



SPECIAL EDITION: Annual Ministry Report

Serving the Persecuted Church for More Than 50 Years | Annual Report 2024

Telling Stories of God's FAITHFULNESS

By Floyd A. Brobbel CEO for Voice of the Martyrs Canada

"We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and His might, and the wonders that He has done." - Psalm 78:4 ESV

Years ago, an elder in my church gave me these words of wisdom: "Just tell the stories, and let the Holy Spirit do the rest." In my work with VOMC, I have strived to authentically and passionately communicate the testimonies of our persecuted brothers and sisters. However, I trust the Holy Spirit to use my words and evoke a response within the hearts of those who receive them.

For example, I often tell the story of "Mrs. Lee," one of my heroes of the faith. Following her escape from North Korea, instead of living an "easy" life in South Korea, Mrs. Lee enrolled in the Voice of the Martyrs' *Underground University* (UU). This joint project between VOM Korea and VOM Canada is designed to disciple and equip North Korean defectors so they can minister for Christ in North Korean communities wherever they are found – including China and other East Asian countries.

At 80 years old, Mrs. Lee was all set to graduate from UU. However, a prerequisite for graduation is planning and completing a mission trip. So she decided to join a team of fellow UU students who would be travelling to China to participate in an outreach to orphaned children. Typically, the mothers of these children are North Korean, and their fathers are Chinese. In China, many of these children get left behind when their mothers seek citizenship in South Korea. As their Chinese fathers want nothing to

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do with them either, the children are often abandoned. In many cases, Christians are responding to this need by taking care of these little ones.

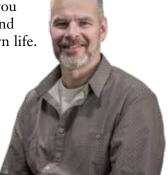
Mrs. Lee and her team went to demonstrate God's love to these children. She knew it would be a risky trip because the Chinese police often round up North Korean defectors and send them back to North Korea. Even though the UU missionaries had South Korean documentation, they could still potentially be recognized as North Koreans and sent back to their home country. Concerned about this risk, the students became fearful until Mrs. Lee reminded them of their training in the theology of persecution and discipleship. "Have courage," she told them. "God is on our side no matter what happens." Mrs. Lee later confided to me: "I'm an 80-year-old woman, a North Korean defector. Who (in their right mind) would use me? I'm a nobody." Then, with a pause and a big smile, she continued, "But God did!"

In this Annual Report issue of *Voice of the Martyrs Canada*, we are telling stories of enduring faith steeped in love for God and others. These stories have power because they are not complete; rather, they continue to live on as persecuted followers of Jesus boldly proclaim the hope of the Gospel in regions of hostility. As author C.S. Lewis wrote, "There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind."

I pray that as you engage with these stories, they will inspire, challenge, encourage and equip you to likewise testify of how God's faithfulness and goodness have been demonstrated in your own life.

Grace and peace,

FLOYD



Our logo has changed, but our mission has not.

We have simplified and refreshed our logo. In the days ahead, you will see other resources that communicate VOMC's ministry focus in a clear and attractive way. We believe these steps will not only strengthen our partnerships with you and those of the next generation, but also more strongly convey the needs of our global VOM family. It is important to us to remain faithful to God's calling. We are committed to actively remembering and serving the church "persecuted."

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Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.

Some of the translated quotes included in the testimonial articles may have been altered slightly so they will be in keeping with Canadian English spelling, grammar usage and style.

The goals of VOMC are expressed in our "Ministry Purposes" as follows:

- 1. To encourage and empower persecuted Christians to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).
- 2. To give practical relief and spiritual support to the families of Christian martyrs (Matthew 25:36).
- 3. To equip persecuted Christians to love and win to Christ those opposed to the Gospel (Romans 12:14).
- To help believers rebuild their lives and Christian witness in countries where they have formerly suffered oppression (Nehemiah 1:3; 2:5).
- To promote the fellowship of all believers by informing the world of the faith and courage of persecuted Christians, thereby inspiring believers to a deeper level of commitment to Christ and involvement in His Great Commission (Hebrews 13:3; Galatians 6:2).

Spending of funds is confined to board-approved programs and projects. Each restricted contribution designated towards a board-approved program or project will be used as designated with the understanding that when the need for such a program or project has been met, or cannot be completed for any reason determined by the board, the remaining restricted contributions designated for such program or project will be used where needed most. Gifts from individual donors of \$10 and more are acknowledged and receipted with an official receipt for income tax purposes.



About the Cover: As a young girl in Sierra Leone, Miracle once belonged to a demonic secret society. Today, she follows Jesus Christ and serves Him with joy.

Recycle your magazine: share it with a friend!

INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY REPORT

By Rev. Riadh Jaballah, VP of International Ministry



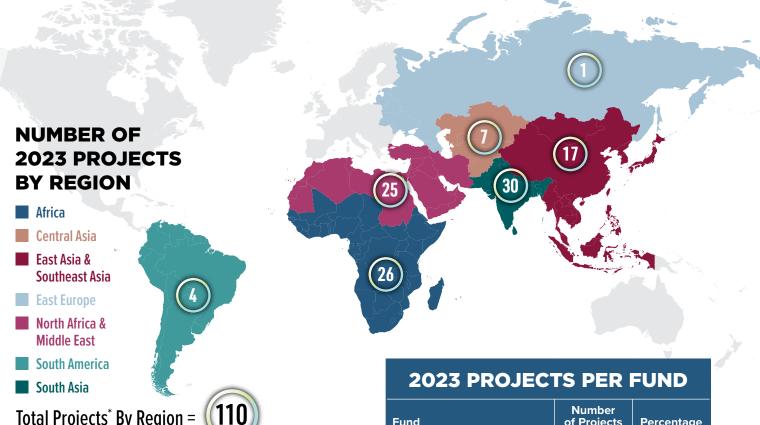
"Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain." Psalm 127:1 NIVUK

66 In God we trust!" This has been a daily reminder for the members of VOMC's International Ministry department as we faithfully continue serving our persecuted family in Christ. The unprecedented circumstances in which we live are impacting entire populations – both domestically and internationally.

Since March 2020, when signs of the global pandemic became increasingly more evident, the lives of people here in Canada and all other countries around the world shifted dramatically. In the aftermath of the pandemic, as everyone now tries to regain a sense of normality, there is the realization that so much has been lost, including aspects of our political freedoms and ways of life...even here in the West.

Canada is facing several challenges, including concerns relating to Bill C-63, which already passed into law on February 24th, 2024; while Bill C-367 is being debated at the time of writing this report. If the latter law happens to be passed, it could potentially have a significant impact on our religious freedoms, churches and Christian ministries. The geopolitical context in which we live today is evidently becoming very dark.

