, after he compared Christianity and Islam in a radio broadcast, sources said. David Omara, 64, pastor of Christian Church Center and a well-known radio preacher in the area, was beaten and strangled after finishing his broadcast in Aduku, Kwania District at about 9 p.m., according to his son, Simon Okut.

“Immediately after his preaching, someone telephoned my father appreciating his presentation,” Okut told *Morning Star News*. “He then requested him to meet somewhere with some of his friends. We left the radio station. As we arrived at the said place, there came out of the bush six people dressed in Islamic attire, and they started strangling and beating my father with blunt objects.”

As they beat him, one of the assailants said, “This man ought to die for using the Quran and saying Allah is not God but an evil god collaborating with satanic powers,” Okut said. “As they were hitting my father with blunt objects and strangling him, I fled to save my life. Two attackers ran after me but could not get hold of me.”

Omara is survived by his wife and eight children ages 30, 26, 22, 20, 18, 15, 13 and 10. Muslims make up roughly 12 percent of Uganda’s population, with high concentrations in eastern areas of the country.—*Morning Star News*

## Egypt: Al-Azhar Imam Vows Lawsuits

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, the world’s leading Sunni Islamic institution, Ahmed El-Tayyeb expressed categorical rejection of the act of insulting Prophet Muhammad and

vowed to sue perpetrators at international courts, Al-Azhar said in a statement. His remarks came in a meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, who is visiting Egypt to help de-escalate tensions that followed France’s President Emmanuel Macron’s comments on Islam.

Macron defended the right to draw cartoons on Prophet Muhammad, saying that France would not renounce the cartoons. Also, several campaigns were launched in the Islamic world, mainly on social media, calling for the boycott of French products as a response.

If you consider insulting our prophet—peace be upon him—freedom of speech, we categorically reject it, the statement read. “I am the first to protest freedom of speech when this freedom offends any religion, not only Islam,” the grand imam said.

“Europe is indebted to our prophet Muhammad and to our religion, due to the light this religion has introduced to all humanity,” El-Tayyeb said.

“We reject calling terrorism ‘Islamic,’” El-Tayyeb said, adding that everyone has to immediately stop using this term, as it hurts the feelings of Muslims worldwide and it contradicts the truth known by everyone.

El-Tayyeb affirmed that Muslims around the world reject terrorism acting under the cover of religion, and stressed that Islam and its prophet has nothing to do with terrorism.

“Al-Azhar represents the voice of nearly 2 billion Muslims, and I said terrorists do not represent us and we are not responsible for their actions. I announced that in all international forums, in Paris, London, Geneva, the United States, Rome, Asian countries and everywhere.”—*Ahram Online*

# COVID-19 and the

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to close down and they faced a dismal *Ramadan*, distanced even from nearby cohort colleagues. We missed our times with them, too. We used online platforms to keep as close as possible, but everyone's personal crises and adjustments diminished our interactions. When I review my text exchanges with one of my closer friends in the cohort, I'm saddened by how my own distractions played a role in our distancing. Ayesha gave me a new WhatsApp number to use when she left, but none of my texts have reached her.

## COVID's Impact on the Islamic *Ummah*

Our nano-scale experience with Muslim friends here in our own country opens our eyes to the bigger picture of COVID's impact on the lives of Muslims globally. How our personal laments figure into God's unchanged love for them and us during this crisis will somewhat depend upon how well we understand their challenges in this season.

Every Muslim is part of Islam's *ummah*: a community of Muslims whose unity is guided by Allah for the advancement of Islam. Its axis is its creed: "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger." The Quran says that Islam's *ummah* began at creation. Over time, humanity's original *ummah* divided into many communities, but the best is the community of Muhammad (Quran 3:110). It calls on this

*ummah* to obey Allah's edicts and heed its warnings (Quran 16:12, 42:7) and to obey and follow the example of the prophet Muhammad (3:31-32) in every matter of faith and practice. Said obedience, through the rigorous maintenance of public piety, is the essence of honor in *ummah* and is of highest priority. It exalts the prophet and the united community of believers.

There is a *hadith*, one of the prophet's recorded sayings, that equates the vitality of unity in *ummah* to "one body: when any part of the body aches, the whole body responds with sleeplessness and fever" (Bukhari 6011). Its remote resemblance to the biblical Body of Christ metaphor highlights the kindness and generosity demonstrated in our Muslim friends who so very carefully attend to one another's needs. It is one of many passages that compel Muslims toward empathy, compassion, and love for one another, but their motivation is not rooted in the love of a Savior who helps, heals, and saves. It is rooted in a deed ethic that tells them Allah approves of their good works, which must exalt Islam's prophet and their *ummah*.

