

OPEN DOORS

MAGAZINE



The Church

A beacon of hope in Syria and Iraq

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**You are the light of the
world. A town built on a
hill cannot be hidden.**

MATTHEW 5:14



A Letter from the Editor

The sound of mortar fire ripped through the night sky and shockwaves from the explosion cracked the walls of Ferial's home. Terrified, she scooped up her two young children and hid in the bathroom.

This is reality for Christians in Syria and Iraq. This is why many persecuted Christians experience 'trauma'.

We encounter this word almost every day as we read the stories of our persecuted family. But we realize that they are also never without another word: HOPE!

Hope found in God, hope through their local Christian community, hope through His Word and Spirit, hope through ministries that help them like us (a privilege!), and hope found in you - their global family in Christ who pray and support them.

This calling as 'hope-givers' is so strong that in Iraq and Syria, we helped transformed almost 300 local churches to be "Centers of Hope" where people, believers and non-believers alike, can find shelter, aid, trauma counseling, and Biblical teaching amongst many others amidst the post-war/ISIS effects on their economy, government, and society.

If you have been praying and giving especially to our ministries in the Middle East, thank you very much and may you be encouraged as you read on. Know that you are part of it!

If you are encountering our ministry for the first time, may you be encouraged too to get involved and join us in strengthening persecuted Christians around the world. (Rev 3:2)

Altogether, because of Jesus, we can sing Hallelujah to the Lord!

BEACON OF HOPE



When Ferial visited an Open Doors Centre of Hope in Syria, everything changed. Now, we want to make every church a Centre of Hope.

When Islamist extremists set out to eradicate the church in the Middle East, your support kept hope alive. An outpouring of support, prayer and advocacy meant the church survived. Thank you. But today, believers face economic collapse – and extremism remains.

Civil war in Syria is raging. A quarter of a million people have been killed, millions more have fled their homes, and a humanitarian crisis is unfolding. The church, too, is dying at the hands of Islamic State, as Christians lose hope and leave.

That was 2015. “The church was bleeding,” said Pastor Edward, Open Doors partner and head of the Alliance Church in Syria. “We lost 60% of our members.”

So Open Doors regional director Thomas Adam* brought church leaders together from across Syria and Iraq. “What do you need?” he asked. “Hope,” came the reply. “The church and society need hope.”

It marked the start of a new Open Doors campaign, to bring hope to the Middle East and raise a million voices in prayer and advocacy. We wanted to stand with our brothers and sisters, to help the church survive the onslaught. Your support made it happen.

From despair, hope

Ferial, a 52-year-old mum of two, lived in Aleppo when war broke out in Syria. Bombs cracked the walls of her home, and militants shot at her family as they returned from the market.

For three months, they survived with no water. But even after moving to safety, to a place called Latakia, Ferial grieved the life she'd lost.

It was only when Ferial visited an Open Doors Centre of Hope, at the Nazarene Church, that everything changed. “They took us under their wings spiritually and financially,” said Ferial. “They motivated me to love Jesus even more than I used to. We didn't feel abandoned, they made us feel loved.”

A fragile church

Because of the support of people like you, Ferial has hope. 286 Centres of Hope have opened in Syria and Iraq since 2015, bringing the love of God to people practically and spiritually. Their success shows the church *can* shine as a beacon of light in the darkness.

“Last week, a family in our church left. It broke us.”

This support meant the church in the Middle East survived the onslaught from the Islamic State. But it's vulnerable.

Today, daily life in Syria is harder than ever, with electricity, healthcare, food and employment all in short supply. Christians across the region suffer the effects of trauma. More people leave every month – and hope hangs by a thread.

Pastor Edward says, “The situation in Syria is worse than before. The economy collapsed. The middle class is now close to starvation. We are in a devastating situation and people are trying to leave. Last week a family in our church left – and it broke us.”



Pastor Edward runs a Centre of Hope in Damascus, with support from people like you.

For more than a decade, Pastor Edward has steadfastly led his church in Damascus. He runs a Centre of Hope, a medical clinic called Jesus Light of the World, which serves around 1,500 people a month. Pastor Edward has seen God at work in these past years, but he is tired.