In a world full of anxiety, anger and prejudice, where Christians are targeted and censored, our refuge must always remain in the Lord God Almighty. During such difficult times – where there are *wars and rumours of wars*¹ – anyone can feel anxious and lonely. However, exploring and meditating on Bible verses that encourage us to trust in God will bring peace to our troubled hearts and replace those dreaded feelings of despondency with revived hope and joy, knowing that He has promised to *never leave us nor forsake us*,² and that a much *brighter future is assuredly awaiting us*.³ Therefore, it would not be wise to lose our composure and stumble spiritually when we can so readily turn to the Lord for needed wisdom and strength, relying steadfastly on Him and His infallible Word.



Total Projects^{*} By Region =

*Note: As some of VOMC's projects span multiple regions, the total number of "Projects By Region" equals 110.

The members of VOMC's International Ministry department are thankful to the Lord for making it possible to tangibly fulfill many of His promises in the lives of our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters worldwide through the ministry's multiple international projects. Furthermore, we are grateful that God has sovereignly guided our team and further strengthened our partnering relationships with well-proven, credible national spiritual leaders who are diligently facilitating the mission's projects within the countries resided by persecuted believers.

Of course, the Lord's great plans and purposes are also being made possible through the generosity of our constituents - the many Godly men and women He is using to fulfill His ministry work. This includes those who believe in the mission of VOMC and have faithfully stood alongside the persecuted in times of need. These dedicated believers continue to support the ministry prayerfully and financially despite the challenges of today's economic hardships. We are beyond grateful to God for our supporters' sacrifices and the love they continue to pour through the mission in order to assist the suffering members of our persecuted family in Christ.

VOMC's primary goal, which is to give God the glory in every aspect of our ministry service to the persecuted church worldwide, did not change in 2023. Fulfilling His mission through VOMC involved

Fund	Number of Projects	Percentage
Bible (translation/distribution)	14	12.02%
Christmas Blessing	1	6.85%
Equipping the Saints	28	20.54%
Families of Martyrs	6	5.04%
Legal Defence	5	2.90%
Medical	1	0.19%
Relief & Development	17	11.00%
Underground Church	14	30.03%
Women's Ministry	6	11.43%
Total Projects** Per Fund	92	100.00%

**Note: Some projects may involve multiple funds.



adjusting the plans of our international projects while prayerfully navigating how to effectively implement them within an unpredictable world context. God, in His mercy, has helped us to keep our focus on what we started building many years ago. We also learned to adapt our strategies based on the urgent needs caused by global challenges, such as the pandemic and inflation.

Thanks to the Lord's faithfulness, VOMC was able to provide greatly needed encouragement to the persecuted church throughout the year of 2023 in the following ways:

- Supplying the funds necessary for various Bible translation projects so God's Word (in print, digital and audio formats) can be made readily accessible in different languages for persecuted Christians of many countries.
- Distributing desperately needed Bibles to believers in several restricted nations.
- Providing for the urgent practical needs of persecuted Christians, including the families of martyrs.

- Equipping and empowering persecuted believers through the establishment of reliable local partnerships.
- Funding needed legal defence and advocacy for persecuted Christians facing imprisonment, charges or other legal issues because of their faith.
- Facilitating discipleship programs, as well as theological and Biblical training courses.
- Maintaining and developing a solid network with our International Ministry partners.
- Travelling overseas to personally meet with ministry partners to evaluate the projects we are overseeing, while also monitoring their growth and sustainability.
- Launching and/or producing various Christian radio programs.
- Helping vulnerable women whose husbands have been either arrested, imprisoned or martyred because of their Christian faith by providing financial assistance, skills training, and other means of practical aid so they can eventually achieve longterm sustainability and autonomy.



PRAYER POINTS:

Please join us in giving thanks to the Lord for the overwhelming blessings He has bestowed upon the ministry of VOMC in 2023, and for entrusting this provision to be wisely and effectively distributed in areas of the world where persecution is prevalent. Continue to prayerfully uphold our persecuted family in Christ before God's throne of grace, asking Him to sustain them as they suffer for the sake of the Gospel. Pray for the members of VOMC's ministry team as we serve these suffering believers and strive to be sensitive to their spiritual, emotional and physical needs. Pray that God will raise up spiritual and political leaders here in Canada who have a reverential fear of Him, and thus earnestly seek *after His heart*, so this great nation would ultimately be governed according to His will and the statutes of His Word.

oday, millions of Christians encounter severe opposition as they share their stories. Many are subjected to harassment, imprisonment and/or threats of death. The members of VOMC's ministry team have been called to steward the stories of these persecuted believers by serving as their voice and addressing the injustices they encounter.

The testimonies you will be reading about in the following pages are just a few of the countless stories being shared by the persecuted Christians we represent as they continue to faithfully reach out with God's unconditional love to their neighbours and compassionately lead their enemies to Christ. As you read about their remarkable lives of resilient faith, it is our prayer that God will continue to guide us in our endeavours to be faithful stewards of His amazing story and the inspiring stories shared by the courageous members of His persecuted church.

Yasmine:

SOWING GOSPEL SEEDS IN A DANGEROUS LAND

Yasmine was outside her home chatting with a friend when they suddenly heard gunfire down the street. "I saw [the assailants] coming, shooting," Yasmine recalls. "I went to the house to tell my husband to come out because the bad people are coming."

Islamic militants have ravaged large areas of Burkina Faso since 2016. Two notable terrorist groups in the region are the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam (JNIM), which translates to "The Group Supporting Islam and Muslims." Using the desert areas of neighbouring Mali and Niger as safe havens, these groups attack innocent victims without warning, taking advantage of Burkina Faso's limited military capability. "The terrorists are better armed than the army," a local pastor states.

These militant groups have taken control of roughly 40 percent of Burkina Faso, killed more than 10,000 people, and forced about 1.7 million residents (including many innocent Muslims) to flee their homes and take refuge in camps for internally displaced people. The militants have specifically targeted Christians in the country since 2019, often focussing their attacks on pastors and Christian leaders, as they seek to create an Islamic caliphate. One denomination reported that

500 pastors have been forced to flee during the past few years because of the violent activities.

On May 15th, 2023, gunmen attacked Yasmine's town, which is located in northern Burkina Faso, near the border with Mali. Her husband, Pastor Laurent Siadau, urged her to leave with him on their small motorcycle. But as Yasmine didn't want to leave her friend alone, she decided to flee with her on foot while Laurent sped away on the motorcycle.

