

**MAY 2017**

*“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” —Matthew 5:11*

**Dear Friends,**

As followers of Christ, we are bound to be persecuted, but Christ himself reminded us that we will be blessed when we are. Today persecution of believers is widespread, and living peacefully as a Christian is an almost impossible challenge in many nations. How we respond is one of the defining characteristics of His followers: love in place of hate and forgiveness when wronged. Those responses, however, don't mean that we don't have pain and sorrow. They also don't require that we simply give up our God given human rights.

Thankfully, because of Christ's redeeming work on the Cross, we already have the victory. And He is ever interceding as our Advocate before the Judge of creation. And we can take His example and also work as Advocates on behalf of the Church. And when it comes to religious freedom that is what Advocates International is all about: using our legal skills and talents to keep the doors open (legally) for the spread of the Gospel, and protecting His people, when and where possible.

### **Religious Liberty Partnership Consultation**

Your prayers are a critical support for our work for the persecuted church. We especially appreciate your prayers for the successful consultation last month in Brazil. Advocates is one of the founding members of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP), and I currently serve on the board of the RLP. In April, we were blessed to hold our annual RLP Consultation in Brasilia, hosted by ANAJURE, the Brazilian member of Advocates Latin America (FIAJC). Over 70 attendees from 21 nations attended the gathering, where we focused our efforts on how we can best help the persecuted church around the globe.

One encouraging thing about meeting in Brazil—that nation is considered the world's best in terms of religious freedom. In addition to meetings with the President of Brazil, the Minister of Foreign Affairs (himself the author of Brazil's refugee laws), and numerous members of the Brazilian Parliament, we heard from a variety of ministries who shared their ongoing challenges. One of those was Russell Stendal, a missionary in Colombia whom God has used mightily to bring the Gospel to the people of that nation, including the FARC guerrilla leaders. Miraculously, a peace agreement is close at hand and Stendal's efforts have been critical. Please pray for Russell, “Colombia for Christ” ministries, and the ongoing peace talks. Please also pray for the ongoing efforts of the RLP as we formally register as a legal entity in the U.K., which will allow for even better collaboration and cooperation amongst the members.

Thanks also for your prayers for my meetings with Gilberto Ribeiro and the other lawyers in São Paulo. We had an encouraging time together.

## World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians

This month, I've been invited to join the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians, hosted here in Washington, DC, by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The gathering is expected to bring together over 600 Church leaders, victims of persecution and advocates from 130 countries. Originally scheduled for last November in Moscow, Russia, it was moved due to the harsh new law passed by Russia that severely limits religious freedom there.

Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ, according to the United States Department of State. This abuse can include beatings, physical torture, imprisonment, severe punishment, isolation, rape and even death. As we see daily in the news, ISIS continues to claim responsibility for increasing attacks, including the Palm Sunday blasts in two churches in Egypt. Blasphemy and apostasy laws, particularly in Pakistan, result in the overzealous taking matters into their own hands, accusing innocents whenever it pleases, tearing families apart.

According to the latest numbers from the Pew Research Center released just last month, government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion increased in 2015 for the first time in three years: 105 countries in 2015, up from 85 countries in 2014. Moreover, the findings show that 40% of countries had high or very high restrictions on religious freedom, an increase from 34% in 2014.

## Upcoming Travels

At the end of May, I will go to South Korea for the Global Family Fair, meetings that are sponsored by Korean churches and Global Council member Dongsu Sim. The gathering will bring together Advocates from around the globe who are in the ongoing battle for the family and marriage between one man and one woman. The churches in Korea are preparing themselves as efforts to push for same-sex marriages in their country increase. Please pray for this important gathering.

Please also pray for our colleagues in Ghana who are preparing to host the 12<sup>th</sup> Advocates Africa Conference in Accra in August, and for our friends from ANAJURE in Brazil who continue preparations for the 12<sup>th</sup> Advocates Latin America Conference in Rio de Janeiro in November.

Thanks for your continued financial support that allow us to encourage, enable and equip our advocates around the globe. Thank you also for your ongoing prayers that strengthen our Advocates who continue to battle the increasing religious persecution.

May the Lord bless and keep you in His perfect . . .

Grace and Peace,



Brent M. McBurney  
President & CEO

