

INTERCEDE

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A Miracle Church in New York City

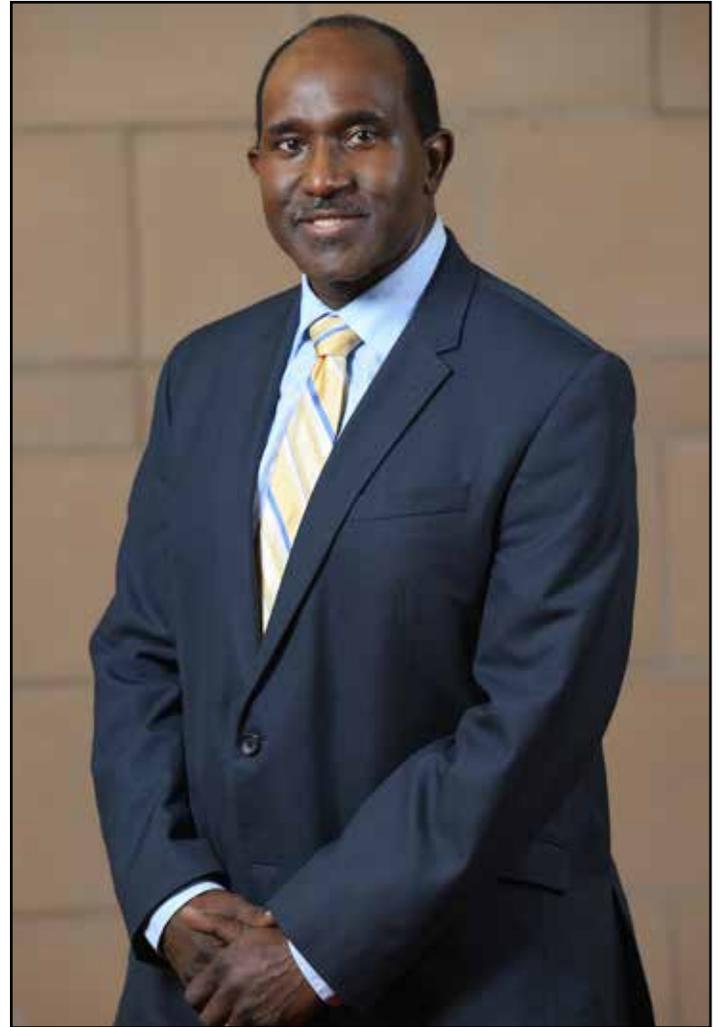
By Mimsie Robinson

Since the 1980s, one of the demographic shifts in America has been the influx of West African immigrants. Over the last fifteen years, legal immigrants from Africa have been entering the United States at a rate of about 50,000 per year. This significant influx has raised the percentage of foreign-born African people in America to approximately 4 percent. Many Africans migrate to cities like Washington D.C., Atlanta, and Los Angeles. A large number settle in the New York City area. Many African immigrants cluster in a section of Harlem known as “Little Africa” or “Little Senegal.” This area is located between Malcolm X Boulevard and Frederick Douglass Boulevard.

As the missions pastor of Bethel Gospel Assembly, a church in Harlem with a longstanding commitment to local evangelism and foreign missions, I have been an eyewitness to this demographic shift. For New Yorkers, evangelizing unreached people groups no longer requires a passport and international travel. As I observed these population changes in the neighborhood, my passion for reaching new West African Muslim residents began to grow. In 2003, I met and started mentoring one of our members who had converted to Christianity from Islam. As this man became a gatherer and leader of francophone West African Christians in need of a church home, our senior pastor asked me to work with him to plant a church.

Since 2008, Living Water Christian Center has served French-speaking West Africans in the New York area. Most of the parishioners live in Harlem and South Bronx. The church has a tremendous opportunity to reach out to its Muslim neighbors in Harlem and neighboring communities. I serve as executive pastor of this congregation, alongside the Muslim background believer who is the senior pastor.

