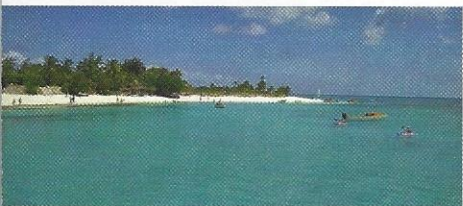


significant news for christians

Some news that's encouraging—some disturbing. Read with discernment. Watch and pray.

THE Church Around the WORLD

September 2021



Country in Focus: The Republic of Vanuatu ⁽¹⁾

Vanuatu, formerly called the New Hebrides, consists of 12 larger and 70 smaller islands southwest of the Solomon Islands in the southwest Pacific. The population of 300,000 is made up of more than 100 different people groups. The economy is highly dependent on agriculture and tourism, both of which are vulnerable to weather and climate. Vanuatu is the third poorest nation in the Pacific.

All islanders have complete religious freedom, though small pockets of traditional ethnic religions still remain on many islands, and a number of other faiths are making inroads into the country. Thousands have turned to Christ through the witness of Presbyterian missionaries and viewings of the JESUS film. Christian leaders helped gain the country's independence and continue to play an important role in government. The country's motto is "In God we trust."

Prayer concerns:

- Pray for the ongoing tasks of literacy and ministry training.
- Pray for those producing audio Scriptures, which remain essential in a country with a low literacy rate. To date, portions of the Bible have been translated and recorded for some 50 languages.
- Pray for the Christian radio station in Vanuatu, which is now broadcasting 24 hours a day.

Baptisms, Church Membership, Attendance Decline in SBC ⁽²⁾

A new report revealed that in 2020, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) saw declines in several key metrics, including baptisms, church membership, and weekly

church attendance. According to the most recent Annual Church Profile (ACP) report, last year, there was a 3 percent decline in church memberships. According to Lifeway Research, the SBC has seen a steady decline in numbers since the denomination's strongest year, 2006, when it had 16.3 million members. The latest drop brought the denomination's total number of members to 14 million.

Baylor University Recognizes First-Ever LGBTQ Student Group ⁽³⁾

Baylor University, one of the world's largest Baptist universities, has taken steps toward giving formal campus recognition to an LGBTQ student group, although the school maintains that it disapproves of same-sex marriage, adultery, and sex outside of marriage.

According to the *Christian Post*, the Waco, Texas-based school's board of regents recently adopted a resolution that clears the way for the school to formally recognize a group of LGBT-identifying students.

President Linda A. Livingstone and the

university administration were tasked by the board of regents with determining "the appropriate pathways to provide additional care, connections, and community for Baylor's LGBTQ students, including the possibility of establishing a new, chartered student group that is consistent with Baylor's core commitments."

In a statement on the decision Livingstone asserted, "We look forward to moving forward on the charge in that resolution and doing it in a way that respects the principles outlined there and respects our values and mission and then our deep care for our students." The resolution also states that "as an important and faithful expression of our Christian mission, we desire to establish

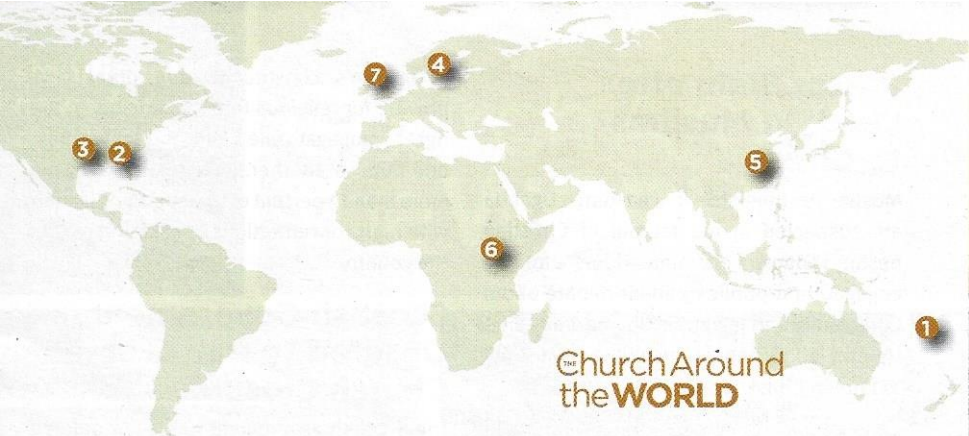


This month you can . . . Try 10 Outreach Ideas for Your Church

Here are some outreach ideas for your church to try. It often takes some time to organize and plan for such activities, so an early start is always helpful.