Hearing more gunshots behind them, the two women ran into the forest and eventually found shelter in another town. Back in Yasmine's town, government forces had eventually arrived to confront the terrorists. Fighting between the Islamists and the military prevented Yasmine from returning home for more than 24 hours, and she was unable to reach her husband on his cellphone.

When she finally had been able to return home, Yasmine was shocked to see Laurent's motorcycle lying outside their house. Two of their adult sons explained that for unknown reasons, he had run inside the church next door – presumably to hide – where he was shot in the head by the attacking Islamists.



Not all of us are called to die a martyr's death, but all of us are called to have the same spirit of self-sacrifice and love to the very end as these martyrs had.

~ Richard Wurmbrand, International Founder of Voice of the Martyrs

Prior to this, Laurent had not been in full-time ministry very long. For most of his life, he worked as a chef in the country's capital city Ouagadougou. But then, in 2018, after all but one of the couple's five children were grown, he began attending Bible school. Two years later, he sensed God calling him to minister in northern Burkina Faso, where Islamic militants were already active and many civilians were either Muslims or animists.

According to Yasmine, reaching people in that region is similar to working on a farm. "In the village, [the Gospel] is like seed," the Christian widow explains. She and Laurent planted Gospel seeds in the lives of the villagers and worked hard to cultivate what they had sown. The fruit of Laurent's prayer ministry was seeing his neighbours freed from spiritual oppression. "When I remember that," Yasmine says, "I am very happy."

One of the couple's sons, Marcel, recalled that not everyone in the family was in favour of their move to the dangerous region of northern Burkina Faso. Aunts, uncles and other relatives had warned him, "Don't let your father go to that village; they don't want him there." But Marcel's father felt committed to fulfill his calling which involved advancing the Gospel. "He always told them that God called him to this village," Marcel adds, "and he must go to fulfill what God called him to do." Despite the brutality and injustice of Laurent's murder, his widowed wife Yasmine does not feel any anger towards his killers. "My heart's desire is for God to make His Spirit meet these people and change their hearts, like He [did in the life of] Saul on the way to Damascus." Marcel also prays that those who killed his father will genuinely repent and come to know the Lord "so one day they can also go to heaven."

Currently studying at a Bible training school, Marcel is determined to follow in his father's footsteps and enter the ministry. "Pray for me to get involved in the ministry when I am finished," he asks. "And [pray] for my uncles and other relatives...to meet Jesus and know that my father didn't die for nothing. He died for the faith. He died for the Gospel." Yasmine also requests prayer that she too will persevere in her faith. "Pray for me," she requests, "so God can comfort me and I will stay right in my faith until the end. I will see my husband [in heaven]. That is my will and my wish."

While still in the early stages of grief, Yasmine warmly recalls the mission work that she and Laurent did together by sowing Gospel seeds in northern Burkina Faso. "I am really happy for what we have done there," she concludes, "because many people have given their lives to Jesus Christ."

Editor's note: Yasmine bravely shared her testimony with VOM's incountry workers just 16 days after her husband's murder.

Abdul: THE IMAM WHO MET JESUS

About 90 percent of the population in Bangladesh adheres to Islam, while less than one percent practises Christianity. Those like Abdul, who convert to Christianity from Islam, are subjected to persecution by opposing local authorities and militant Islamic groups, as well as the members of their families and communities.



By age 25, Abdul had achieved his goal of becoming an imam. Around the same time, he also started teaching Arabic, the language of the Quran and other Islamic texts, to young students in Bangladesh.

After studying and teaching the Islamic texts for the next 25 years, he found himself drawn to the prophet Isa (Jesus), who is mentioned in the Quran. Although he never read a Bible before, Abdul felt there had to be more to Jesus than what he learned through his Islamic studies.

One night, while riding his bike, Abdul, who was 50 years old at the time, encountered what appeared to be a bright light for several minutes. Compelled to stop his bike beneath a tree, he then heard a voice speak to him. "It was clear that someone was talking to me," Abdul recalls. "I stood there and didn't see anything. I wasn't afraid, but I stood there and listened." He then heard the voice say, "Don't go down this road; take this other road." Confused, he simply rode his bike home.

Sometime later, while walking alone at night, Abdul heard that mysterious voice again. "There are so many prophets, so many people gone," the voice announced. "But I am alive and I am coming again! I am the Light; I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

Though Abdul felt as if he was going crazy, the bewildered listener realized that Jesus had been personally speaking to him. That's when he began to follow the spiritual road towards Christ, a decision that led to a debate with his family a few nights later about the importance of Jesus. "Nothing else was as important in my life," Abdul attests. "My only desire was to know more about Jesus. In my heart, I could talk to Him."

Abdul remained a leader in his mosque for three

more years, until one day he met a local pastor. The pastor shared the Gospel with him, provided a New Testament Bible and answered his probing questions about Jesus Christ. Abdul was soon baptized and, upon learning about the Great Commission, he made a commitment to share the Good News of Jesus with the lost: "When I finished my baptism, I went to my village and shared the Gospel."

Community Tensions

When Abdul first shared the Gospel with the imams he knew, they quickly became angry over what he was telling them. As a result, the imams eventually requested a meeting with Abdul and his family. Not surprisingly, they asked the new believer why he had rejected Islam to follow Jesus Christ. Abdul told them that he could no longer accept the Islamic faith, explaining that he and all of them were sinners in need of a Saviour. When Abdul's family members heard this, his wife, son and younger brothers immediately rejected him.

His older brother was so outraged, he took off his sandal and hit Abdul with it, a deeply offensive gesture according to Islamic culture. However, this chastisement was not enough for Abdul's nephew who demanded an even harsher punishment: "Please kill him because he is now a problem for our family! When we go to the bazaar, people will say, 'Your uncle is a Christian.' This is shameful to our family!"

The outraged nephew then left, only to return later with some bamboo sticks. Abdul's family watched as he cruelly beat his uncle with the sticks, breaking both of his legs. After spending many days in the hospital, and subsequently taking time to heal from his injuries, Abdul relocated to another village.

Unwelcomed By Opposers

When the nephew learned of Abdul's move, he informed the members of a militant Islamic group, who soon appeared at the Christian man's door. They took him to their headquarters and put him in a small room where, they told him, he would remain until he decided to abandon Christianity. "Jesus is in my heart," Abdul responded. "How can I kick Him out of my heart?"

