

14 Denominations Unite in John 17:21 Prayer Rally

Wednesday saw the deadliest violence in Iraq since late November.

A series of morning attacks killed at least 31 people across the country. Some reports say it's a mark of rising tensions between Iraq's ethnic and religious groups, which could shove the country back into chaos.

Sunni rebels are trying to undermine the Shiite-led government by creating division. Earlier this week, a suicide bomber killed prominent Sunni lawmaker Ifan Saadoun al-Issawi, and more attacks came as hundreds gathered at his burial.

The Sunni legislator stood in staunch opposition to Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, leader of the Shi'ite right-wing Islamic Dawa Party. Al-Issawi also helped found a local branch of the Sawhwa, a group of Sunni Arabs who battled alongside American troops at the height of Iraq's rebellion.

Despite Iraq's rising unrest, Open Doors USA says believers are coming together in Baghdad. Starting Friday, Christ-followers from 14 different denominations will gather for a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

"In the past, we used to meet only once or twice per year here in Baghdad, or in a situation of severe danger," a Catholic bishop told Open Doors fieldworkers. "But since six years [ago], we get together on a regular basis, and it is more official. When a difficult situation comes up, we immediately come together."

The bishop says the upcoming Week of Prayer is modeled after Jesus' petition in John 17:20 and 21.

“Our Lord taught us to love one another ,and He says to be ‘one.’ He was praying to the Father, ‘Let them be one like We are one, Father,’ so why should Christians be so divided?” the bishop continues. “We all have our own history and customs, but we can pray together, no? We are pushed from the Gospel to do this.”

The 14 denominations in Baghdad include Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental and Protestant churches of varying origins: Chaldean, Assyrian, Syrian, Armenian, Greek and Latin.

“During the week of prayer, all churches and parishes meet in their own churches,” the bishop explains. “But on the 18th and 25th, the churches will unite in prayer in one church.”

In John 17:21, Jesus prays for all believers, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.”

Ask your friends to join you in praying for unity for the body of Christ in Baghdad this week. Pray for unity among believers throughout the world, according to Scripture.