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Praying for students—Praying for the vulnerable

By Jacqueline Dugas

Editor's note: This article was published in part last September. We include it in this issue of Harvest Partner because more than anything else, students of every age absolutely need to be covered with prayer by God's people.

We live in a world that is complex and socially treacherous. Young people are the target of so much that is destructive to human beings. Young as they are, they have a vulnerability that puts them at great risk, but they don't know that. At the end of the day, they need us to care for them in prayer.

Over 8 million people across Canada will fill our nation's classrooms this September, from elementary to higher education. More than 7 million of them are students.

Given the diminishing percentage of Christians in Canada, it is safe to say that the vast majority don't have a praying parent or

grandparent. **Friends, this is where we can really help.**

Students are on a sort of journey. They connect with new people, engage new ideas and face all kinds of opportunities, some good, some very damaging. Like all sojourners, they need the care and help of God.

Most of us have developed coping skills over many years that help us face this changing world without losing our way. It's not the case for children, teens and young adults. They're still growing up and have much to learn about life.

They are fragile and have a vulnerability that is preyed on continually. In fact, they are bombarded by literally thousands of messages every single day. Voices and images are calling them to look this way, look that way, try this, experiment with that. It never quiets down and it rarely leads anywhere good. The latest technologies, with all their benefits, are too easily used to be destructive against personhood. The impact can be devastating.

Research has shown that psychological distress is rising at an alarming rate among Canadian youth. It's heartbreaking. No young person should experience distress or despair. They are at an age when they should be learning and growing and building meaningful lives.

To identify psychological factors impacting young people, researchers examine a wide range of topics including home life, physical health, gambling, video gaming and the use of social media. Indicators show that changing moral values and a culture of entertainment and distraction appear to play a significant role in the growing despair sweeping over this generation.

The intense competition and need to perform well adds another layer of anxiety. One study found that an increasing number of post-secondary students reach for ADHD drugs to cope with academic stresses. These are drugs bought from dealers, not prescribed by physicians. Again, it's heartbreaking but it also draws a clearer picture of what many young people are going through.

Other studies have looked at the stressful impact of great debt loads and unprecedented competition for a place in the job market.

The findings are cause for great concern and much prayer that these young people be protected from despair and hopelessness.

Then, there is the campaign to undermine the Christian faith. In many classrooms, our young people are swept by waves of ideas and ideologies

that squarely reject, even despise the Gospel of Christ. The soil of their hearts is being hardened before they even hear about Jesus.

In a recent communication, the Ezra Institute for Contemporary Christianity, here in Canada, shared that as many as 70% of Christian students leave the church in university.

How then shall we pray?

First, let's remember the Christians in schools and on campuses, from students to faculty. Let's pray that with the help of God, many of these Christians would be bright lights in their environments, not afraid to walk to the beat of His drum! The ways of the Gospel are not the ways of the world and the pressure to depart from the Way is huge. Let's pray for the Lord's keeping grace, for His protection on hearts and minds and for a daily experience of His great love.

Second, let's cover all students with prayer, asking the Lord to keep them safe from social pressures, destructive influence and violence. Let's also pray that they would find good friends to be companions on their journey.

Children and young people need our prayer support for strength and wisdom as they face the demands of their unique context. Let's pray for the Lord to help them find their way and find their place in this world.

Above all, they need to have opportunities to come in contact with the life-giving Gospel of Christ. Let's pray for those opportunities to come, that many may encounter the Lord and experience His love in the depth of their souls.

Some of you do not have children or grandchildren. Many of you do. But we can all take this vulnerable generation into our hearts and lay them at the feet of Christ. Let's remember them in prayer often in this coming school year because more than anything, they need to be covered with prayer by God's people.



NEW BELIEVERS UNDER FIRE

In many parts of the world, to respond to the Gospel of Christ and to follow Him means leaving everything. Countless people chose to do it every day.

In Chad, a Muslim dominated nation, amid great personal poverty, believers rejoice in their Saviour and spend their lives making Him known. The challenges and trials are monumental, yet they carry on faithfully, having encountered Christ and being fully aware that others must hear about Him.

Before he was imprisoned, young D used to take people around town on his motorbike like an Uber driver. He hung out with a few friends and watched a lot of soccer.

