

Happy Birthday, Brother Andrew!

One of the leading evangelists of the 20th century turns 90 years old on Friday, May 11. Known to the world as Brother Andrew, Andrew van der Bijl is the founder of Open Doors International, the oldest worldwide ministry serving persecuted Christians. He has traveled to approximately 125 countries, logging more than a million miles to preach the Gospel. Due to his daring, bold and dangerous travels, he earned the name God's Smuggler as he snuck Christian literature, including Bibles, into countries that were hostile to Christianity.

"Brother Andrew boldly lives out the call to bring the gospel to all nations. Open Doors continues his legacy of supporting persecuted Christians in all areas of their lives, so they not only hear the gospel, but are able to live it as well," said David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA.

Since its founding, Open Doors has advocated and provided support for Christians living under religious oppression, denied the freedom to worship, facing ostracism and prejudice, and facing the threat of violence, imprisonment and death for professing faith in Jesus Christ.

Brother Andrew's journey began with a tour group in Poland when he discovered a Christian church behind the Iron Curtain. He delivered a suitcase full of Christian literature, marking the beginning of Open Doors.

One of Brother Andrew's most well-known stories took place on the Romanian border. With a car full of Bibles, Brother Andrew watched as all the cars ahead of him were stopped and carefully searched. He prayed to ask for a miracle and boldly took a few Bibles out, leaving them in plain sight. Unbelievably, the guard glanced at Brother Andrew's passport and waved him on.

While Brother Andrew initially concentrated on Eastern Europe, his ministry grew to the Middle East and Asia. Communism was the main threat to Christianity in 1955, but now Islamic extremism dominates as the primary cause of Christian persecution. To track the variations in persecution year to year, Open Doors compiles research and publishes its World Watch List, which is a top-50 ranking of the worst countries to live as a Christian. North Korea has topped the list for 17 years due to its totalitarian regime.

“Open Doors continues to advocate for persecuted Christians around the world,” said Curry. “There is still much work to be done as one out of every 12 Christians in the world faces persecution like imprisonment, beatings, rape or death simply because of his or her faith. We call on the free world to remember those who are persecuted and be a voice for the voiceless.”

Brother Andrew has always emphasized that God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways. He tells people that he is no one special, but that he simply listened to the daily call to obediently bring the Bible to those who do not have it. Americans are encouraged to celebrate Brother Andrew's birthday by posting messages on Facebook or Twitter.