Muslims rely heavily on *ummah* and their capacity for good works, as established for them in the Quran and *hadith*. COVID has invaded this religious paradigm. They have

# The Muslim *Ummah*

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to rely on the intervention of trusted religious leaders and scholars for management protocols. These highly trusted individuals look to the Quran and *hadith* for precedence, and then they issue *fatwas* (rulings on Islamic law) to guide Muslims everywhere they live. Diaspora Muslims, in particular, are keen for this advice. Those who reside in regions where the law of the land conflicts with Islam's law might be extra vulnerable, so these *fatwas* are a help to them.

Muslims, in the days of the prophet, were confronted by contagions. Leprosy was a serious threat, as were other plagues and calamities. Allah's response to such challenges is his stark reminder that "Nothing will afflict us except what Allah has decided for us. He is our Protector" (Quran 9:51). Furthermore, Allah afflicts Muslims to test them: "We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives and crops" (Quran 2:155a). Those who remain steadfast will find favor (Quran 2:155b).

Most Muslims today believe that COVID is an act of Allah, intended to test the Islamic *umma*. Of their own will and effort, they must endure and pass it. The favor they will earn will count toward the measure of their good deeds on Judgment Day.

One *hadith* by Bukhari (5641) recalls the prophet extending assurance to Muslims by saying, "Whatever trouble, illness, anxiety, grief, hurt or sorrow afflicts any Muslim, even the prick of a thorn, God removes some sins by it." Another *hadith* records the prophet's reflection on the plague: "It is a torment with which Allah afflicts those whom He chooses, but He has made it a mercy for believers. If a servant [of Allah] is afflicted with the plague and remains in his town, realizing that he has only been afflicted with what Allah has determined for him, we will have the reward of a martyr" (Bukhari 5734). Indeed, numerous *fatwas* have been released to verify the Corona Virus classifies as a plague, and those who die from it will hopefully classify as martyrs. This is a significant comfort to families who have lost loved ones to the disease, as it offers assurance for the reward of paradise.

## COVID's Impact on Muslim Religious Rituals

COVID's impact upon Muslims, in general, not just those who are victims of the illness itself, is expansive. The vast array of obligations a Muslim is responsible for covers duties that are prescribed to individuals or the *umma* as a whole. The protocols for these duties impact one's spiritual destiny. Deeds count as credits toward eternal reward, so when COVID interferes with the Muslim's capacity to earn those

credits, without concessions for special situations, it might translate as deficit and possibly sin. This aspect of COVID's impact foments even greater fears, perhaps, than one might have of becoming ill, losing family and friends to the disease, or losing employment or wealth. The possibility of doing things the wrong way or missing out on Allah's blessing is a real vulnerability for them.

In unprecedented fashion, mosques all over the world locked down in mid-March in an effort to stem the tide of COVID's impact. Mecca's Grand Mosque, the Prophet's Grand Mosque in Medina, Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque, Turkey's Fatih Mosque, Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed's Grand Mosque, Basra's Moussawi Grand Mosque, the National Mosque of Malaysia, East London's Mosque, and the Islamic Cultural Center of New York City were all closed by the end of March. Immediately these and other mosques all around the world sought ways to keep their congregants engaged. Mosques with financial means began televising or live-streaming sermons and classes for their communities, but most of the world's mosques do not have such options. Without ready access to their mosques and *imams*, the unity of Islam's *umma* suffers. Most ominously, these closures cast a dark shadow over impending *Ramadan* (Islam's required month of fasting) and *Hajj* (a required pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia) events.

*Ramadan* and *Hajj* are two of Islam's five pillars—practices that garner the forgiveness of sin and Allah's coveted spiritual blessing and favor for participants. Closed mosques would not interfere with people's fasts and daytime prayers, but customary mosque-based food distributions to the poor for their *iftar* (breaking of the fast) meals would have to be re-structured, if not cancelled. Customary *iftar* celebrations with extended family and friends would be pared down to immediate family households. The nightly prayers that Muslim men, in particular, would attend at the mosque after the family's meal and evening prayers could no longer happen where the prophet decreed that they should. *Fatwas* were issued to permit conducting these prayers at home instead of at the mosque, led by a family member who is most versed in the Quran. There was even concession for reading the Quran rather than reciting it, since not everyone has the skills to do so. Allah offers added blessing to those who participate in these prayers and times of congregational Quran readings and recitations, but this year the congregation was spread out, distanced as such for the first time in living memory. People adapted, but all of this represented a grievous, huge shift in prescribed tradition and protocol.