But in early 2018, his behaviour started to change. He snuck away for hours at a time; sometimes he was gone all day. People noticed and rumours began to circulate. Finally, his brother found out the truth and told their parents – D had become a Christian.

He'd met a man named DJ who invited him to a Bible study. Many conversations followed and, over time, D came to believe that Jesus is the one true God. He was baptised along with his friend A,

who also came to believe in Christ. *“Even now,”* says A, *“when we think about that day, there is a great joy that comes to our heart.”*

Six months after D and A became Christians, a local imam reported them to the police, and they were arrested. D’s family didn’t visit him in prison, neither did A’s. They would have gone without food if not for an acquaintance who worked at the prison and brought them meals. After three days, lacking any evidence of illegal activity, the police chief let them go.

But they could never go back to the way things were.

Unlike many Muslims who convert to Christianity and are kicked out of their homes, D’s family let him stay. However, he was no longer treated as a son.

“Harder than being jailed is being an outcast from society, from your own family,” D told our team. His parents revoked their co-signatures on his motorbike lease, forcing him to abandon his taxi service — his only source of income. Worse,

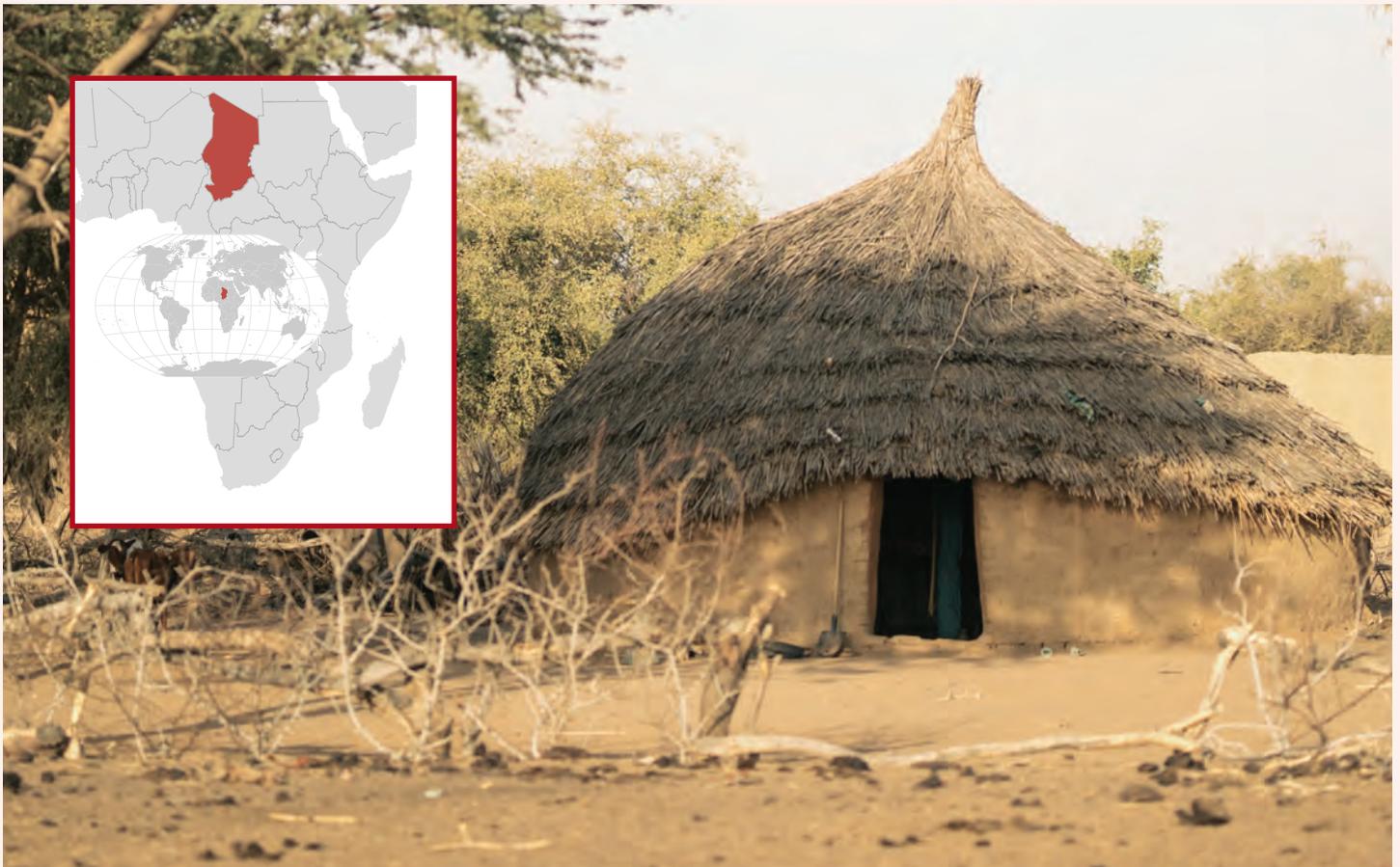
they stopped including him in important family conversations and family events.

