

Hundreds Join Campaign to 'Leave a Thanksgiving Place Setting for Pastor Saeed'

Christian Defense Coalition has launched a Facebook effort inviting Americans to leave an empty place setting on Thanksgiving to stand in solidarity and pray with Pastor Saeed Abedini and the persecuted church around the world.

Pastor Saeed, an American citizen, has been in an Iranian prison for more than a year because of his Christian faith. He is serving an eight-year sentence, first in Evin Prison and now in Rajai Shahr Prison, one of the worst prisons in the world.

The Facebook event page, "Leave a Thanksgiving Place Setting for Pastor Saeed," says the empty place setting will serve "as a 'prophetic' reminder to pray for Saeed [and] all those being persecuted for their faith around the world."

As of Tuesday afternoon, more than 700 people have RSVPed as attending.

The group will also set up a Thanksgiving place setting in front of the White House on Pennsylvania Ave. at 10:00 a.m. Thursday morning.

The Rev. Patrick J. Mahoney, director of the Christian Defense Coalition, says this is to "remind President Obama to be a much stronger voice for religious freedom around the world and the release of Pastor Saeed."

The group is asking people who participate to post pictures on the Facebook event page, which they will use to create an album to give to Abedini after his release.

"While Americans enjoy the blessings of spending Thanksgiving

Day with family and friends, it is important to remember that millions around the world are being brutalized, persecuted and attacked for their Christian faith. Thousands are in prison," Mahoney says. "Pastor Saeed will not be able to spend this special day with his wife and two young children, but instead will be spending it in a cramped prison facing constant violence and persecution.

"We can never be silent when it comes to issues of human rights justice and religious freedom. We must always be a loud prophetic voice in the public square calling for an end to the persecution and violence directed toward people because of their faith beliefs.

"'Leave a Thanksgiving Place Setting for Pastor Saeed' is a powerful way for Americans to stand in solidarity with the persecuted church around the world and teach their families about the important issues of human rights and religious freedom."