

PRAYER GUIDE

#everyright

Egypt

EVERY RIGHT



The church in Egypt faces an uncertain future: despite government support, Christians remain under pressure from radical Islamists. Please use this special guide to pray for Egypt for 31 days and stand with our brothers and sisters in Christ as tensions rise across the Middle East.

Egypt profile

Egypt's Coptic church remains the largest Christian community in the Middle East. Yet a radical Islamist agenda within Egypt and an extremist insurgency across the region now pose a real threat to Christians.

Relations between Christians and Muslims were sometimes difficult even before the Arab Spring but tensions have heightened since President Mohammed Morsi was ousted in 2013. His removal led to a violent backlash against the Christian minority, whom militants accused of conspiracy in Morsi's overthrow. Churches, homes, businesses and institutions were attacked and nine Christians killed in the immediate aftermath.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, elected in May 2014, has sought to reassure Christians of his support. Recent changes to the constitution underscored religious rights for all citizens. Yet these amendments have yet to be enforced – and Christians remain vulnerable, particularly in rural areas.

Thanks to our supporters, Release partners are able to focus on supporting Christians with a Muslim background, including through a safe house, and on establishing Self Help Groups for poor Christian women.

Religions in Egypt: Muslim (mostly Sunni) 86.6%; Christian 12.8%; other 0.6%
(Source: *Operation World*)

Under threat

Christians in Egypt have been a target for violent attacks – but they also face more subtle forms of persecution, including discrimination and accusations of blasphemy.

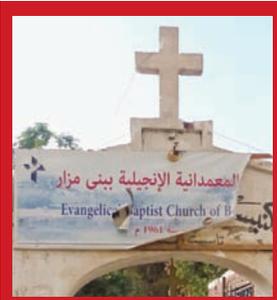
Day 1: Carpenter 'Paul' was thrown into prison after trying to build a church. He has lost all his property since being released and still receives death threats from his opponents. Pray that his faith will remain strong. He says: 'I love Jesus who brought me from darkness into light.'

Day 2: Pray for 'Mona' whose husband was killed after he tried to mediate in a petty row between his Christian mother and one of her Muslim clients over a bill. Pray too for Mona's teenage son who is traumatised by his father's murder; he too is receiving threats. The whole family have had to leave their home.

Day 3: Christian teacher Dimyana Abd Al-Nour fled Egypt in 2014 after being convicted of 'blasphemy'; she had been accused by students and parents at the Luxor school where she taught social studies. Pray that she will be able to return to her homeland and live in freedom.

Day 4: Kirolos Shawqi Atallah was sentenced to six years in jail in 2014, after being convicted of 'blasphemy' and 'inciting sectarian violence'. His crime was simply to have 'liked' a Christian forum on an Arabic-language Facebook page. Pray for his release and his protection. (See box, above right, about Release Potential's 'Your LIKE has power' challenge.)

Day 5: Pray for the release of Bishoy Armia Boulous (formerly known as Mohammed Hegazy) who has been charged with blasphemy for trying to change the religious status on his ID card to 'Christian'. He was also convicted of 'spreading false information' after documenting political unrest in Egypt.



Day 6: Pray for Christians in rural areas of Egypt, especially Minya and Assiut governorates which were worst hit in the anti-Christian violence of 2013. The Christian minority faces discrimination and often hostility, especially in areas where poverty has fuelled radicalism.

Day 7: Pray for Christians who are living as a minority alongside militant Islamist groups. In one slum area of Cairo where Release is working, Islamists have burnt down the same church twice in recent years. The church meets under heavy security.

Day 8: Islamist terrorists released a video in February 2015 showing the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians abducted in Libya. Pray that God will comfort and strengthen their grieving families.

Power with responsibility

Egypt's national Government has been explicit in its support for the Christian minority – but regional officials are often less sympathetic, and sometimes hostile, towards the church.

Day 9: Pray for wisdom and courage for the Egyptian Government as it works to restore stability and security. Pray that it will be committed to upholding religious freedom for every citizen.

Take on the Release Potential 'Your LIKE has power' challenge, to show support for Christians such as Kirolos (see Day 4), by 'liking' a story about Egyptian Christians via www.releasepotential.org

Day 10: President al-Sisi has been open and visible about his support for the Christian community, attending church services and meeting Christian leaders; pray that he will not be swayed by hardline Islamists to withdraw this support.

Day 11: Pray for those in authority in Egypt's provinces where radical Islam is growing. Pray that local officials will be committed to promoting a culture shift away from religious intolerance.

Day 12: The Egyptian constitution was amended in January 2014 to strengthen religious liberties, especially for 'followers of Abrahamic religions', which includes Christianity. Pray that these constitutional changes will translate in practice into greater religious freedom.

Day 13: Pray that many people will sign Release's **#everyright** petition calling on the Egyptian Government to enforce in practice the rights now enshrined in their constitution (see box, right). Pray too that more Christians in the UK and Ireland will pray and support Christians in Egypt and across the Middle East.