One night, as Abdul was sleeping on the floor, two men with knives entered the room and demanded that he renounce his faith in Christ. "So many prophets like Muhammad have come, and everyone [of them] has gone to the grave," Abdul explained to the armed men. "Only Jesus Christ is in heaven. He will come again, and He will keep those of us who are following [Him]. I believe He is our Saviour and we can go to heaven [to be] with Him."

Putting a knife to Abdul's chest, one of the men threatened to kill him. "No problem," Abdul said confidently. "I am ready." Frustrated by their inability to intimidate Abdul, the two men left the room. Then, when Abdul noticed that his guard was asleep, he too left the room – escaping from his captors. Six months later, the group's leader showed up at Abdul's house, paralyzed on his right side. Attributing the paralysis to his mistreatment of Abdul, the man was full of regret. "Please, forgive me," he implored Abdul. "I have done wrong." Abdul forgave his former captor and, a few months later, heard that the man had been miraculously healed.

Continuing Jesus' Great Commission

Even though Abdul still struggles to walk because of the physical abuse he suffered, he continues to proclaim the Gospel message to Muslims in his village while trusting God regarding his own healing. And despite the emotional and physical suffering he endured, he testifies that the persecution has helped him grow closer to Christ. "My faith is now stronger," he declares.

Abdul encourages all of his brothers and sisters in Christ to engage in Jesus' Great Commission. "Those who believe in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour have a responsibility to share the Gospel," he adds. "It is important...to share our faith with others." In order to continue sharing the Gospel, he asks that we pray for his health. "When I physically die, I'll rest," he states. "I have no intention of stopping otherwise."

PRAY FOR BANGLADESH

Report by Terry B., International Ministry Partner

Bangladesh is one of the most crowded countries in the world, with its 170 million people sharing a space about the size of Southern Ontario or the state of Wisconsin. Almost 90 percent of the population is Muslim, and approximately one percent is Christian.

While the constitution permits freedom of religion, in practise, citizens who have placed their faith in Jesus commonly encounter various forms of prejudice and bullying. In the cities, Christians are often less likely to be hired by Muslim-owned organizations. And for the over 100 million believers living in one of the country's 60,000 villages, extreme poverty is usually experienced.

New followers of Jesus can also be banned from using local water wells or they may have their small shops or tea stalls boycotted. Many times, the decision to follow Jesus will lead to families being separated. In spite of all this, there are several movements that are reaching the country's majority people, and many are turning to Christ!

Our Christian brothers and sisters in Bangladesh need moral and spiritual support, as well as a practical means of supporting themselves. VOMC's ministry partners constantly monitor the situation in this country and, through the mission's various International Ministry



projects, thousands of Bibles are being distributed, many leaders are obtaining training, and small gatherings of believers are receiving assistance in practical ways.

Please pray for unity between the various church movements, courage and strength for new believers, and the necessary provisions and resources required for all those who are faithfully serving among them. If you would like to respond with a financial gift, you may do so by visiting vomcanada.com/donate.



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Heavenly Father, we know that in hard times You are with us. Protect and encourage all those whose lives are endangered by their witness for You. Walk closely alongside them. In Jesus' all-powerful name, amen.

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FOR THE PERSECUTED

EUROPE

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Nigeria

Morocco

Burkina Faso

> Benin Cameroon

Mauritania

- Tunisia

Cent Rep

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NORTH AMERICA



SOUTH AMERICA

PERSECUTED REGIONS

In these areas, Christians encounter varying degrees of repetitive, persistent and systematic suffering, and deprival of basic human rights, because of their faith in Jesus Christ – a belief their persecutors will not tolerate.



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PAUSE & PRAY

Pray that our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ will feel the comfort and encouragement of the Lord. In 1 Peter 4:12-14, the Apostle Peter shares about suffering and takes great encouragement from the knowledge that God is always with us, even in our most difficult moments.

Pray that persecutors will come to know
Christ. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus says,
"...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (ESV). As you think about our brothers and sisters in Christ, pray that God will use their suffering to bring others to faith – particularly those who are carrying out the persecution.

Pray that the church will be strengthened and continue to grow. Ask that God will increase the boldness of believers as they share the Gospel, and that more and more people will accept Jesus as their Saviour.



3.

Eun-Ji: "Not yet my time to go..."

The first time Eun-Ji set foot in a church, she was disgusted. From her perspective, the people sang and prayed loudly during the service; told her "lies" about North Korea; and, worst of all, spoke of the country's "eternal leaders," Kim II Sung and Kim Jong II, with brazen disrespect. All of these things infuriated her.

The visiting skeptic had come to the church, a Korean congregation in China, purely for financial reasons. Eun-Ji suspected that a woman who owed her money had attended there, and she needed that money back. After all, she had a family to feed during a time of severe famine in North Korea.

"In 1997 and 1998," Eun-Ji recalls, "...there were dead bodies all over the streets [because of the famine]. My husband and I were receiving our income solely from the [North Korean] government. Then the government cut off our rations, and we had no ability to survive."

Knowing that Eun-Ji had family members in China who could help her, a local woman persuaded her to take up smuggling. Most of the time, Eun-Ji smuggled goods that could be easily traded for food. However, when she was asked by a woman to help a child obtain much-needed medicine, Eun-Ji spent a week making arrangements. But then the woman – along with the promised payment – disappeared.

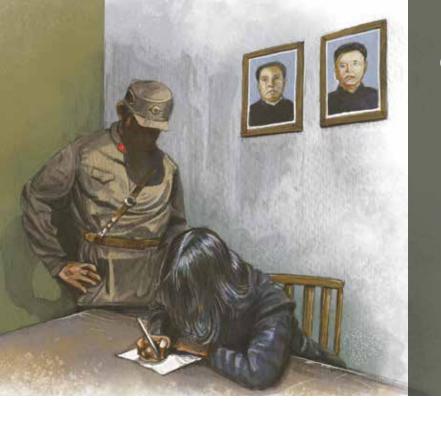
That's what led Eun-Ji to the Korean church in China. Hoping to retrieve the loaned money from the borrower, Eun-Ji spoke with the pastor and deacons of the church. They calmed her down, prayed for her, and provided money to help her family. They also suggested that she take a different route home to avoid border guards, directing her to another small church along the way.

Growing Faith

The church located along her new route became a regular stop during Eun-Ji's subsequent smuggling trips. For four years, people in the church lovingly shared the Gospel with her and taught her what it means to follow Christ. Over time, as Eun-Ji studied the Bible and learned how to live as a Christian, she also began sharing the message of Christ with others. Even so, she was still not wholly committed to following Christ. But one dark, cold night in December this changed....