“When the storm is over and we look back, we will see how the hand of the Lord was moving,” he said. Pastor Edward’s eyes fill with tears as he adds, “I preached during the crisis about the promises of the Lord but I’ve learned my lesson, I don’t promise a better future. It’s about trusting God’s sovereignty and experiencing his presence. We have experienced divine light amid darkness.”

Make hope last

Now, Open Doors has a vision to make every local church in Syria and Iraq a Centre of Hope. The centres will provide prayer, counselling,

Bible teaching, income-generating projects, loans to start businesses, medical support and humanitarian aid. They are places for Christians and Muslims alike to receive holistic, life-changing support.

With Centres of Hope right across Syria and Iraq, hope will last. Faith that survived will be strengthened, and believers will witness to the hope of Christ.

**“We cannot give up.
We must make hope last.”**

“The church has become smaller but it has remained, and God will keep his remnant,” said Thomas Adam*, Middle East Director for Open Doors. “When we grow the number of Centres of Hope, we stay faithful to our brothers and sisters and show they will never be alone. We cannot give up. We must make hope last.”

**name changed for security reasons*



Studying the Bible with other women strengthened Ferial's faith: "They motivated me to love Jesus even more."

Will you make hope last?

PRAY NOW

- Give thanks for Pastor Edward's faithfulness, and ask God to renew his strength.
- Pray for Ferial, in Syria, that she will be a beacon of hope.
- Pray the church will not only survive, but flourish and grow.

PRAY TOGETHER

- Join the *One Million Prayers of Hope* campaign and light up the world in prayer, by visiting www.opendoors.org/hk/hope.
- Pray on the *International Day of Prayer*, November 6, 2022, by ordering the Make Hope Last pack.

PLEASE GIVE

Every HK\$290 could supply vital food, winter clothing and blankets to a Christian in Syria this winter.

Every HK\$400 could enable two vulnerable believers to access basic medical services.

Every HK\$510 could provide trauma support and counselling to a believer attending a retreat.

**"You are the light
of the world. A
town built on a hill
cannot be hidden."**

MATTHEW 5:14



Power of hope

When Syria's civil war began and Islamic State set out to destroy the church, Ferial and her family feared for their lives. But you brought hope – and it changed everything.



Ferial and her family visited a Centre of Hope in Syria - and received the vital help they needed.

The sound of mortar fire ripped through the night sky and shockwaves from the explosion cracked the walls of Ferial's home. Terrified, she scooped up her two young children and hid in the bathroom.

This was Aleppo, Syria, soon after the outbreak of war in 2011. Islamist extremists were intent on eradicating the church, and Christians like 52-year-old Ferial were caught in a deadly conflict.

“There is no sadness because we're so close to Jesus.”

“One time my husband and children went to the market and on the way back they were shot at,” said Ferial. “They ran, the children crying.”

With no water, no food and no work, the family were forced to flee the besieged city and start again in the countryside, in a place called Latakia. Ferial grieved the life she'd lost. Their new home was tiny, with limited electricity. Other Christians were leaving Syria in huge numbers.

But then Ferial visited an Open Doors Centre of Hope, at the Nazarene Church, and everything changed.

“They took us under their wings spiritually and financially,” said Ferial. “They motivated me to love Jesus even more than I used to. We didn’t feel abandoned, they made us feel loved.”

Thanks to your prayers and gifts, there are 160 Centres of Hope in Syria. These remarkable places provide holistic support including prayer, counselling, Bible teaching, income-generating projects, loans for starting businesses, medical support and humanitarian aid.

Ferial and the family received vital practical help – food, support with the rent, tutoring for the children – and Ferial’s faith grew as she studied the Bible with other women. “I felt different, closer to the ways of Jesus,” she said. “God is alive in us, taking care of us, nurturing us. My heart never felt as touched by that before.”

Today, Ferial works as a teacher at the centre, her fear is gone and the children have completed their studies. Even now, amid severe poverty and hardship, your support means Ferial has hope.

“You are very generous, I thank you very much,” she said, tears welling in her eyes. “Since we got to know Jesus, I see a very beautiful future. Even with all the crises – war, the economy, lack of electricity and water, the psychological crisis – I feel peace, inner peace. There’s no sadness because we’re so close to Jesus. We know Jesus won’t leave us.”

