

**"In the cross, in the cross
Be my glory ever,
'Til my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river."
~ Lyrics in "Near the Cross" Hymn
Written by Fanny Crosby**

BENIN: Church Building Destroyed on National Vodun Day

Source: VOM USA

Considered the birthplace of the ancient tribal faith of vodun (commonly referred to as voodoo), many residents in the West African country of Benin continue with religious practices that commonly involve animal sacrifices and talismans to ward off evil. These practices are so widespread in Benin that January 10th is celebrated as National Vodun Day.

When local Christians residing in a small town of central Benin refused to participate in the national celebrations, a group of vodun followers burned their church building to the ground. In the aftermath of the attack, the church's pastor requested prayer, asking that: 1) the people of the village will be set free from their bondage to vodun, 2) the church would be strengthened, and 3) his congregation's destroyed house of worship would soon be rebuilt.



The pastor in front of the destroyed church building.
Photo: VOM USA

Let us prayerfully lift up the Christians residing within this predominantly vodun nation as they continue sharing the Gospel message with villagers caught in the grip of spiritual darkness. Despite the adversity facing these ministering believers, may they consistently serve as conduits of God's shining light by conveying the "Good News" of His salvation and deliverance. Ask the Lord to empower them with His Holy Spirit, so that many more villagers will experience freedom from darkness and the assurance of eternal life. May these believers' courage and conviction in the Gospel message be used to mightily transform this land and its people. Also pray for the provision of resources needed to rebuild their church facility.

SRI LANKA: Church Under Investigation for Worship Services

Source: NCEASL

The Pentecostal Assembly congregation in Dodangoda, Sri Lanka, is made up of about seven families who regularly meet in the home of their pastor. On February 12th, while the Sunday worship service was in progress, approximately seven police officers arrived at the home. They informed the pastor that local monks, who had issued a complaint about the Sunday services, claimed that the meetings were being conducted illegally.

The next day, the pastor and another church member went to the local police station where they were met by seven monks, along with other villagers. One of the monks stated that because theirs was a Buddhist village, all Christian services must be discontinued. The monk continued by explaining that while the pastor is permitted to pray with his own family, he must refrain from conducting services involving other villagers. The pastor replied that no one was forced to join in the church meetings, further stating that he is the legal owner of the property.



Roughly 70 percent of Sri Lankans follow Buddhism.

Shortly after the incident at the police station, plans were made for another meeting to take place on February 17th. On that scheduled day, however, approximately 50 villagers gathered around the pastor's house, demanding an end to all worship activities. In addition, they threatened the pastor if he continued. Because of the antagonistic nature of this demonstration, police were called to the scene. However, by the time the officers arrived, the crowd had dispersed. The commissioned officers then asked the pastor to inform them of any future incidents.

Opposition from local Buddhist monks is common, particularly in rural areas of Sri Lanka. For more information, and/or to review previous reports, go to our [country report](#).

On behalf of the Christians facing opposition in this predominantly Buddhist nation, pray that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard the hearts and minds of the pastor and congregants in Dodangoda, as well as those in Sri Lanka's other Christian communities. May these believers consistently demonstrate God's love to fellow villagers – including those who oppose them – so that many will readily receive His wonderful gift of salvation. Pray that the issues of concern being experienced in various areas of country will be resolved, and that there will be no further incidents of intimidation or violence.

REPORT UPDATE

CHINA: Early Rain Church Faces Violent Raid

Sources: Early Rain Church, ChinaAid

The Early Rain Covenant Church has been a target of Chinese Communist Party officials since the church was raided in December 2018 ([read more](#)). The church's lead pastor, Wang Yi, was sentenced to nine years in prison and other members have faced detention and pressure. Despite ongoing intimidation and arrests, the ministry of the church has faithfully continued, though generally online or in small groups.

In January of this year, the church decided to resume meeting as a larger group. However, the authorities had them evicted each time, forcing them to move to different venues. On March 12th, police once again forcefully raided the church.

At 8:50 a.m. that day, one church leader, Jia Xuewei, was violently removed from the meeting and then beaten when he failed to show identification. As the service began at 9 a.m., the supply of electricity was abruptly shut off to the room where their meeting was being held. Despite this interference, the service continued anyways with preacher Wu Wuqing leading. An hour later, several officials stormed the pulpit and shut off the computer that was being used for the live broadcast. Other officers began seizing cell phones, and pushing some of the worshippers to the ground, resulting in several injuries. Throughout the violence and mayhem, the choir quietly sang the hymn, "Near the Cross."



The choir continues to sing "Near the Cross" during the raid.
Photo: ChinaAid

While the almost 100 believers in attendance left peacefully, they then gathered downstairs to continue worshipping. Some of the leaders, along with a group of church members, were taken to the police station. Other church members gathered outside the station to sing hymns and provide water and food to those who had been arrested during the recent raid. Thankfully, the detained congregants were released later that evening.

To read more about the ongoing persecution encountered by members of this church, and many other Christians in China, go to our [country report](#). Please note, that along with the provided written reports, this webpage features numerous video reports and interviews. In September 2022, *Closer to the Fire* podcast host Greg Musselman interviewed special guest Dr. Bob Fu of ChinaAid about the increasing crackdown against house churches in China. To view the report, go to [this page](#).

Please remember the leaders and congregational members of the Early Rain Covenant Church in your prayers. Although the members of this church continue to be targeted by governing Communist officials, may they persist in seeking ways to gather together for worship. Pray that God will further strengthen Pastor Wang Yi and provide needed guidance to those who are faithfully leading the ministry of the church despite ongoing oppression. May the actions, words and attitudes of the persecuted church members be a powerful testimony to all the officials opposing them.