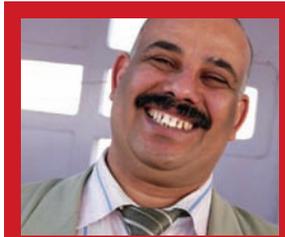
Day 14: Pray that more Christian judges will be elected to Egypt's judiciary. Currently, the judiciary is predominantly Muslim, prompting concerns among Christians that it is biased.

Day 15: Former president Mohammed Morsi was given a 20-year sentence in April 2015 for his involvement in the arrest and torture of protesters during his rule. Pray that his supporters and the Muslim Brotherhood will choose to pursue their agenda through politics, not through violence.

Day 16: A growing Islamist insurgency based in Sinai and with alleged links to Islamic State is a particular focus for Christians' concern. Ask God to give the Government wisdom and firm resolve to thwart the ambitions of these extremists.

Firm foundations

The Egyptian church is growing despite – and perhaps because of – persecution. Now more than ever, the church needs to unite and be a powerful witness to God's love.



Day 17: Thank God for the way that Pastor Mahrous's church has grown since its building in Minya was burnt down during anti-Christian violence in 2013. Mahrous narrowly escaped death at the hands of extremists. The church runs a food bank to care for Christians and Muslims alike.

Day 18: Thank God for the resolve and resilience of Egyptian Christians over many centuries in the face of oppression. The church of Egypt grew out of martyrdom, from the 1st century AD onwards. Pray that Christians today will stand firm and resist pressure for them to leave their country.

Day 19: Pray for protection over Christians, particularly as they gather for worship. In one church Release has contact with, the pastor drives with blackened windows straight into a compound protected by steel gates.

Day 20: Praise God for the way in which relatives of some of the Egyptian Christians beheaded by militants have spoken out in forgiving their killers and praying for peace. Pray that nominal believers will be inspired by their example and commit themselves afresh to Christ, and that non-believers will be inspired to stand with Christians.

Day 21: Thank God that many Muslims are reportedly turning to Christ as they become disillusioned with radical Islam, in the face of so much bloodshed. Pray that the search for truth will bring many more to church.

Day 22: Pray that persecution will bring unity to the church in Egypt. Thank God that Christians have been looking to work together more across denominations and traditions in recent years. Pray for an end to any enduring disunity, misunderstanding and tension.

Day 23: Pray that churches across Egypt will be filled with the Holy Spirit so that they will be radiant with the love of Christ and lead many more people to meet with almighty God.

Take action

Please sign Release's **#everyright** petition calling on the Egyptian Government to enforce in practice religious rights enshrined in changes to the constitution adopted in 2014. Go to www.releaseinternational.org/campaign or ring 01689 823491 if you'd like us to send you a copy. Please return your completed forms to us ASAP and definitely by the end of September.

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Day 24: Pray that Christians in Egypt will be encouraged by the fact that their brothers and sisters in the UK and Ireland are praying and taking action for them as part of Release's **#everyright** campaign (see Take Action box overleaf). Pray that those who suffer persecution will know they are not forgotten.

Strengthening the church

Christians in Egypt have many needs, from safe houses for Muslim-background believers facing death threats to poor Christian women whose faith makes them second-class citizens.

Day 25: Pray for a safe house funded by Release which provides refuge for persecuted Christians, many of whom have been raised as Muslims. Pray too for the believers there: many have been rejected, persecuted by relatives as well as by extremists.

Day 26: Pray that the Release-funded Self Help Groups will help women learn that they are precious in the sight of God. One of the Christian women who is training to be a group facilitator had been told by her brother that, as a woman, she was 'nothing', a 'loser'.

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Day 27: Pray for poor Christians such as these pictured living in Cairo's slums who eke out a meagre living by sorting through rubbish. Release's Self Help Groups are starting in these areas, to help women and their families who are marginalised as Christians. With Bible-focused training, they support each other and learn how to transform their situation and their community. Pray that women feel confident to join.

Day 28: Pray for physical protection over Self Help Group facilitators as they walk through the communities where they are working; pray too that they will have a continued passion to serve.

Day 29: Pray for initiatives that aim to open dialogue and build bridges between Muslim and Christian communities. Thank God that Muslims in Al Manufiyya, north of Cairo, recently donated money to help build a new Coptic church: pray that the President will keep his promise to rebuild churches in Minya destroyed in 2013.

Day 30: Traditionally, there is a great sense of national pride in Egypt's religious tolerance – which is why opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood has been so strong. Pray that moderate Muslim leaders' and clerics' voices are heard so that Christians will be included, not discriminated against.

Day 31: Pray for the delivery of Release's **#everyright** petition to the Egyptian Ambassador in London this autumn; pray that it will be well received and seriously considered. Pray that the Egyptian Government will take firm action in support of Christians in Egypt as a result.

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Sources: Christian Today, Middle East Concern, Morning Star News, Release partners and contacts.

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