D who suffered losses beyond what we can imagine, says, *“...it’s not the mature believers who face the worst hardship. Most persecution falls on new converts, specifically those who converted from Islam.”*

REACHING EVERY FERICK

Our Every Home for Christ Ministry Director in Chad was raised as a Muslim and kicked out of his home at a young age for choosing to follow Christ. He understands the price that new believers often pay for their faith and is dedicated to reaching every home in his nation with the Gospel, including the homes of more than 6 million Muslims.

One convert says, *“when we believed, the suffering started.”* At first there were only two Christian families. They partnered with Every Home for Christ and started sharing the Gospel village to village. Then the authorities burned down the building where they stored their gospel literature.



By that time, there were eight other believers. All of them were brought before the religious leaders, harassed and imprisoned. This happened multiple times, until they were finally forced to flee their homes.

EHC director described that day with these words: *“They walked out of the village, the wives and husbands holding hands with their children, with nothing.”*

Patiently, they started new lives. They shared the Gospel in nearby *fericks* (nomadic villages) and their own village grew as new believers joined them. Together, they cultivated new lives, ones that helped overcome the pain of loss.

“We have no intention of going back to the way things were before,” one convert says. *“There is no glory without paying the price.”*

For one dedicated pastor, the pain is worth it. He loves seeing people’s lives change.

“There is a complete turnaround,” he says. *“We can see them starting to love other people. We can see them stopping bad behaviours that they used to have. They are meek under persecution. They reach the point where they get the understanding that now they have found the truth — a truth worth dying for.”*

CAMEL CARAVAN

A community of Christians formed an Every Home camel caravan and travel as evangelists across vast deserts on month-long journeys to take the Gospel to various *fericks* in the region.

Many of these *fericks* can only be reached by camel. These nomadic communities are spread across a large region and it takes months to find them and visit them. One young member of this camel caravan is only 14 years old, a precious boy on a monumental mission.

New believers in Chad must shoulder a heavy load. But they are not alone. They have found a family that offers strength and support, a family

that is going forth with a shared mission. Their vision of the Church is a generous one, sending them out of familiar territory and into contact with people who will often reject them.

They are young believers, outcasts from their families, resilient in the midst of scarcity. They are former Muslims, compelled by love for Jesus and for those who have never heard His name.

They are bold and resilient. They are keeping the faith. They are going to others with the Gospel, no matter the cost. They need our prayer support.

May they know the strengthening Presence of Christ day by day and may the Lord protect and preserve new believers under fire.



 trouver l'espoir · finding the hope

Finding the Hope is making a difference in our nation! Churches that participated in outreaches have discovered that prayer and sharing the Gospel bears fruit. They are welcoming 1st time visitors, leading people to the Lord and have opportunities for meaningful follow up.

We are currently working with churches in 19 communities in four provinces that are planning *Finding the Hope* outreaches before the end of this year. Several other churches are considering outreaches for the new year.

Let's pray for God's kingdom to come to people in these communities, for the light of the Gospel to pierce the spiritual darkness and for people to be prompted to respond to the Gospel's invitation. We invite you to also pray that more and more Christians will be stirred with a renewed compassion for the lost in their communities. As Jesus instructed, let's ask the Lord of the harvest, to send out workers into his harvest field.