



## Iran: What the Media Does Not Say!

Pastor Victor Atallah

Last month we hosted a group of Iranian converts for biblical training at John Calvin Center. Most live in Cyprus as asylum-seekers or recognized refugees, including several families. A few others live in Europe or Canada. Some have been following Christ for many years and others are new to the faith. Three are being prepared for baptism. A young Iranian was also brought along by some participants because he expressed interest in the “Christian religion!”



### *Iranian Christians Grow in Grace*

Pastor Iain Wright again served as the main guest teacher. He and his Orland Park, Illinois, congregation (USA) dearly love Iranians and generously support MERF’s outreach to Persian-speaking people. He focused on the riches and sufficiency of God’s Word for every area of the lives of God’s people. It was heart-warming to hear the reactions of these

*“...the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”*  
—Matthew 9:37

lovely Iranian converts to what they had learned. One couple enthusiastically announced that “from now they will examine how they live, worship, and witness to others in the light of God’s Holy Word.” Two weeks later another couple phoned me to ask for a private counseling session. They joyfully explained how their “marriage has been enriched by what they learned.” The young seeker is now regularly attending a weekly Bible study in the home of the family who invited him to accompany them to the conference.

For each of these, belonging to Christ can be life-threatening from Muslim

fanatics in their families and communities who view them as traitors to their roots by opting for the religion of the “corrupt West.” Yet, we know of several Iranian converts who have returned to Iran and survived pressure to recant their faith in Christ. Some have become instruments of spiritual blessing to family members, friends, and others. They all participate in home Bible study groups, secret worship, and even outreach activities.

### *Changing Trends*

The indisputable fact is that many millions of Iranians (some say as many as 60 percent) are disenchanted

*Top to bottom: Tehran in Iran, Iranian training session.*

with Islam and strongly prefer Western secularism. The Iranian authorities are fully aware of that, and thus no longer use Islamic slogans to stir public loyalty. Instead, they use nationalistic slogans such as “preserving” or “restoring” the “greatness of Persia.”

Yes, many do not mind “corrupt Western” ways of life. This includes some politicians and government officials! But also, growing numbers long for a satisfying spiritual alternative to the religion they no longer desire to follow.

This explains why, despite threats and difficulties, the church in Iran continues to grow very rapidly, especially among young people.

In recent months, a few Iranian leaders seem to have yielded slightly to these trends. It has been reported that several key Iranian Muslim clergyman have publically commended aspects of Christianity in their Friday sermons.

Former president Ayatollah Mohammed Khatimi has repeatedly said that he has no problem with Iranian Christians as long as they remain loyal to their families and nation. He described them as “honest and hard-working Iranians.”

These are wonderful Gospel days for Iranians. Training and supporting qualified Iranian converts for gospel work is one of MERF’s top priorities. Radio broadcasting and Internet-based ministries are a major part of MERF’s strategy with its main Persian ministry partner, Words of Hope. This is reaping much fruit among the many Iranians who are disenchanted with Islam.



## Update from Iraq

Baghdad Church activities continue throughout the week—worship services, Bible classes for children and youth, and women’s meetings. Due to continued insecurities, the church hires buses to and from all services and activities. Despite many challenges and delays, Baghdad Church has opened the first stage of the Children’s Center project: *The Good Shepherd Kindergarten* for children under six years of age. Orphans are 20 per-

cent of the enrollment. Their expenses are covered by the fees paid for the other children. The second stage of the project is to renovate the other building on the property next year. Many thanks to all who contributed!

By God’s grace, services and activities also continue in the smaller congregations in Kirkuk and Basra. Since 2003, war and violence have forced two-thirds of Iraqi Christians to leave the country. *Please pray for the Lord’s protection of the remaining Christian community in Iraq.*

## Special Prayer Request:

Praise God for Nelly Tannoury of Lebanon, a key member of the Arabic broadcasting team. Her short audio segments effectively reach out to young Muslim women.

She has suddenly suffered from a serious weakening of muscular movement. *Please pray for her full recovery and return to her vital ministry.*

**Top to bottom:** Baghdad worship service; Good Shepherd Kindergarten, Baghdad; Nelly Tannoury.

