

# Find Out Why This Iraqi Martyr Had a Big Smile on His Face

More than 1,000 people from St. George's Church in Baghdad have been killed in the past 10 years. But church leader Canon Andrew White said he has no intention of leaving Baghdad despite the dangers facing Christians.

The British-born minister, dubbed the Vicar of Baghdad, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 15 years ago, which affects his speech and mobility.

"The attack from the opposition isn't overt and always obvious. But it's always there just under the surface. At every level of society Christians are Christians. They're a minority," White explained.

"They're to be sidelined and they are people who are considered at great risk because they do not follow the way of the majority of people here who follow either Shia or Sunni Islam," he added.

In the mid-1990s there were more than 1.2 million Christians in Baghdad. But with war and terrorism and direct attacks against them, a million Christians or more have left the country since that time, leaving behind a decimated church.

"And where have they gone? They've gone to Sweden, Detroit, Chicago, and Canada," White said. "And we want them here. And I say to them, 'I'm not going to leave you, please don't leave me.'"

It's not hard to see why Christians still in the country want to leave.

Rebekah and Awlee had been married for more than two decades

and were raising their three children in Mosul, a large city in the northwest located on the west bank of the Tigris River, opposite the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh.

Awlee grew up in an Orthodox Chaldean family but joined an evangelical house church in 2009. During that time he became more passionate about his faith in Jesus Christ.

"There was a big difference. It was like a bomb. He became like a bomb," Rebekah said.

"He prayed every day for three hours from midnight until three o'clock. He would come and wake me and say, 'Let's pray together.' He asked that we be filled with the Holy Spirit. He felt God had put the healing gift in his hands. He prayed for sick people," she said.

As a result, Awlee had an insatiable desire to lead Muslims to Jesus, even going to the mosque to tell them about the gospel.

He spent time praying over Mosul, one of the most violent cities in Iraq where Christians are often singled out for attacks by militant Muslims.

Between January and March of 2012 Awlee led seven Muslims to Christ and brought his first convert from Islam home with him to wash his feet.

Awlee's boldness also drew the attention of Islamists who wanted to silence him. While he didn't tell Rebekah, she believes her husband was warned many times to stop telling Muslims about Christ.

Awlee was kidnapped on March 19, 2012 and was tortured for three days before being shot nine times.

Rebekah's pastor warned her not to open the casket to see her husband's bullet-riddled body. But she did anyway.

"He told me that they shot him five times in the head. I said,

'No, I want to see him.' So they opened the casket," she said. "When I saw him I saw a big smile on his face. After that, they closed it and we got ready to take him to his village.

"When they took him to the church, a lot of people were saying bad things about those who killed him. But I didn't accept that into my heart. I was praying for those people who killed him. I am proud of him because he died for Jesus."