PLEASE PRAY

- Lift up Ferial before God. Give thanks for the power of hope in her life.
- Pray for Ferial’s children, Anna Maria and Ohannes, that hope will light their generation.
- Pray the church in Syria will shine as a beacon of hope in a dark place.

Join the One Million Prayers of Hope campaign and light up the world in prayer for Syria and Iraq, by visiting www.opendoors.org.hk/hope.



Ferial works as a teacher and the children have finished their studies, thanks to your support.



2016

Karamles

THEN & NOW

2022

Karamles is a predominantly Christian village in Iraq with a close-knit church community. The town is roughly 15 kilometres east of Mosul. Its population of around 3,000 fled in August 2014 when ISIS militants over-ran the area.

Many Christians found a safe haven in Erbil. Some lived in tents or in an unfinished shopping mall. A large group found a roof over their heads in what was often referred to as 'Karamles Camp', a building complex with several apartments and a central courtyard.

Salem & Ikram Qasha

THEN



Salem and Ikram were displaced overnight in August 2014.

In 2016, they were asked; what do you treasure most since you ran from ISIS? Ikram took some keys that were hanging on a rusty nail on a wall and said, "Nothing would be better than to live in my own house again."



Salem showed photos of his parents on his phone. The photos are dear to him for he "never wants to forget the Christian heritage in Iraq". He doesn't know if the printed photographs are still in his home in Karamles.

NOW

After more than 3 years of displacement, Ikram was finally able to try fitting her carefully kept keys into her own front door because Karamles has been liberated. Following serious repair work on their house, Salem and Ikram now live in Karamles again.

Thankfully, the printed photographs of Salem's parents were still there. He proudly shows them.

"I pray for Daesh [ISIS] that God lights their way. We are all human after all and we ask God to forgive them."

- SALEM



Tereze



Tereze's parents got married only two weeks before ISIS invaded Karamles.

The newlyweds found a place to stay in 'Karamles Camp' with other members of their wider family. Soon, Nariman and Thomas found themselves pregnant and Tereze was born during displacement in 2015.

Like many other Iraqi Christians, several of Tereze's relatives have left Iraq—less than one third of Karamles' residents returned to the town.

Tereze is now a young girl of 7 years and living in Karamles. It is not the place she was born in, yet it is the town with the roots of her family.

Although the Islamic State may seem defeated, fears for the future are not gone. Thomas asks for prayer.

"Please pray for us. The situation here is unstable and I am afraid about the future of my children. I am praying that they can have a future better than ours."

HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

YOUR SUPPORT, YOUR IMPACT

When Islamist extremists set out to eradicate the church in the Middle East, your support kept hope alive. Thank you.

YOUR GIFTS AND PRAYERS, CHANGING LIVES

RESTORING LIVELIHOODS

Salah Askiefi, 30, received a small business loan to open a sweet shop in Latakia. "God helped me with this, when all roads seemed closed," he said. "It's as if God told me, I want to lift you up. Thank you to everyone who made this possible. It was a lifeline."

REBUILDING HOMES

Shefa*, from a local partner organisation, visited Qaraqoush, Iraq, where your support helped rebuild more than 2,000 homes. "Once, I was shocked by the smell of death and the sight of destruction here," said Shefa. "But now, I visit those villages and hear the church bells ring again. I see Christians picking up their lives!"

CARING FOR THE ELDERLY

Amir*, in his 80s, lives alone on the top floor of an apartment in Damascus, Syria. His wife has died and his children left the country. He's housebound because he struggles to walk and the lift doesn't work. But, thanks to your support, people from church visit... "I've only God and you," Amir said.

ADVOCACY

"International agencies and even the US government started to support churches in Syria and Iraq financially," said Open Doors director in the Middle East, Thomas Adam*.

This incredible outcome was the result of your support to advocate for our brothers and sisters, and highlight the church's positive contribution to society.

RELIEF AID

Iktimal and her family were driven out of their home and farmland by armed militants. Christians at the Centre of Hope in Latakia helped the family find a house to rent, and provided mattresses, blankets, pillows, gas, monthly food packages and clothes. "We found this place and started to love life again," said Iktimal.

CHURCH: A BEACON OF HOPE

Fadi, from Baghdad, was 11 when war broke out. Conflict, death and fear marked his youth. But he knew the church was a beacon of light. "If they chase me out of my house, I can go to church and take shelter," he said. "The simple fact that the church was open made it a centre of hope."