While crossing the border that night to bring back goods for the upcoming New Year's celebrations, her movement through the snowy forest drew the attention of some Chinese border guards. Eun-Ji began to pray silently as she had been taught in church. To her amazement, one of the border guards walked into the forest near her but this time passed right by without seeing her, and others of the patrol soon moved on. Eun-Ji was sure that God had answered her prayer. "This was when I realized that the things I learned at church were real," she states.

After the famine ended, and the North Korean government renewed its hard stance on smuggling, Eun-Ji continued her illegal work. Then, in the early



Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

~ Romans 8:35-37 ESV

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2000s, the missionaries at the church she had been visiting for more than four years proposed a dangerous new smuggling venture: they asked if she would carry Bibles into North Korea.

Eun-Ji was hesitant. Being caught with a Bible could result in lifetime imprisonment, or even a death sentence. But her younger sister-in-law, who joined her in the smuggling enterprise – and had also come to faith in Christ through the ministry of the same church – was willing to take the risk.

So the two women packed the Bibles deep in bags of rice, with hopes these forbidden Christian resources couldn't be seen or felt by inspecting officials, and then they carried the smuggled materials back to North Korea with instructions to keep them secret and safe. Once home, Eun-Ji and her husband buried the carefully wrapped Bibles in their garden.

Food for the Stomach and Soul

As family members approached her for food and their other needs, Eun-Ji began to see them in a different light. She tried to gauge how receptive they would be to the Good News that had miraculously changed her heart. Whenever Eun-Ji shared any food or clothing with them, she made it clear that she was not the ultimate source of the gift. "It is not me giving you this," she told them. "It is God giving it to you through me."

If that didn't arouse suspicion or anger, Eun-Ji would cautiously take the next step, while continuing to foster her relatives' faith. Over time, she shared the Gospel with them, taught them to pray and helped them to memorize Bible verses. And she also encouraged them to pass the Gospel on to others in the same way she had shared it with them.

An Angel in Orphan Clothes

While North Korean authorities were investigating a woman for trafficking North Korean women to Chinese men, the woman tried to shift the attention away from herself by offering information about other smugglers with contacts in China. Eun-Ji was one of many people arrested and interrogated as a result of the woman's disclosure.

Eun-Ji believed it was only a matter of time before someone revealed that she had been in contact with Christians in China and even smuggled Bibles into North Korea. And she feared that her punishment would cost the ultimatum: death by a firing squad.

After her arrest, the secret police locked Eun-Ji in a second-floor hotel room with iron bars over the windows. It was there in that building they conducted interrogations, using torture to compel confessions. Left alone in the unheated room on a freezing January day, all Eun-Ji could do was keep moving to stay warm and cry out desperately in prayer. As darkness fell, she prayed, "Father God, it is not yet my time to go to You. I have more work to do for You. Please deliver me from this."

Eun-Ji continued to pray throughout her second day of captivity and, in the evening, an official came into the room and placed a small bowl of noodles on the table. The man told her that he would be returning to interrogate her that night, and she feared the officials would torture a confession out of her. Overcome with terror, she fainted.

When Eun-Ji regained consciousness, the room was completely dark. Then she heard someone at the door. Initially, she thought it must be the interrogator returning, but couldn't understand why he was waiting outside the room. When the door finally opened, Eun-Ji was surprised to see a small child, who then ran off without entering. "Next to the hotel, there was an orphanage," Eun-Ji explains. "One of the orphans probably came into the inn to steal stuff." She thinks the child probably chose her room because the lights were out.

The door was now wide open, with light shining in from the hallway. But Eun-Ji didn't dare move. She was sure the police guards must have heard the child's movement. So she remained silent for ten minutes, staring at the open door, yet no one else came to the room. Seizing the opportunity, Eun-Ji quietly slipped down the stairs and out of the building unnoticed. She later learned that a family had thrown a party for the officials as a bribe to let a detained family member go. During that time, the officials became intoxicated, giving her the chance to escape.

For the next three months, Eun-Ji hid from authorities with help from people who were disillusioned with the government. However, her husband and children were being harassed because of her escape from custody. Knowing that they were also at risk, Eun-Ji and her family made arrangements to defect to South Korea.

God's Favoured Daughter

Today, Eun-Ji and her husband, who are still residing in South Korea, serve in a local church where they minister to other North Korean defectors. Recalling how God had called and protected her, Eun-Ji smiled, describing herself as God's favoured daughter. This former smuggler asks for prayer that she will remain faithful as she continues to seek every opportunity to do God's will.

Whenever Eun-Ji has the occasional opportunity to speak with family members in North Korea, she urges them to remain strong in their faith. It is her prayer that the Gospel seeds planted in their lives will continue to bear good fruit as God's Kingdom advances in North Korea.



Eun-Ji secretly met with family members for times of discipleship and worship (photo reenactment).



for the PERSECUTED CHURCH

Join Us.

Canadian congregations are encouraged to set aside the first Sunday of each November to raise awareness about religious persecution and to pray for our persecuted sisters and brothers in Christ.

For more information, visit: **idop.ca**.

David and Maria:

MAKING DISCIPLES WHERE BOMBS FALL

> Maria sometimes feels alone in their ministry. Yet, at a recent pastors' conference, she was strengthened after meeting with other couples who also minister in Colombia's dangerous "red zones."

David and Maria, along with their three sons, have grown accustomed to guerrilla violence since moving in 2005 to a small Colombian town within the state of Arauca so they could lead a church.

After the couple planted two more churches in the area, the total number of those attending more than doubled in size to include 300 worshippers. But the church's growth was one of the few positives in an area long known for violence and drug trafficking by two violent Marxist groups: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). Although FARC leaders signed a peace accord with the Colombian government in 2016, many dissident guerrilla fighters have since reorganized.

Shortly after the family moved to the town, David and Maria realized how dangerous it was to reside there. One day, as their nine-year-old son was returning from a shopping errand for his mother, two stray bullets from guerrilla gunfire struck him in the neck – and one of those bullets missed a major artery by only one millimetre. Now fully recovered, the boy helps lead worship with his two brothers at one of the churches pastored by their father.

The family has also received anonymous threats. A few years ago, someone slipped a note under their front door, warning them that they would be killed if they didn't leave the community within 24 hours. David will never forget how his wife's face turned pale when she picked up the note and read it.

Even though David and Maria never learned who put the threatening note under their door, the couple understand that they are not particularly welcomed by those in the rebel-controlled area who strongly oppose the Gospel. Despite the risks, they decided to continue their ministry work in the town. However, they soon found themselves facing a new level of danger.