Living Water Christian Center is one of Bethel’s fastest growing church plants with over 200 men, women, and children in attendance on an average Sunday. Like the senior pastor, approximately 25 percent of the congregation has Muslim roots. As I worked on my doctoral dissertation, I conducted a project in which I interviewed 20 (11 men and 9 women) francophone Muslim Background Believers



(MBBs) to ascertain the key components that influenced their conversion experience. Fourteen of the participants were born in Burkina Faso, three in Ivory Coast, and one each in Guinea, Mali, and Senegal. Twelve of the respondents were converted in their country of birth (Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast), four received Christ in New York City, and one became a Christian in France.

Factors that Influence Muslims to Come to Christ

Many factors could influence a person’s decision to follow Christ, and the respondents in my project repeatedly noted

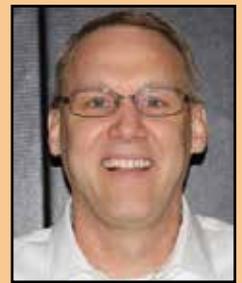
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Until All Have Heard

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



The Spirit is at work in our world convincing, convicting, and drawing people to himself. Whenever I hear stories of Muslims coming to Christ, it reminds me of the primary work of the Spirit and the character of God in missions. It reminds me of how the Lord will pursue one lost sheep to bring it back into the fold. John 15:5-15 indicates that the Holy Spirit is not only working *in* the believer, but He is also working *on* the unbeliever. Supernatural means, such as dreams, visions, and divine healing, work on the un-

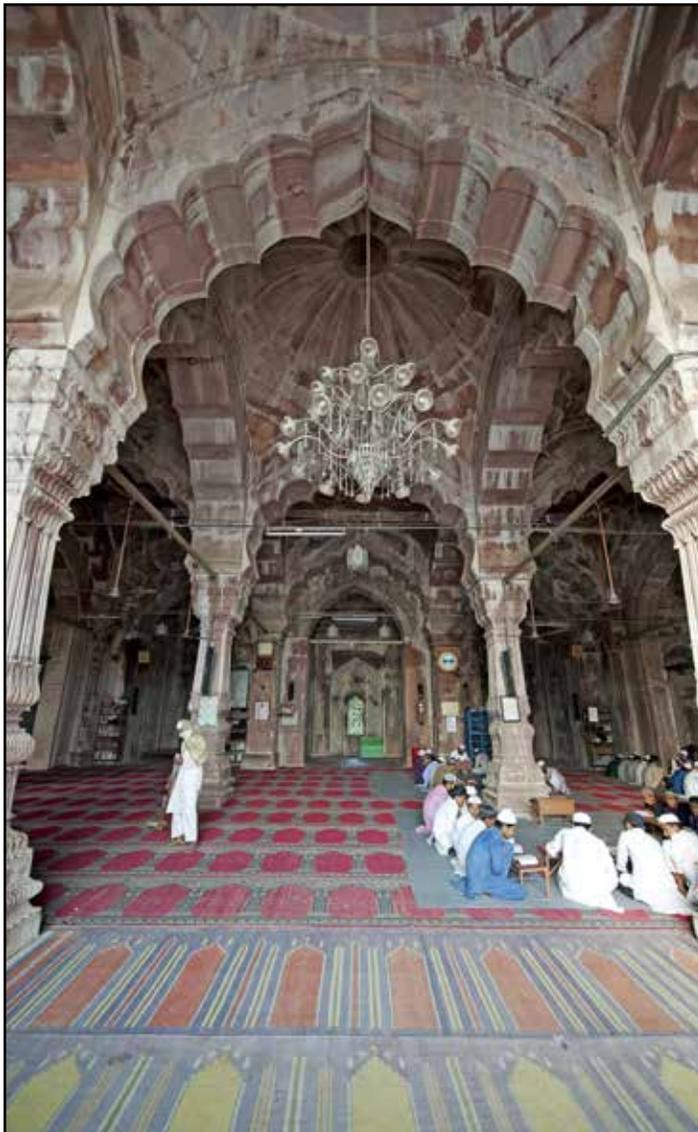
believer, but the Word of God is the foundational instrument and means of salvation. The Holy Spirit works with His people by the means of His Word to declare His salvation to lost and perishing people. We must never forget the mercy, grace, and patience of the Lord and His relentless longing that none should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Exodus 34:6-7 reveals the character of God, which should direct our witness and mission in this world. The Lord, speaking directly to Moses, divulges His nature by reminding Moses that despite the rebelliousness of the people of Israel, He will be gracious and merciful if the people will turn to him in repentance:

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

This passage displays the lovingkindness (*hesed*) of the Lord but also indicates that iniquity has consequences. *The Holy Spirit’s work always draws people to salvation through Jesus Christ.* We can rest assured that God is working to draw sinners to himself—even Muslims who may seem to be the furthest from salvation. Truly our mission to share Jesus with Muslim people is in accordance with the nature and character of God!

The bi-monthly *Intercede* provides teaching regarding Islam so you can intercede for Muslims and learn how to reach them with the life-saving message of Jesus Christ. Over 1.7 billion Muslims are destined to a Christ-less eternity unless the gospel reaches them. Yes, the Holy Spirit is working in this world, but He calls us to work with Him in His mission. Please join us as we intercede and equip national leaders, pastors, and laypeople to reach Muslims in this enormous harvest field.



Muslim World News



Mozambique: Churches Burned

A Catholic bishop has deplored the world's indifference to escalating extremist violence in northern Mozambique, where multiple churches have been burnt, people beheaded, young girls kidnapped, and hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the violence.

Bishop Luiz Fernando Lisboa of Mozambique's Pemba diocese has been an outspoken advocate for the needs of the more than 200,000 people who have been displaced by the violent insurgency.

In June 2020, there were reports that insurgents had beheaded 15 people in a week. Yet, the bishop said the crisis in Mozambique has largely been met with "indifference" from the rest of the world.—*Catholic News Agency*

Morocco: Christians Arrested

Converts to Christianity in Morocco have been repeatedly arrested by police as part of a campaign clamping down on the Christian faith. Jawad Elhamidy, president of the Moroccan Association of Rights and Religious Liberties, told Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) that Christian converts have been arrested and subjected to harassment while at police stations.

Most are released after interrogation, but are often put under pressure to return to Islam, and face abuse when they refuse. "The penal code holds that all Moroccans are Muslims, so those who convert to Christianity face legal problems, beside threats to their security," Elhamidy said.—*Independent Catholic News*

Malaysia: Blasphemy, 26 Months

A man was sentenced to 26 months in jail by the Sessions Court after he was found guilty on two counts of insulting Muhammad, Islam, and PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang on Facebook last year.

Judge MM Edwin Paramjothy imposed a 26-month jail term for the first charge and a six-month term for the second charge on Danny Antoni, 29, and ordered the sentences to run concurrently from the date of his arrest on March 6, 2019.—*Malay Mail*

Pakistan: Crosses Removed

A village near Baloki was forced to remove the cross from a church under construction after threats by local Muslims. Baloki is 40 miles away from Lahore, the capital city of the Punjab province. Open Doors, a non-profit group protecting Christians, ranks Pakistan as the world's fifth worst country for extreme religious persecution of Christians.—*Express*

Sudan: Legal Reforms

The transitional government in Sudan passed a series of amendments repealing the death sentence for apostasy, public flogging and female genital mutilation, giving Christians hope for the future following the toppling of the Islamist regime of President Omar al-Bashir last year.

Sudanese Minister of Justice Nasreldin Abdelbari confirmed the contents of the wide-reaching reform bill titled the Miscellaneous Amendments Act during a national television talk show.—*Christian Post*

A Miracle Church

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the following factors: (1) disillusionment with Islam; (2) influence of the church and pastors; (3) Christians in the life of the subject; (4) supernatural influences, such as healing, deliverance, and answered prayer; (5) the Quran and the Bible; and (6) uncertainty about their eternal destiny.

Disillusionment with Islam

Fifteen (75 percent) of the participants expressed that disillusionment with Islam and its practices played a key role in their conversion to Christ. In fact, this was the most frequently stated factor. One participant made the following observation: “They could not relate to modern life. Every time, they want to go back to the way it was back during the Prophet Muhammad’s time.” Another respondent stated: “Muslims have a code of dress. They are not much exactly [concerned] with our own culture. They pray in Arabic when they are speaking and not in our dialect. Therefore, we don’t understand at all what is being said.” The notion of learning Arabic and feeling their dialect was not good enough for God alienated some of the MBBs.