NEW BELIEVERS

Open Doors director Thomas* said many people from a Muslim background have come to faith in Jesus. "I was speechless when I went to a church service with only Muslim-background believers from Syria," said Thomas. "This place is a centre of hope for them."

**name changed for security reasons*

HOPE REMAINS – BECAUSE OF YOU

Civil war is raging in Syria. A quarter of a million people have been killed, millions more have fled their homes, and a humanitarian crisis is unfolding. The church, too, is dying at the hands of Islamic State, as Christians lose hope and leave.

That was 2015, and the desperate situation demanded a global response. Open Doors regional director, Thomas Adam*, brought church leaders together from across the Middle East. “What do you need?” he asked. “Hope,” came the reply. “The church and society need hope.”

So Open Doors launched a new vision to bring hope to the Middle East and raise a million voices in prayer and advocacy. We wanted to stand with our brothers and sisters, to help the church survive the onslaught.

Your support made it happen.

From relief aid, to rebuilding homes, to restoring livelihoods, your gifts and prayers changed lives across Syria and Iraq (see opposite). You helped open 286 Centres of Hope, strengthening the church to shine light in the darkness. And more than 808,000 people signed the Hope for the Middle East petition (see more over the page), forcing leaders around the world to take notice.

You stood with our brothers and sisters – and they were not alone.

You kept hope alive – and the church survived.

Thank you so much.



“The simple fact that the church was open made it a centre of hope,” said Fadi, a Christian from Baghdad.



160
Centres of Hope in
Syria, for Christians
and Muslims alike



2,000
homes rebuilt
in Iraq



126
Centres of Hope
in Iraq, providing
holistic support



1M+
food packages
distributed in Syria



808,172
people from 143
countries signed a
petition on behalf of
Christians in Syria and
Iraq

2017



RAISING A VOICE: **NOEH'S STORY**

Noeh was just a little boy when Islamist extremists destroyed his hometown of Karamles, in Iraq. The family fled – but when they returned, their home was burnt to the ground.

So when more than 808,000 people signed our Hope for the Middle East petition, 12-year-old Noeh was chosen to present it to the United Nations. In December 2017, Noeh travelled with his father Hathem and a church leader to America, and presented the petition in New York.

The petition urged world leaders to ensure that Christians and others in Iraq and Syria are guaranteed the right to equal citizenship, dignified living conditions and a prominent role in reconciling and rebuilding society.

Today, Noeh has returned to live in Karamles and is a shepherd. “Life is difficult and it is hard to find work, but there is hope here now,” said Noeh. “Our homes are here so we are back to rebuild and remain. Jesus brought us back here safely.”

2022



YOUR IMPACT:

JINA'S STORY

Kidnappers stormed the bus, travelling from Aleppo to Qamishli in Syria, and ordered two Christian men off. One was later freed after a ransom was paid. The other was Rober, husband to Jina and dad to one-year-old Apo. He was never seen again.

“They told Rober to convert to Islam time after time,” Jina heard. “But he refused, saying, ‘I have my God and that’s it.’” The years passed and Rober was officially declared dead. The family was devastated.

But today, little Apo is 10 – a kind and obedient boy – and, thanks to your support, Jina has hope.

At the Centre of Hope in Aleppo, Jina receives food parcels and winter fuel, and Apo attends kids’ Bible groups. Jina is even training to be a beautician. “How would a widow survive without the help you provided?” she said. “You helped me to find this work and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I pray God will bless you and open new doors for you to continue to help us in Syria.”

Thank you so much for bringing hope to the Middle East.



MAKE HOPE LAST

Islamic State set out to destroy the church in Syria and Iraq. Together, we helped keep hope alive. Thank you.

Today, Christians face economic collapse, poverty and hunger. Extremism remains a threat.

Without our ongoing support and prayer, Christians may lose hope and leave.

Will you strengthen the church to be a centre of hope?

- Join the *One Million Prayers of Hope* campaign and light up the world in prayer.
- If you are able, please give. **Every HK\$290** could supply vital food, winter clothing and blankets to a Christian in Syria this winter.

Please visit www.opendoors.org.hk/hope

Thank you.



We are a tax-exempt charity (under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue).

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Website