A Rattled Church

In early 2021, two guerrilla groups engaged in battle near the Arauca River, which forms the border between a town in Colombia and a town in Venezuela. Venezuela's military has allegedly been supporting one of the guerrilla groups, dropping bombs on enemy

locations. And some of the explosions have literally rattled David and Maria's church building.

"You hear the bombs every night," Maria states. "[When] in the service preaching, the building shakes because of the bombs." Confirming his wife's report, David shared with VOM's mission team various cellphone videos containing audible sounds of gunfire and explosions in the background.

David then shared video footage of a shelter that his church had provided for some of the 5,000 Venezuelans who were displaced by the conflict. The video showed a large open area dotted with tents, where many of the

families had been living since the conflict began in March 2021. The church faithfully fed and cared for these displaced families, regardless of their faith affiliation.

In the video, David can be heard sharing the love of Christ with those displaced by the fighting. "It has been a good way to share the Gospel," he adds, smiling. "We have been able to give glory to God...for taking care of us every moment in all situations."

While explaining further about their outreach work, David received an urgent video message from another concerned leader in the church: "There are troops landing, tanks landing, and everything is starting to



only nine years of age.

get a little more tense. It feels like war is eminent." When David initially viewed the video message, a loud unexplained booming sound came through the speaker of his cellphone. He shook when he heard it. "I am traumatized," he admits. "I thought it was a bomb. You live on edge...hoping you don't get bombed."

Returning to Ministry

After a much-needed respite at a gathering for pastors in Colombia, David and Maria felt ready to return to their Kingdom work. "My satisfaction is when people come to the Lord," David explains. "Seeing families restored, and young

people putting their weapons down, fills me with satisfaction." Although continuing their ministry work means returning to the chaos, David says they have no plans to leave their church and the work that the Lord has called them to fulfill. "Everything has to do with the calling of the Lord," he concludes, "and knowing that it's His will."

"CHRISTMAS BLESSING" IN COLOMBIA

In partnership with Colombia Para Cristo Society, VOMC's 2023 *Christmas Blessing* distribution project took place in Colombia and the frontier between this South American country and neighbouring Venezuela. Our ministry partners reported the following:

This project was born from the idea of encouraging 400 children from four Christian communities by providing them with durable bicycles. The bicycles are very significant gifts, as they are not just toys but very important tools that are used as a means of transportation – something that each of these families would never have been able to afford. The project also sought to provide Christmas [gifts such as] books and Bibles, as well as family care packages that included food and other daily necessities. Miraculously, the Lord multiplied this blessing by allowing us to reach more than 13 persecuted Christian communities, including the grand total of 1,026 children who each joyfully and gratefully received a bicycle or a toy, impacting their lives forever. We also distributed more than 14,300 [Christian] books and more than 3,200 Bibles to Sikuani natives who received the Word of God in their language for the first time ever. Most of this happened during events and conventions that took place in areas near the



Colombia-Venezuela border which are almost impossible to reach. Most of the families travelled for weeks from Venezuela with tremendous effort to receive their own copy of the Bible, which they lovingly held in their hands as if it was the most valuable treasure in the world.

Dmitry:

MINISTERING HOPE TO A NATION AT WAR

Condensed Version of Report By Release International One of VOMC's International Ministry Partners

As a church leader, Dmitry is familiar with the trauma and upheaval of having to flee from Russia's persecution of Christians. During the course of his life, it has happened not just once, nor twice, but on three separate occasions.

The first of these three displacements took place in 1989 when he was a young man. During that time, his family fled from the former Soviet Union as religious refugees and ended up in the United States. Years later,

Dmitry returned to Ukraine as a pastor, but was forced to leave Crimea when the Russians took over that part of the country. Two years ago, it happened for the third time.

"At 5:30 a.m. rockets came to our city," Dmitry recalls. "We all woke up and said, 'It's war.' Everything changed. Within a

22

week our city looked like Armageddon. No gas, groceries, telephone lines, Internet or electricity...." Prior to this attack in Melitopol, where Dmitry resided with his family and pastored a church of 500 members, there were numerous protests against the Russian invasion. "We were praying with other ministers. In the first week, [the soldiers] began investigating the churches and then started forbidding us to pray in the city square. They started attacking the church[es] and arresting people."

On March 19th, Dmitry himself was arrested. "[Russian soldiers] came into our house at 6:30 in the morning. We saw soldiers jumping over the fence into the backyard; about 15 of them. They got into the house, separated me [from the rest of my family], took

computers and everything. Then they took me to the church [where] they searched the building and took everything.... Then they put a black bag over my head and took me away."

Dmitry spent a total of eight days in prison amid appalling conditions. "Every time they took me for interrogation, they put a bag back over my head and dragged me through the corridors. Every day, I thought it could be the last day of my life." During

> detainment, he would hear the screams of other prisoners being interrogated. Even so, Dmitry said the Lord gave him peace in his heart. "I had no fear. It was supernatural. I began witnessing to [those in the prison] and talking to them about the Bible."

After Dmitry's arrest, Christians around the world were praying

for him. He is grateful that the prayers for his soon release were miraculously answered. However, as the secret police continued coming to his home, he made the decision to flee the country for his family's safety.

Dmitry and his family eventually moved to Poland where he now remotely serves and supports an underground network of house churches in Melitopol. As a dedicated pastor who is thankfully able to visit Ukraine regularly, he continues to be passionate about seeing people won for Christ and discipled: "If people are to be changed, they need Christ. And only Christ can change the problem [of war]. Until the end, we will have more problems, and then Jesus will come. In the meantime, we can change a nation by changing [people] – one by one."

Esther: Finding TRUE BEAUTY IN CHRIST

A woman in Iran tells us the following story...

As a hairdresser and makeup artist by profession, my everyday interactions are woven with the stories, tears and laughter of those who sit before me. Yet, beneath the surface, I harbour a deeper mission: liberating Iranian women ensnared by the injustices of sex trafficking and introducing them to

the freedom found in the pages of the Gospel.

The women who grace our chairs by day, seek beauty in our salon; yet, by night, they gather to learn of the hope that's available through Christ, as I once did. In the quietness of this secret Bible study, the truth of the Gospel is shared and lives are

transformed. It's in these moments – as we exchange the weight of our past for the hope of our future – that the true power of Christ's love is revealed, bringing healing and redemption to each of us.

My journey with the *Heart4Iran Emerging Leaders Program* began with a deeper yearning to see changes in the lives of the women I encounter. This training has enabled me to currently use my profession for something beyond [mere physical beauty]: restoring dignity and hope in the lives of others where it had once been stolen.



