

## Willow Creek Church Splits from Exodus International

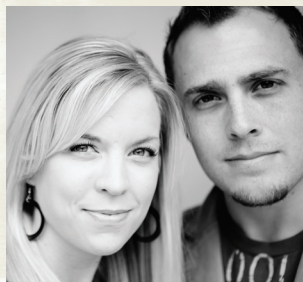
Willow Creek Community Church—a megachurch in South Barrington, Illinois—is no longer an affiliate of Exodus International, ending a relationship that spanned several decades. Willow Creek spokespersons say they just wanted to rethink the church's affiliations, but *Christianity Today* reports that Exodus president Alan Chambers believes the church split from his organization to avoid public criticism.

“The choice to end our partnership is definitely something that shines a light on a disappointing trend within parts of the Christian community,” Chambers told the publication, “which is that there are Christians who believe like one another who aren't willing to stand with one another, simply because they're afraid of the backlash people will direct their way if they are seen with somebody who might not be politically correct.”

Exodus International is the world's largest ministry specifically addressing the issue of homosexuality. The organization holds that “Christ offers a healing alternative to those with homosexual tendencies.” Chambers added that he sympathizes with organizations that have to deal with political, social, and financial backlash, but said that is just part of carrying an unpopular Christian message.

Scott Vaudrey, Willow Creek's director of pastoral care and leader of its elder response team, said, “It is true that Willow Creek discontinued its formal relationship with Exodus. In making this move, we were not making a social or political statement. We were simply in a season of reviewing and clarifying some of our affiliations with outside organizations.”

## This Month . . . Help Bring Radios to Sudanese Victims



Two Houston worship leaders have recorded a project titled “Music for the Radio,” designed to help spread the gospel in South Sudan. Dave and Jess Ray traveled to Sudan in 2008 with Aid Sudan and were impressed with the needs of South Sudan, an area where about two and a half million Christians and animists were killed in a lengthy and bloody conflict. “So when we returned, it was a really natural response for us as musicians to put together music and to write songs inspired from that experience—and out of that was birthed the project ‘Music

for the Radio,’” Jess explained.

Aid Sudan is putting up satellite repeater stations throughout southern Sudan, and many more are planned. “Each night they broadcast Bible stories, health and hygiene information, community-development teaching—things that are crucial for the development of southern Sudan. And most importantly, these people get to hear the gospel in their own tribal languages,” Dave said.

All of the proceeds from CD sales will go to purchase handheld radios. It costs \$20 for each solar-powered radio fixed-tuned to Aid Sudan radio, which reaches individuals and whole villages—potentially millions of people. For information on ordering the CD, please visit [www.musicfortheradio.org](http://www.musicfortheradio.org).

**Customer service and subscription number: 1-800-495-3265.** James Kraus, publisher; Mary Pappas, associate editor. © 2011 THE CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD, vol. 41, no. 12, November 2011. THE CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD (ISSN 1062-2810) is published monthly by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 351 Executive Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188. Printed in the USA. Subscription \$12.00 per month per 100 copies. Canada: \$14.00 per 100 per month. Scripture quotations from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 351 Executive Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Sources: [cnsnews.com](http://cnsnews.com), [christianpost.com](http://christianpost.com), [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com), and [onenewsnow.com](http://onenewsnow.com). Photo of Pamir Mountains © iStock.com; back page photo courtesy of Dave and Jess Ray. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Church Around the World, Subscription Services, P.O. Box 464, Mt. Morris, IL 61054.

# CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD

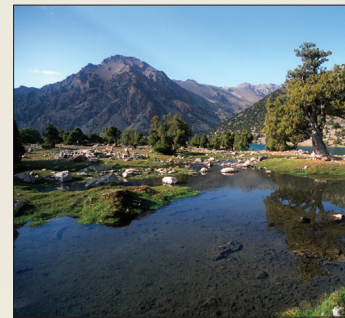
## NEWS OF SIGNIFICANCE TO CHRISTIANS

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

### Focus on . . . *Tajikistan*

Tajikistan is a small country bordered by Afghanistan, China, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The land was the northernmost part of the Persian Empire through the 12th century and later fell under Russian rule until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Tajikistan struggled with civil war among various regional warlords until 1997. Many nonindigenous people left the country during that conflict, and Tajikistan is now one of the poorest of the former Soviet states. Religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution, but fear of radical Islam has prompted the government to control all religious expression and to pass draconian religious laws. There are perhaps 7,000 evangelical believers in a nation of 7.6 million people. Pray for

- the Tajik church, which numbers only a thousand but is growing by a slow and painstaking process;
- lessening effects of the civil war, which led to widespread hardship and more than 83 percent of the population living in poverty;
- Tajik Christians to have a renewed vision to witness and share;
- the many small ethnic groups that have virtually no chance of hearing the gospel.



### Rise in Islam Worries Tajikistan's Government

After decades of enforced secularism, the people of Tajikistan have begun flocking to their traditional religion. Islam is blossoming, with beards and head scarves in style and bazaars doing a booming trade in prayer rugs, religious audio recordings, and clocks featuring Muslim holy sites.

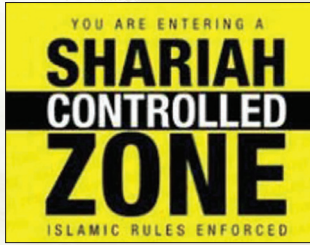
Afraid of Islamic radicalism and the challenges posed by increasingly influential religious leaders, Tajik authorities have been working fervently to curb religious expression. Bearded men have been detained at random, and women have been barred from religious services. The police have also shuttered private mosques and Islamic websites, and government censors now monitor Friday sermons. In June, lawmakers took a drastic step further, passing a law that would, among other things, bar children younger than 18 from attending religious services at mosques.