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# COVID-19 and the Muslim *Ummah*

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When Mecca's Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina announced their COVID shutdowns in mid-March, it foreshadowed the cancellation of *Hajj* in 2020 for all but 1,000 would-be participants. This grieved the Muslim world. Between 2.5 and 3 million people usually make the pilgrimage. Muslims who had planned and saved money for their sacred journey had to cancel. This marks the first time in history that a pandemic shut down *Hajj*. Those who lost their savings due to the pandemic might take some solace in Allah's promise that fortunes lost to calamities will count as charity toward the measure of their good deeds, but that is hardly consolation for a pilgrimage that promises the forgiveness of all sins one has committed from birth to the time the journey is complete.

Due to COVID, mandated Friday prayers have been halted on a global scale for the first time since they were instituted by the prophet in 622 A.D. Until 2020, they have always been performed in a mosque, with participants lined up in perfectly straight rows, standing shoulder to shoulder and sometimes ankle to ankle. This *umma* act lauds Islam's concept that its mode of prayer is perfect. COVID banished prayers from the mosque and landed them in private homes. Almost overnight, families found themselves leading their own first-ever Friday worship and recitation times. It's not supposed to happen that way! This change has been grievous for many mosque communities and, truth be told, significant numbers of them gathered anyway. In Sweden, a small group of diaspora Somali Muslims who comprise .69 percent of the nation's total population represented an estimated 18 percent of the nation's COVID deaths.<sup>1</sup> The predominant reason is their lack of compliance with general distancing and misguided religious instruction.

*Fatwas* have been issued to help Muslims navigate the extraordinary circumstances COVID has wreaked upon Muslims. They don't necessarily make life easier, but they make laws clearer. These edicts gave direction to Muslims who

had the virus and couldn't fast food or water, so they might make up for it after they recovered, or offer alms in its stead. They addressed the plausibility of loans for businesses that were failing (the Quran forbids usury). *Fatwas* have been issued to help Muslims navigate impeded protocols for the prayers, body preparations, and burials of COVID-related deaths. They have told Muslims what to do in the event that a local law requires the cremation (forbidden in Islam) of a Muslim's COVID infected corpse, or what to do when Muslim bodies are buried without due process. The list of *fatwas* is as endless as the needs that present.

## In Christ, Lament Turns to Joy

The whole topic of Muslims and COVID is, in a very biblical sense, lamentable. Muslims are spiritually lost before they ever experience COVID's cruelties. They are slaves to a religion that disguises the Christ of the Bible and burdens them with the task of perfecting personal and communal righteousness. COVID makes them sick and complicates their path to forgiveness.

It is ironic how COVID's capacity for killing can also be an awakening to the restorative nature of lament and neediness. My husband and I are now fighting it on several fronts, and it is a rough ride. In my own struggles and alone-ness, I have lamented—wept because I hurt and feel vulnerable to loss in ways I have never experienced before. In the midst of my lament, God reminds me that He, too, laments.

COVID has forced a pause. In this pause, lament is in order. Christ lamented in the garden on the night before He was betrayed. He lamented over the children of Jerusalem, whom he longed to gather together "as a hen gathers her brood under her wings" (Luke 13:34-35). Christ lamented at the tomb of His friend, Lazarus. Even in the midst of the lament, Christ rose from the dead, thereby bringing deliverance and hope to all who would believe.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Muslims lament—but without true hope and without assurance of salvation. Their only recourse is to accumulate enough good deeds to hopefully gain access to paradise. Let us earnestly pray that the Lord will give us more opportunities to share with Muslims "the reason for the hope within us" for we earnestly desire that all Muslims everywhere come to know the truth about Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup>Anne Speckhard, Othman Mahamud, and Molly Ellenberg. "When Religion and Culture Kill: COVID-19 in the Somali Diaspora Communities in Sweden." Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/when-religion-and-culture-kill-covid-19-in-the-somali-diaspora-communities-in-sweden/>



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## **Friday, January 1, 2021. Please pray for**

...*Holy Spirit anointing* on a New Testament translation in the Ndut language. The Ndut of Senegal number approximately 56,000 (43% Muslim).

...*the country of Nigeria*. Pray that the violent actions of Muslim Fulani herdsmen and members of Islamic terror groups like Boko Haram will be thwarted. Of Nigeria's population of 205 million, 49% are Muslim.