1. Deliver food baskets: Organize, prepare, and deliver food baskets to families and individuals in need in your area.
2. Invite a friend: Have members commit to personally invite one person—friend or stranger—to church every week.
3. Host a baby shower: Plan a baby shower for the clients of a local pregnancy center.
4. Serve Sunday brunch: deliver invitations to homes located near the church building inviting them to a Sunday brunch before your church service.
5. Pray for leaders: Invite local government leaders to your worship service. Recognize those who are able to attend and pray for them.
6. Facilitate date night: Provide complimentary childcare for couples so they can go on a date.
7. Offer a nearly-wed seminar: Invite engaged couples to a seminar before church or during the week, helping the couples prepare for marriage.
8. Provide a car-care clinic: Set up a free oil change and general car maintenance operation at your church for the single moms and widows in your community.
9. Thank local heroes: Invite firefighters, police officers, emergency medical personnel, and others for a special recognition service and lunch at your church.
10. Adopt an international student: Work with your local university to welcome an international student. Pick them up at the airport when they arrive. Invite them to dinner once a month and spend time with them during the holidays.

(These ideas originated in the post "52 Ideas for Your Church This Year" by Diana Davis, author, columnist, and speaker.)



Baylor University Recognizes First-Ever LGBTQ Student Group, continued from page 2

trust with our LGBTQ students so that, among other things, they might seek out the resources provided by Baylor.”

The resolution, however, also makes clear that the university continues to uphold “the biblical understanding that sexual relations of any kind outside of marriage between a man and a woman are not in keeping with the teaching of Scripture.”

Sweden’s Largest Denomination Proclaims Itself ‘Transgender’ (4)

The largest Christian denomination in Sweden posted an open letter this month to the transgender community declaring that it, too, is transgender.

The Church of Sweden, a Lutheran denomination with more than 5 million members, posted the letter on its official website with the names of nearly 1,000 people who signed it. It was authored by six individuals, four of whom are priests.

“We are writing to you from a church that is also trans. A church is made up of people,” the letter says. “People are different. We have confirmands, employees, churchwardens, elected representatives . . . and other parishioners who define themselves as transgender people. The church thus also consists of transgender people. Therefore, the church could be described as trans.”

China Most Worrying Country for Religious Freedom (5)

Secretary of State Anthony Blinken released the State Department’s much-anticipated annual Report on International Religious Freedom recently.

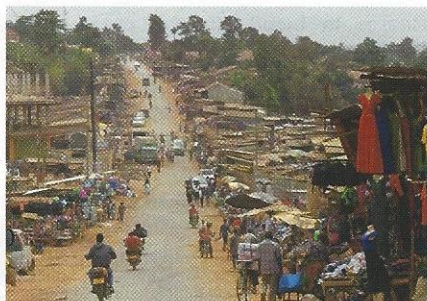
The 2020 report detailed the Chinese government’s systematic persecution of an estimated 200 million religious believers, including Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists.

“Religious freedom, like every human right, is universal. All people, everywhere, are entitled to it no matter where they live, what they believe, or what they don’t believe. Religious freedom is co-equal with other human rights because human rights are indivisible. Religious freedom is not more or less important than the freedom to speak and assemble, to participate in the political life of one’s country, to live free from torture or slavery, or any other human right. Indeed, they’re all interdependent,” Blinken told reporters.

The State Department announced that the Chinese government continues to commit genocide and inhumane acts against Muslim Uyghurs, Christians, and other religious and ethnic minorities in western China.

Pastor Slain after Leading Muslims to Christ (6)

Muslim extremists in eastern Uganda are suspected in the murder of Christian pastor Thomas Chikooma. Hours after he engaged in a public open-air debate about Christianity and Islam, Chikooma was killed. He had led 14 people, including 6 Muslims, to faith in Christ.



Area Muslims had invited the independent Pentecostal church pastor to participate in the debate at a taxi park in the town. After Chikooma offered a defense of Christianity using the Bible and the Koran and led several people to receive Christ, angry Muslims began shouting the jihadist slogan, “Allahu Akbar,” or “Allah is greater,” compelling him to rush away from the venue. His body was later found in a pool of blood, beheaded, and with his tongue removed. Relatives were in tears as they mourned the loss of the pastor, a father of 11 who had planted 50 churches in eastern Uganda.

Uganda’s constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one’s faith and convert from one faith to another. Muslims make up no more than 12 percent of Uganda’s population, with high concentrations in eastern areas of the country.

Scottish Government Ordered to Pay over Church Closures (7)

The Scottish government has been ordered to pay 50 percent additional costs after it lost a court case on church closures during the COVID-19 lockdown. Rules in Scotland had criminalized church gatherings in person.

The measures were successfully challenged by 27 church leaders when Lord Braid ruled that it was not for the Scottish Government to dictate to churches that worship must be conducted online. Overturning the restrictions with immediate effect, he said, “[An online service] might be an alternative to worship but it is not worship. At very best for the respondents . . . it is worship-lite,” he said, adding that the churches were being “effectively prevented from practicing or manifesting their religion.”

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, which supported the church leaders in their court action, said, “This decision is a timely reminder that governments may not impose excessive or unnecessary restrictions on churches.”

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we ask you to pray for us. Pray that the Lord’s message will spread rapidly and be honored wherever it goes, just as when it came to you.

2 THESSALONIANS 3:1