

Our dear friends,

As we write this all is busy as it is our annual cream tea! This is not for us but for our dear Christian Cancer Support Group. It is now an event that marks the calendar. Summer is here! We hope it is – we are anxiously watching the weather. Will the sun come out or won't it? Will it rain? We trust in the Lord and we know whatever the weather the love and faith in this group will shine as brightly as ever.

In May we had the joy of a service of Bridal Consecration. For Sister Louise the years of testing a call with us were over, the sun shone, our friend and Bishop was with us. Moreover he brought the Archbishop of Melanesia along with him. Louise's family, the Sisters and friends gathered in our chapel and the solemn promises were made. It is a moving occasion for us all, solemn in some ways but overflowing with joy.



We have had another celebration recently. Sister Lynda's Gran or "Nain" in Welsh celebrated her 100th birthday. The staff at Westhaven have cared for her lovingly and with great kindness since she needed nursing care. They moved into first gear, decorating the home and providing a splendid buffet. Nain's family, her friends and the Sisters accompanied by the "perfect dog", who had been especially invited by the matron, gathered for the celebration. The deputy Lord Mayor of Wirral gave Nain a beautiful flower arrangement and of course there was the birthday card from the Queen.

There is another big O in July. Many of you will know Sister Nora, a Methodist deaconess who has faithfully looked after our library for many years now. She will be 90. She shows no sign of giving up! We are wondering if we have one of the oldest librarians in the country! We are immensely grateful for all the help that she has given us. Let it be said. She still does a very good job.

The flowers in our garden are bursting with colour. This year they seem to be exceptional. Our gardening Sister tells us that this is because of the hard winter. We can still remember our car skidding in the icy front drive and ending up perilously near the wall. There it remained for 10 days. Now we have the joy of all the beautiful flowers. We have had our times of testing since the year began, the icy days, but from such times the Lord can produce a rich harvest if we allow it, flowers of many colours; joy in the certainty of The Lord's Presence. As we were reminded in our communion service last week, "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong and that you, O Lord, are loving." Ps 62:11-12

We can't remember when our concern for the persecuted church began. It has become so much a part of us that it seems to have always been there. We pray and sing victory songs and regularly receive, by post and email, news of our brothers and sisters who are suffering for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

Over the years unexpected contacts have come our way. In 1998 a letter arrived here. It had been carefully covered by a sheet of blank paper so that no one could read the writing through the envelope. It said, "Grace, mercy and peace from our Lord Jesus be with you. I have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints which have been encouraging me. I always remember you in Jesus -----Please pray for me" A China Brother ----- . Three years later in 2001 another letter came. This included the comment, "I think you know I have a little inconvenience here". Also, "I don't cease to remember you before my Lord these years." We also have prayed faithfully for him to the present day. None of us will ever forget the hauntingly beautiful songs in the Korean Church to which we had been invited –songs that were cradled in suffering yet simple and trusting. The words spoke often of heaven. We heard the sobs as an update on North Korea was given and the prayers that came from hearts that had been broken. There are, it is believed, 40,000 to 60,000 Christians in labour camps. We find it too painful to even describe the diabolical happenings in these camps. If a Christian is arrested, the family also go into the camp including young children. Many of them die there. They are not allowed to raise their heads (to heaven) so eventually their spines begin to crumble. When did you last pray for these brothers and sisters? As you read this remember them, their courageous faith and endurance.

We have had Iranian Pastors here who have told us first hand about the suffering church in their country. We have had Christian asylum seekers visit us who have had to flee to save their lives. There are those who have converted from Islam

to Christianity. They may experience phone calls with death threats, persecution by their families, loss of their livelihoods and sometimes they are not accepted either by the indigenous minority Christian Church who are afraid of reprisals on them. These Muslim background believers are forming their own groups - meeting together in secret in countries where to convert to Christianity is seen as treason.

There are many more – Christians hiding in the jungle in Burma and hounded by the Burmese military. Their villages have been destroyed. There are those in Eritrea who are imprisoned in crowded shipping containers, baking hot during the day and freezing cold at night. One young Christian woman in her twenties imprisoned in a container has recently died. These are our brothers and sisters in Christ. There are many other countries, other situations that we have not mentioned.

We hear stories too of the church growing in numbers in countries where the gospel and evangelism is forbidden. One Muslim background believer told how the Lord came to her in a dream. She said to him, “Who are you”. He replied, “I am Christ.” “Come follow me”. She woke up and from that day has followed him. The road led to arrest and terrifying interrogation. Her father who was a Muslim said to her, “I don’t want you to return to Islam. Christ has invited you.” He saw clearly the danger she was in and warned her that she must go to another country because he didn’t want anything to harm her. “You must go and make your life without us, before you are my daughter, you are God’s daughter”. She was heartbroken but she left. She was asked whether she wished that she had not had that dream. She replied, “Never”. (Open Doors website)

A former curate from St Mary’s Church said to us that he was praying for the persecution of Christians in the UK. We wouldn’t go that far! It is certainly tougher here than when he first said this to us. But we could see where he was coming from. By comparison with the persecuted church we are often lukewarm and compromising. Jesus had a word for such a church in the book of Revelation. “So because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” Rev.3:16 “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. “So be earnest, and repent.” Rev 3:19

Persecution reveals those who truly love Jesus. Christians in the persecuted church are ready to die rather than deny Jesus. They don’t look for martyrdom but they look death in the face and they are ready. Heaven is a reality for them in a way it is not for us so they sing often of heaven. They sing of “his (Jesus) companionship until heaven” and “there are no tears in heaven.” The church in North Korea see internment in prison camps, where there is torture, ill- treatment, starvation rations and harsh labour as a continuation of their missionary calling. “I will continue my missionary work”, as “I do not fear; the Lord is with me”. It is impossible for a church such as this to die. They have counted the cost and are willing to pay it out of love for the Lord Jesus.

They love and forgive. They keep faith with the teaching of Christ. There is no bitterness or desire for revenge only a desire that their persecutors will be found by the Lord Jesus. These churches have nothing, as we would see it but they have everything that is needed in Christ; whereas we have so much but lack their riches in Christ. Sometimes in the West it has been Christians taking other Christians to court. The persecuted church would find this incomprehensible.

Suffering sorts out our priorities. Some of us never acquire right priorities until the Lord allows suffering to touch us. The persecuted church is cradled in suffering. It is in the air that they breathe. Their priorities are prayer, evangelism, grounding new believers in the Bible and loving one another. We have much to learn. Perhaps as the major denominations go steadily down in numbers year on year, the Lord is saying something to us about our priorities.

The persecuted church can teach us much. They also need us. They need our prayers, our encouragement and our support – perhaps most of all our prayers – our personal prayer and prayer in our churches. Don’t let us forget our dear brothers and sisters some of whom in the short time it has taken you to read this will have suffered for the Name of Jesus.

May the Lord bless you,

The Sisters of Jesus Way

Sisters of Jesus Way, Redacre, 24 Abbey Road, West Kirby, Wirral, CH48 7EP.
Tel. No. 0151 625 8775. E-mail: sistersofjesusway@redacre.org.uk
Website: www.redacre.org.uk