Three of the respondents mentioned their aversion to the notion of being forced to pray five times a day in a certain posture or with a mat. They mentioned the impracticality and religiosity of this kind of behavior in modern society. Some of the participants were born into nominal Muslim families where they were not sent to Quranic school. Nevertheless, they had enough information to formulate an opinion about Islam. Here are ideas expressed by five of the participants:

- “I didn’t want to be a Muslim. I didn’t know what to do. I can’t read the Quran. The Quran is in Arabic. I didn’t know how to pray. Seeing their lives, it’s kind of like hypocrisy. People go to mosque, then the next day they’re drinking and doing stuff. And, I am like, “No!” (Mossi woman)
- “I didn’t like what the Quran said about women ... The way they were really diminishing about women.” (Gourounsi woman)
- “As a child, disillusionment with Islam’s inability to answer my questions caused me to threaten to commit suicide.” (Mossi man)
- “It was hard for me to follow a God I didn’t know because I was following because people are following. I didn’t understand anything at all.” (Mossi woman)
- “There is a big difference [between Christianity and Islam] because I didn’t understand anything in Islam. It’s a religion that does not give any explanation of itself.” (Bissa woman)

The disillusionment with Islam opens a door for Christians to share the life-saving message of Jesus Christ with people who have never had the opportunity to know the truth..

Influence of the Church and Pastors

Fourteen (70%) of the participants indicated that attending church and accepting Christ at church played a major role in their conversion. Clearly, the role of the Christian community and pastors who welcome Muslims into their congregation played a key role in the conversion experience of this sample of MBBs. In four cases (20%), the respondents attended church for several months or even years without realizing that there was something they needed to do to become Christians. At some point, the pastor acknowledged their presence and invited them to accept Christ.

One Mossi woman shared that, at the age of 12 or 13, she went to church to ask the pastor some questions for a school project. When she heard the choir practicing, it kept her from focusing on the words of the pastor. The pastor let her sit in the church and listen to the rehearsal. After the girl had attended the choir practices for a while, the pastor told her, “Singing in the choir is good, but there is one more step that you have to take; you must give yourself entirely to God.” She accepted Christ as her Savior that very day!

A Mossi man had been going to church with his uncle and came to realize his spiritual condition when a visiting minister stated, “You are not a Christian, even if your dad is a preacher or pastor. Until you take your time and say you’re going to give yourself to Jesus, you’re still not a convert yourself.” He responded promptly to the altar call after acknowledging that the words applied to him.

A Bissa man in Burkina Faso, discouraged over his inability to find work, happened to see a crusade featuring Emmanuel Sawadogo, a well-known evangelist. He stopped to see what was going on and the message touched him. That evening he gave his heart to Christ.

Interestingly, many people would respond to Christ if a Christian simply invited them to attend church. God uses pastors and the body of Christ to introduce Muslims to Jesus. This should encourage believers to recognize the power of the spoken Word of God in the church context.

Christians in the Life of the Subject

Thirteen (65%) of the respondents mentioned Christian friends, relatives, and a teacher/pastor who played a key role

in New York City

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in their conversion. Friends influenced the salvation of nine of the participants. In three cases, relatives shared Christ with family members. One participant was influenced by a teacher who eventually became a pastor. When the new believer experienced persecution and estrangement from his family of origin, the teacher/pastor became a surrogate father.

In some cases, the participants indicated that a Christian friend was the most significant factor in their conversion. A Mossi man said, "One of my friends introduced me to Christ while I was in boarding school." He explained that he was won to Christ by the love and non-retaliatory, Christ-like behavior of his roommate when provoked or mistreated. Eventually it caused him to listen, show interest in the Christian faith, and join a prayer group comprised of his roommate and other Christian students.