Government critics liken the crack-down to a Soviet-style attempt at reversing Islam's spread. And many warn that banning young people from mosques may have an unintended effect, drawing the youth toward illegal organizations instead.

*All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.*

—1 CORINTHIANS 12:27

## British Muslims Urged to Embrace *Sharia* Rule



Muslims Against Crusades (MAC), a British Muslim group known for its

provocative publicity stunts, has chosen a borough in northeast London as the first target of its campaign to establish “emirates” under Islamic law.

“As part of our Islamic Emirate Project, Waltham Forest is to be the first borough to be targeted for an intense *sharia*-led campaign, introducing the prospect of Islamic law for the Muslim community to abide by,” according to a statement

released by MAC. Waltham Forest has the fifth-largest proportion of Muslims—15 percent—of any local authority in England.

As part of the campaign, the group plans to put up posters in Muslim neighborhoods warning that alcohol, gambling, drugs, smoking, pornography, prostitution, and concerts will be prohibited.

“There is no way that the British government is going to allow independent Islamic states to be set up in any of our towns or cities. It’s just not going to happen,” said Mike Judge, spokesman for the Christian Institute, a nondenominational British charity. “But this does show that some British Muslims want to impose *sharia* law on their communities.”

## Pastor’s Death Sentence for Apostasy Upheld

The Jubilee Campaign, a group that promotes religious liberty of ethnic and religious minorities, is requesting prayer for an Iranian Christian sentenced to death for leaving Islam. Iran has not executed a citizen for changing faiths since 1990. In the latest case, however, Iran’s Supreme Court upheld the death penalty for Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, who has been in prison since last year.

“The fact that Iran has upheld the

death sentence for specifically converting from Islam to Christianity means that any of the Christians currently in Iran who are converts will also potentially face the death sentence,” warned Ann Buwalda, immigration attorney and founder of the US branch of the Jubilee Campaign. She notes that there has been a crackdown against the underground church in Iran for some time, and others are likely to face persecution.

## Critics Urge Change in Faith-Based Hiring Rules

A group of clergy and lawmakers is trying to overturn a nearly decade-old policy that allows faith-based organizations that receive federal funds to hire and fire employees on the basis of religion. “It’s shocking that we would even be having a debate about whether basic civil rights practices should apply to programs run with federal dollars,” said Representative Bobby Scott of Virginia.



“There is just no justification for sponsors of government-funded programs to tell job applicants, ‘We don’t hire your kind.’” The policy, introduced under President Bush in 2002, prohibits organizations that receive federal funds from refusing to help people based on their religion, but allows them to take religion into account when hiring and firing employees.

## Pakistani Persecution Continues to Target Christians

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom wants the State Department to focus on Pakistan and its treatment of religious minorities—including Christians. In the past year there has been “a real and significant decline in the status for religious freedom in Pakistan,” according to commission spokesman Knox Thames. He added that this trend started in November 2010, when a court sentenced Christian Asia Bibi to death on a charge of blaspheming Islam. “Then in January,” Thames continued, “the governor of Punjab province, who was a Muslim and had been a very outspoken critic of this decision and the

blasphemy law, he was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. Then about two months later to the day, the federal minister for minority affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, the first and only Christian in Pakistan’s cabinet, was killed by members of the Pakistani Taliban.”

The commission wants the State Department to designate Pakistan as a “country of particular concern,” which would add it to the list of the worst abusers of religious freedom. Once Pakistan is added, Thames says the State Department should engage in high-level discussions to encourage the Pakistanis to change their position on the issue of reform.

## Prosecution Unlikely for Muslim Murderers

Christians are asking officials to prosecute the attackers of an Ethiopian evangelist who was beaten to death. Muslims in the Ethiopian village of Worabe lured evangelist Abraham Abera out of Kale Hiwot Church and beat him to death with rods. The attackers threatened that though the area’s Christian population is growing, believers would be destroyed by Muslim extremists. Abera’s wife saw the

attack and tried to intervene, but she was also beaten and left unconscious. Following the incident, she was taken to a nearby hospital with head injuries, but she was able to remember the confrontation and identify two of the attackers. Despite that, Christians are afraid that local officials—most of whom are Muslim—may not bring any charges against the attackers.

## New Country, Old Problems

A Christian advocacy organization is congratulating South Sudan on becoming the world’s newest country but warning that conditions may worsen for Christians who remain in the North. Jonathan Racho of International Christian Concern welcomes the split and says South Sudan needs the help of the international community. He explained that in the aftermath of civil war, the nation has been left with little infrastructure and must “embark on the difficult task of nation-building.” The South Sudanese people celebrated freedom from Sudan at the newly formed capital of Juba after decades of war left more than two million people dead and around four million displaced, many of whom were Christians.

Because the government was controlled by Islamic followers, many Christians were also violently persecuted.

Even though Christians are now the majority in South Sudan, believers in the northern country may experience additional persecution. “The president of Sudan, al-Bashir, had already said that if South Sudan becomes an independent country, he is going to introduce a strict *sharia* law, meaning Christians are going to be persecuted and women are going to face discrimination,” Racho warned. “The situation is going to be very hard for Christians who remain behind and live in the northern part of Sudan. And that [is] a very, very large number.”