

Egyptian Christians Gather in Homes for Prayer

Christians in Egypt are hoping that protests will ultimately lead to more freedom of religion there. But some are concerned that Islamic rule will take over the government and lead to greater persecution.

Egypt is ranked No. 19 on the Open Doors 2011 World Watch List of the 50 worst persecutors of Christians. Although Christians have not been targeted in the violence over the past week, there have been several attacks in January. On New Year's Day a suicide bomber killed 22 Christians in front of the Two Saints Church in Alexandria. Egypt has by far the largest Christian minority in the Middle East—an estimated 10 million. The population of Egypt is almost 80 million.

“The people are afraid for the future, since this is an extremely critical time. But we trust in God, and we hope and pray for a new Egypt, with democracy and freedom for Christians,” states “George,” a church pastor involved in the work of Open Doors in Egypt.

Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church has called upon Coptic Christians to stay away from the demonstrations and to come together and pray for the country, but many Christians are nonetheless engaging in the protests.

“I am in contact with members of my church who have gone into the streets to protest,” George says. “As Christians we are also part of the Egyptian society and community and we cannot stay away from all of this. It matters to us, too. We are also in the middle of it.”

George reports that Christians in Egypt cannot go to church. There is a mosque in every street for Muslims, he explains, but fewer churches available—and most believers don't feel

safe. George reports that gunshots and people being killed on the streets, as well as problems getting food provisions due to pressure on the country's infrastructure. Banks have been already closed for a week and the ATMs are empty. Christians are coming together in houses to pray.

"It is very important that we pray at this moment," says George. "We see that the uproar could lead to a better Egypt and that things could turn out for good, but we do not know yet. So prayer is important.

"We pray for the president [Hasni Mubarak], and we do not understand why he has not withdrawn himself from his post. We pray for him that he will do what is good for Egypt and that he will leave at the right moment. Our meetings are also moments to talk about the situation and open our hearts."