Another Mossi man indicated that Islam's inability to answer his questions caused him to threaten to commit suicide. He hid from his parents for the better part of a day. A neighbor, a member of the search team, discovered him sleeping in the family chicken coop. The next day at school, his teacher invited him to church, and he said, "I will be there at church with you no matter what, even if they kill me." On Sunday, he and his brother went to the see his teacher and go to church. That same day, they both gave their lives to Jesus. He suffered many years of persecution from his family and went to live with his teacher, who became a surrogate parent to him. Eventually most of his family turned to Christ.

As Christians, we must never forget that other people are watching our lives. Our Christ-like behavior, attitudes, and life-style can attract people to Christ. As believers, we must let our light shine for Jesus as a means of sharing Christ with people who do not yet know Him.

Supernatural Influences

Six of the respondents (30%) mentioned supernatural influences as a key influencing factor in their decision to follow Christ. Supernatural influences could include dreams, visions, supernatural healing, or deliverance from demonic oppression. Two participants indicated that divine healing made a difference in their decision. A Wolof woman heard the Lord say, "I heard you. Go to the Christians. That's where you will learn of your healing." She went to the service and over the next few weeks she became aware that her leukemia was no longer detectable by the doctors. God spoke to her two more times regarding her need to believe in Christ as the only Savior and the need to be faithful.

A Mossi man had a vision that inspired him to accept Christ. Immediately after receiving the vision, he went home and told his parents that he was no longer a Muslim, but had become a follower of Christ.

Following intense hours of prayer and spiritual warfare, led by a pastor and his intercessory prayer team, another Mossi man decided to follow Christ after God healed his father from the inability to walk or use the bathroom. In his own words, he declared: "He [my father] started walking. After the second day, he kept walking. He never got sick anymore. So, after that, I started believing in Jesus Christ."

Two individuals mentioned deliverance as a key factor in their conversion. One Gourounsi woman commented, "I knew that God was real because I manifested [a demonic stronghold] when he [a pastor] prayed for me and I felt a heat." She experienced this at the church's prayer meeting. Eventually she received complete deliverance from demonic oppression. Another Soninke/Mansa man explained, "At that time I had demons. It was crazy. I was lost. I had graduated from school. He [God] told me to come to Bible study; which I did." Eventually, this man found freedom from demonic bondage, gave his life to Christ, and was baptized by his pastor in a bathtub.

A Mossi woman shared that God answered prayer for some material blessings, and this provided enough evidence to her that Christianity was credible and worthy of following. She said: "He [the pastor] prayed for me and he prayed for the three things I asked for." When God provided her with these very things, she put her trust in Christ for salvation.

All four of the conversions of Muslims to Christianity that took place in New York City involved deliverance, healing, and visions. This does not discredit other factors, but might serve as an encouragement to pray for Holy Ghost power and divinely orchestrated manifestations to reach people from Islamic ethnic backgrounds in the urban areas of America.

Quran/Bible

One participant (5%) mentioned that both the Quran (Sura 3:55) and Bible (passages from the Gospel of John) played an important role in her conversion. This Fulani/Toma woman began to trust in Christ. As it relates to the Bible, she shared the following: "I began to understand by reading the Book of John who Jesus is and why the Quran was saying God will bless those who follow Him above those who don't (Surah 3:55)." Two (15%) other respondents referred to the Bible

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as a factor in conversion. A Mossi lady stated, “In 2009, I started reading my girlfriend’s Bible. This is when I decided to follow Christ.” A male convert said, “He [my friend] took his Bible and he convinced me with his Bible through the whole year. He was kind of like a big brother figure.”

Eternal Destiny

One respondent (5%) mentioned that his uncertainty about his eternal destiny motivated him to turn to Christ after finding no solace in Islam. He shared the following reflection: “When someone died, I didn’t feel peace. When someone died, I knew that there was no return. I am not going to see the person anymore. The person is gone. What will become of him?” This respondent highlighted the lack of assurance provided by Islamic doctrine as what drove him to seek answers regarding his eternal destiny.