...*political leaders of Sudan*. The transitional government is considering a repeal of the long-standing apostasy law, which would make it easier for conversions from Islam to Christianity. Of Sudan's population of 43 million, 90% are Muslim.

## **Friday, January 8, 2021. Please pray for**

...*the people of Lebanon*—Christians and Muslims. The effects of the August 2020 explosion in Beirut are still felt.

...*success for Christian outreaches* in four predominately Muslim cities in Kosovo where there is no current witness. Of Kosovo's population of 1.8 million, 87% are Muslim.

...*the country of Turkey*. Repression of religious minorities is increasing. The president has ordered another ancient church in Istanbul to be turned back into a mosque. Of Turkey's population of 84 million, 96.6% are Muslim.

## **Friday, January 15, 2021. Please pray for**

...*a small, but growing group of Muslim background believers* in Qatar (2.8 million population; 88% Muslim).

...*the distribution of short, Bible-based videos in Chadian Arabic*. Of Chad's population of 16.4 million, 57% are Muslim.

...*the large number of Sub-Saharan African Christians* working in the predominately Muslim countries of North Africa.

## **Friday, January 22, 2021. Please pray for**

...*an anonymous Tunisian Muslim* who responded to a satellite TV program with the following statement: "Pray for me to find the peace they say is from Jesus."

...*gospel outreach ministries to the Gonja people* (pop. 369,000) of northern Ghana. Gonjas are primarily Muslim.

...*mature leadership for house churches* in four Muslim cities of Kazakhstan (18.6 million population; 52% Muslim).

## **Friday, January 29, 2021. Please pray for**

...*Christian ministry teams* interacting with 300,000 Muslims in Birmingham, England.

...*an Arabic media ministry team in the Middle East*. They report: "We praise God for the huge number of Muslims who are connecting via social media. They have lots of questions."

...*Christian workers in Afghanistan* seeking the Lord's direction on how to reach the 67 Muslim unreached people groups.

*I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and  
thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV*



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**Friday, February 5, 2021. Please pray for**

...*the ministry of Suliman in Mozambique*. A former Muslim, he reaches out to Makuwa Muslims of Koba, and erected a small bamboo structure for ministry several times a week. Of Mozambique's 31 million people, 17% are Muslim.  
...*Kiarash, a new Christian from a Muslim background in Iran*. He responded to a TV program with this request: "Watching your program, I have put my future into the holy hands of Jesus. I need your prayers."  
...*Holy Spirit direction* for ministry teams on the islands of Sulawesi and Java in Indonesia. They use print, radio, and online media to reach Muslims with the hope of the gospel. Of Indonesia's population of 272 million, 82% are Muslim.

**Friday, February 12, 2021. Please pray for**

...*witnessing opportunities for underground churches* in Casablanca, Morocco. Pray for them to find ways to witness to their communities despite fear of severe persecution. Of Morocco's population of 36 million, 99.6% are Muslim.  
...*Ameen, a new believer in Saudi Arabia*. Pray that he will be able to share his faith with his wife. Pray, too, for the worker who is helping him grow in his faith. Of Saudi Arabia's population of 38 million, 92% are Muslim.  
...*protection, justice, and salvation* for 1-3 million Uyghur Muslims held in camps in the Xinjiang region of China.

**Friday, February 19, 2021. Please pray for**

...*Christian outreaches to the 900,000 Memon people group in India*, one of the least-reached Muslim groups in the world.  
...*the completion of a new Bible translation project* in the Tajik language that is aimed at the Muslim majority. Only 0.4% of the Tajiks call themselves Christian. Of Tajikistan's population of 9.5 million, 99.5% are Muslim.  
...*protection for underground house church networks in Iran*. One "network" distributed 70,000 New Testaments during the last two months of 2020. Of Iran's population of 84 million, 97.8% are Muslim.

**Friday, February 26, 2021. Please pray for**

...*ongoing distribution efforts* of the Arabic version of The Life of Jesus DVD in several Muslim-majority countries of the Middle East. The goal is to distribute 50,000 copies by the end of 2021.  
...*Nabila, in a major city of Pakistan*. She has received a start-up loan to begin a small restaurant. She states: "Yes, my goal is to help my family, but I want to bring light to all the Muslims of this market area."  
...*more than 600 Christian families in northern Cameroon* to have their basic needs met. These families have been displaced by terror attacks from radical Muslim groups.  
*\*All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*

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