The *Heart4Iran Emerging Leaders Program* carved out a space for me to explore the dimensions of my faith and leadership abilities. It also served as an intersection of wisdom where seasoned Christian mentors imparted their insights on how to transform a world for Christ. Their perspectives on stewardship, community impact and spiritual growth have provided me a deeper understanding of what it means to lead. It dawned on me that our calling as leaders is not merely

to lead but to serve with a heart that mirrors Christ's.

The stories of perseverance, faith and breakthroughs shared in the leadership program were not just tales to be heard but fuel to propel us forward. They echoed the trials and triumphs that bonded us in our pursuit of spreading the Gospel. Each testi-

mony was a powerful testament to the transformation that comes when one encounters the Living God.

Today, my resolve is strengthened to continue my work as a vessel of hope. The salon, once just a place of business, has transformed into a deeper sanctuary of healing. It is a place where chains are broken and true beauty – rooted in the freedom Christ offers – is revealed. The leadership program has equipped me to not only fight against the darkness but to shine a light so bright that it beckons the lost towards [God's] love and redemption.



To learn more about Christian persecution in Iran, view Greg Musselman's podcast interview with Dr. Hormoz Shariat of Iran Alive: www.vomcanada.com/video/ir-govt-persecution

DOMESTIC MINISTRY REPORT

By Rick Tozer, VP of Domestic Ministry



Life stories, no matter how simple or complicated, can help others discover and know God personally. Testimonies of His faithfulness can comfort our friends and remind them of the hope we have in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:4).

At VOMC, we are called to be stewards of the 360 million Christians around the world who endure persecution for their faith. This is our mission: *Actively remembering and serving the church "persecuted.*" When sharing their stories, we invite people across Canada to pray, support and aspire to become like these believers who are strong and bold in their faith.

FAITH COMMUNITIES

Church events and small group gatherings provide nurturing environments where we can share our life experiences with one another and learn from the faith of others. The Apostle Paul encourages us to "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*" (Colossians 3:16 ESV).

In 2023, representatives of VOMC (ministry staff and volunteers) participated in various church services, small group gatherings – including those specifically for seniors, men, women and youth – mission-focussed events and homeschool conferences. As attendees heard the testimonies of suffering Christians, they were inspired to more passionately engage in the Christian faith as Jesus' disciples, serve as "salt" and "light" in our spiritually needy world, and walk in fellowship with members of the persecuted

church. The stories they heard of those facing imprisonment, torture, and even the threat of death – as well as how these difficult circumstances were impacting the families involved – served as powerful examples of resilient faith, righteous living and complete obedience to God's will.

> WHEN DID YOU FIRST HEAR OR READ ABOUT THE PERSECUTED CHURCH?

WHERE HAVE YOU SEEN

GOD AT WORK LATELY - IN

YOUR LIFE OR IN YOUR

CHURCH?

ONE-TO-ONE

Sometimes, the most impactful opportunities to share our own stories come during personal conversations with friends. Such meaningful interactions often pave the way for moments of transparency when sharing about our faith journeys – presenting times when we can learn from one another and pray together. These inspiring conversations often ignite curiosity, strengthen our faith, and move us towards a deeper level of commitment to God.

We also have much to learn from our Christian brothers and sisters in other countries who are courageously enduring persecution. In 1 Corinthians 12:26, we are told that when one member of Christ's body suffers, we all suffer. Hearing their stories helps us to be better informed about the persecution facing members of our global Christian family. Not only do their experiences move us to pray for them, but our own lives become more enriched by their examples of faithfulness to God amid suffering.

While the published issues of VOMC's monthly English magazine and quarterly French edition (which are available free of charge to Canadian subscribers) feature testimonies of enduring faith, they also highlight the immediate needs resulting from persecution, as well as the ministry's corresponding provisions. These stories foster deep conversations about our faith, which can be mutually encouraging – especially when sharing about the goodness of God.



DIGITAL DIALOGUE

Social media platforms have become powerful avenues for sharing stories. Through blog posts, YouTube videos, or even simple Instagram photo captions, details of our lives can be shared with those within our inner circles and beyond.

At VOMC, we use these platforms to spread God's hope and encouragement, even when telling the stories of believers who have encountered harassment, injustice, imprisonment and/or martyrdom. We understand the importance of a strong online presence and continue to look for ways to connect effectively and efficiently with our supporters. We do this through, but not exclusive to, the ministry's social media posts, online virtual events, informative podcast interviews, and weekly *Persecution & Prayer Alert* reports.

Consider following us online and sharing the stories of the persecuted church with your family and friends.

OUR STORY, HIS STORY!

By recounting the ways that the Lord has worked in our lives – and expressing gratitude for His unfailing love and grace – we inspire others to trust in Him. Christians during the first century understood the importance of this by testifying of His life-transforming work. Even persecution could not stop these early believers from sharing the Good News of Jesus through their personal stories.

In Acts 8, we read about the burial of Stephen who was martyred for his faith and the beginnings of Christian persecution in the lives of other dedicated followers of Jesus. Despite the challenges these early believers encountered, the Gospel spread to Judea, Samaria and beyond: "All those who had been scattered by <u>the persecution moved from place to place; and wherever they</u> <u>went, they weren't afraid or silent. Instead, they spread the</u> message of Jesus" (verse 4, VOICE).

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to the ministry, and especially for your prayers on behalf of our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters. We pray that you will continue to be stewards of your story, the stories of our beloved persecuted family, and God's amazing story of reconciliation.

INVITE A SPEAKER

"After listening to Greg [Musselman], you feel prepared and postured to pursue Jesus with renewed zeal no matter what it costs you." ~ James, Mission Central – Vancouver

"[Vanessa Brobbel's workshop] was so informative; it captured my attention...and made me realize how important it is to get my children praying for the persecuted!" ~ Homeschool mom, MACHS Conference – Winnipeg

Bring awareness of persecuted believers to your church. Email us: events@vomcanada.org.



FINANCIALLY FULFILLING THE "GREAT COMMISSION"

Report by Ed Hong, VP of Finance and Administration

When reading the very first Scripture verse in the Bible, we are told an important truth about creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1 NIV). How wonderful it is to be reminded that our all-powerful, personal God created everything that ever existed! Moreover, the Bible tells us that the Lord Himself has always existed. Since He is the Master Creator, ownership over all things belongs to Him. This is the foundational principle of Biblical "Stewardship."

So what does stewardship look like for Voice of the Martyrs Canada (VOMC)? In relation to all the resources God has entrusted to the ministry, the answer can be summarized in the following three words: *management*, *responsibility* and *accountability*.

BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP

Management

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (1 Corinthians 10:26 NIV).

Therefore, all financial funds - plus tangible and

intangible assets – that the Lord has entrusted to VOMC belong to Him. We then serve Him as the "administrators" or "managers" by acting on His behalf to ensure these resources are stewarded well.

Responsibility

The roles are very clear. God is the owner; VOMC is the steward. Owners have rights, whereas stewards have responsibilities. Therefore, VOMC has the responsibility of managing His resources well and in accordance to His will. This is integral for the fulfilment of His great Kingdom purposes here on earth.

Accountability

"So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God" (Romans 14:12 NIV).

One day, each one of us will be called to give an account to the Lord for how well we have managed the abilities/talents, opportunities and resources that He has entrusted to our care. The same principle applies to all who serve the ministry of VOMC as His stewards.

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

In 2023, the Lord entrusted VOMC with a 7.3 percent increase in donations "year over year." The designations of total donations for that year have been applied to the ministry's various project fund allocations, as outlined in the following chart:

DONATION DESIGNATIONS			
Funds	Unaudited [*] 2023	Audited 2022	
Bible (Distributions)	3.6%	4.0%	
Christmas Blessing	2.6%	2.7%	
Equipping the Saints	3.1%	3.9%	
Families of Martyrs	6.8%	7.0%	
Legal Defence	0.7%	0.8%	
Medical	1.6%	1.7%	
Raising a Voice	0.1%	0.2%	
Relief & Development	1.9%	2.0%	
Underground Church	4.5%	3.9%	
Where Needed Most	73.9%	72.8%	
Women's Ministry	1.2%	1.0%	
	100.0%	100.0%	

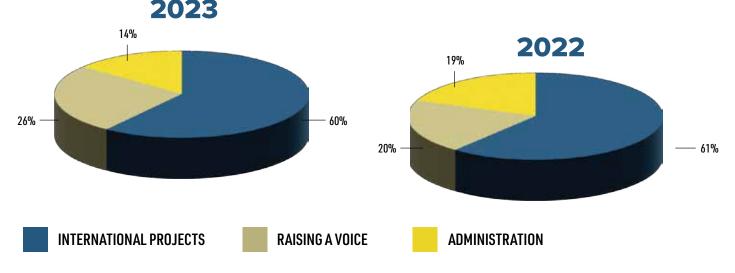
Note: If a contribution has been designated towards a completed board-approved program or International Ministry project, or the amount cannot be allocated to the specified project for any other reason as determined by the Board of Directors, it will automatically be redirected to the mission's "Where Needed Most Fund" and thus applied accordingly.



With the increase in donations during 2023, we were able to allocate 18.9 percent more in funds towards the mission's International Ministry projects.

- 1. International Ministry provides strategic and practical support, while encouraging and equipping our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ to stand strong in adversity and advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a hostile world.
- 2. Raising a Voice brings awareness of persecution around the world to Canadian Christians. This is being accomplished by using, but not exclusive to, the ministry's print and online publications, podcasts, online events, video documentaries, social media platforms and speaking engagements.
- 3. Administration encompasses the day-today operations of VOMC. This includes, but not limited to, Client Resource Management (database), facility management, information technology and equipment, as well as the onsite annual audit (PCI DSS Review) performed by a third-party IT Security firm to ensure VOMC follows the "Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard" to protect constituents' confidential information.

In summary, we are humbled by the trust you have placed in the ministry of VOMC as demonstrated by your financial support and fervent prayers. Thanks be to the Lord for working so powerfully through the faithfulness of constituents like you whose partnership and spiritual fervour are making it possible to tangibly meet the needs of those suffering severe persecution in volatile areas of the world. We ask that you continue to pray for us at VOMC as we endeavour to be wise stewards of all the resources entrusted to us by our Lord.



*Figures for the fiscal year of 2023 were in the process of being audited at the time of publishing this Annual Report.

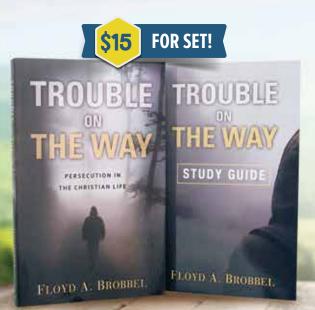
RESOURCES

Trouble on the Way Persecution in the Christian Life

While most of us have heard about Christians suffering for their faith, we tend to think "persecution" mainly impacts believers in times past or in hostile nations today, far removed from our daily lives. But this eye-opening book describes the various stages of persecution, revealing that persecution is something *all* followers of "the Way" can expect to face in this fallen world.

Trouble on the Way will not only help readers recognize persecution in all its forms but also enable them to stand firmly against it. This book does not promote a "doormat" Christianity but rather asserts quite the opposite – a victorious, resilient faith that not only survives but thrives as it encounters the very gates of hell. Paperback, 204 pages

The accompanying *Study Guide* is designed for use during personal devotional times or as a helpful resource for Bible study groups. Paperback (guide), 44 pages





From Under the Altar 50 Devotionals from Witnesses

on the Front Line

\$15

To commemorate the mission's more than 50 years of service to the persecuted church, the leadership team at Voice of the Martyrs Canada commissioned the writing of 50 devotional messages – compiling them into a special

keepsake book. These timely devotional messages contain words of encouragement and insight from various International Ministry partners, staff members, volunteers and board members...who are serving as witnesses on the mission's front line spiritually.

The title, *From Under the Altar*, references the book of Revelation, using the framework of chapter 12 throughout the devotional to outline the ways in which the enemy (described as a dragon in Revelation) seeks to harm God's people, and how they are empowered to triumphantly overcome! Leatherette, 135 pages

Wurmbrand

Tortured for Christ – The Complete Story \$10

This most recently released biographical compilation explores the inspiring lives of Pastor Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand – publishing their complete story in one volume by combining the following three books: *Tortured for Christ, In God's Underground* and *The Pastor's Wife.*

During his 14 years of imprisonment, Pastor Wurmbrand was tortured, beaten and locked away in a solitary confinement cell.



the rose of the

New Cover!

His wife Sabina spent three years at a labour camp, nearly freezing to death as she and other prisoners worked strenuously on the famous Danube Canal. Despite their treacherous hardships, the ministering couple had an unshakeable faith in Christ.

Your own faith will be inspired as you go deep inside the darkest prison cells to see how the light of Christ continues to shine from the hearts of those wholeheartedly committed to Him. Paperback, 384 pages