Persecution Accompanying Conversion

In Muslim contexts, many believers experience persecution. The most common forms of persecution are social and emotional isolation and confrontation by key family members. Two respondents experienced serious physical persecution. One of them, a Mossi male, provided this description:

One afternoon after I finished Quranic studies, a tree fell down and I sat there. What we studied that day was too much in me and I was questioning myself about God and to really know him in person. So, when I was on the tree and I was sitting there questioning myself and thinking, what I can describe is I received a vision of Jesus on that same day. From that vision, that was my first time to know who is Jesus. It took about more than an hour and I cried and I cried and I cried. When I got home I talked to my parents and I told them I am done with the Quran and I am going to learn more about someone called Jesus. He said He has an assignment for me and I need to serve Him. My parents wouldn’t believe.

They couldn’t accept. They gave me to the next day to throw these things away. I told them I was firm in my conviction and I stopped and I said, I am not doing the Islamic prayer. That same day, my clothes were burned and I was beaten. I’ve been banished from my family and from the village. Even though I didn’t know much about Jesus, the conviction, it was like fire that was burning within me. So nothing was able enough to stop me. That was the day I left the village. I walked about 45 miles; I didn’t know where to go. So about 45 miles, I get into a city called Hounde. [In Hounde, he miraculously found a kind man who assisted him].

Many new Christians in Muslim contexts face severe persecution. In these cases, the open arms of a loving church can provide encouragement and shelter. The persecution is much like that experienced by Peter, Paul, Stephen, and other believers in the New Testament. While most believers in Westernized nations do not face this severe persecution, it is a common occurrence in Islamic countries. This serves as a call to believers to pray for the persecuted church around the world, believing that God will help them persevere.

Final Remarks

All these men and women are heroes and heroines who heard and received the gospel from other people of great faith and obedience to the Great Commission. The greatest hero is the Lord Jesus Christ, who sought after the souls of these precious people. John 15:16: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name he may give you.” With every divine encounter, every revelation, vision, or dream, every triumph over isolation, rejection, ridicule, abandonment, and acts of violence, God sought each of these precious people and brought them into the loving arms of Christ. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15).



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Friday, September 4, 2020. Please pray for

...more mission volunteers to join a ministry that is winning Muslims to the Lord in the Agadez Region of the Niger Republic in Africa. Of Niger's population of 24 million, 93% are Muslim.

...a powerful anointing on Zaman Endale's radio ministry aimed at Muslim Amharic speakers. His broadcasts are successfully reaching Muslims throughout Ethiopia and the wider region.

...Muslim Turks who are hearing the gospel via SAT-7. The potential audience for TurkSat is 81 million people. The director reports, "We are seeing the fruits of the seeds we started planting five years ago."

Friday, September 11, 2020. Please pray for

...protection for Bible translation teams in Pakistan, many of whom work in remote and dangerous areas. Of Pakistan's 74 languages, 29 are still unrecorded and most of those are spoken by remote Muslim tribes.

...provision of discipleship materials in Saudi Arabia. The "Church" in Saudi Arabia is growing and the need for discipleship materials is greater than ever. Of Saudi's population of 35 million, 92% are Muslim.

...those who are working to make the Bible accessible to 7 million Libyans, either through translation or distribution.

Friday, September 18, 2020. Please pray for

...Christian workers in Bangladesh who are undertaking new evangelism strategies to more effectively reach the Muslim Shaikh, the largest people group in Bangladesh. Of Bangladesh's population of 164 million, 87% are Muslim.

...Hakiima, a Muslim teenager in Chad, Africa. Although her Muslim parents are unaware, she continues to express keen interest in the stories of the gospel. Of Chad's population of 16 million, 57% are Muslim.

...Syrian believers, especially former Muslims, to remain faithful despite strong persecution by Islamist groups. Of Syria's population of 17 million, 90% are Muslim.

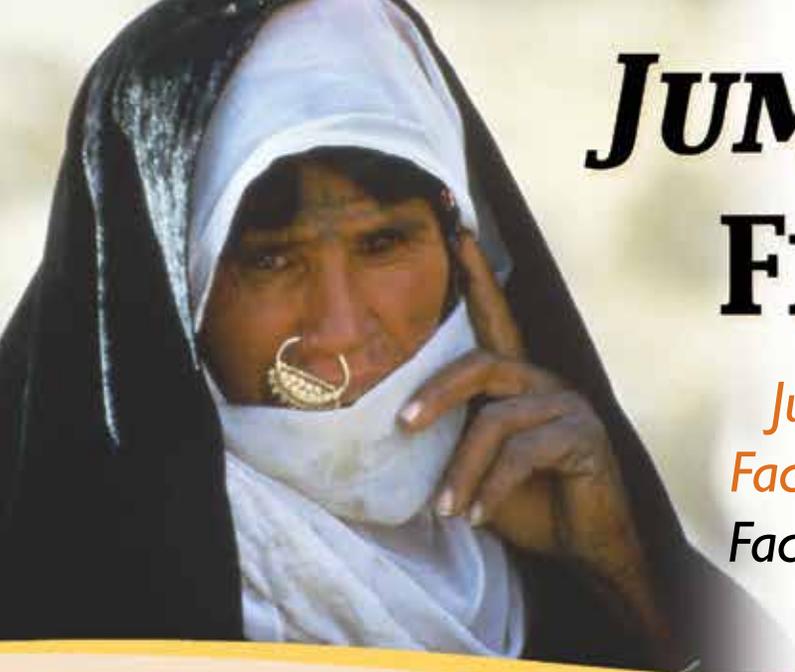
Friday, September 25, 2020. Please pray for

...a ministry team in Egypt that uses social media to reach Muslims with the gospel. They respond to "around 10,000 text messages and calls from listeners and inquirers every month." Of Egypt's population of 102 million, 87% are Muslim.

...spiritual breakthrough in Senegal. Most Senegalese are members of Islamic religious brotherhoods. The main ones, the Mourides and the Tijanis, hold followers in deep spiritual bondage. Of Senegal's 17 million people, 91% are Muslim.

...more workers to reach the 50 million Pashtuns of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey. They are the largest unreached people group in Central Asia, and are almost 100% Muslim.

*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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[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, October 2, 2020. Please pray for

...grace for Christians in Nigeria. Since 2015, a reported 6,000 Christians have been murdered by Islamic jihadists.
...protection for church planters in Indonesia. Since 2006, over 1,000 churches have been torn down.
...Brunei Muslims who want to follow Christ, but face the *sharia* death penalty for the “crime” of leaving Islam.

Friday, October 9, 2020. Please pray for

...protection for small groups of believing communities in Yemen. The six-year civil war has thousands in destitution.
...a Christian-based “veterinary services” ministry in the Middle East. The ministry is geared toward helping mostly Muslim Bedouins with their camels and other livestock.
...Zaynab in Iran, who abandoned Islam two years ago. Forbidden by her Muslim husband to read her Bible at home, she managed to “secretly” access the Scripture and has memorized 2,000 verses in the last two years.

Friday, October 16, 2020. Please pray for

...witnessing opportunities for the 750,000 Christians who are part of the migrant worker population of Kuwait.
...comfort and provision for the harvest of Muslims who are turning to Christ in Uganda, including imams of mosques.
...the family of Joshua in Somalia. Joshua left Islam to follow Jesus. When forced by Islamic terrorists to recite the Islamic *shahada*, Joshua refused and was killed. Of Somalia’s population of 16 million, 99.6% are Muslim.

Friday, October 23, 2020. Please pray for

...strength for Tamil Christians in eastern Sri Lanka to withstand the pressure of radical Muslims to convert to Islam.
...a former Muslim in Kosovo who planted a church in a majority-Muslim town, the first church in that town for 700 years.
...success for a radio station broadcasting the gospel to the mainly Muslim republics of the North Caucasus area.

Friday, October 30, 2020. Please pray for

...wisdom for the coordinators of “safe houses” located in the Middle East that provide shelter for former Muslims.
...Christians in Iraq to persevere under persecution. Christians have dwindled from 1.5 million to an estimated 250,000.
...Eldos in Kyrgyzstan, who left Islam to follow Christ. A group of Muslims beat him almost to death. He was able to flee the country, but still needs physical and spiritual healing. Of Kyrgyzstan’s population of 6 million, 93% are Muslim.

**All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*

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