

Free Methodist World Missions
PO Box 57710
Indianapolis, IN 46251
800-342-5531

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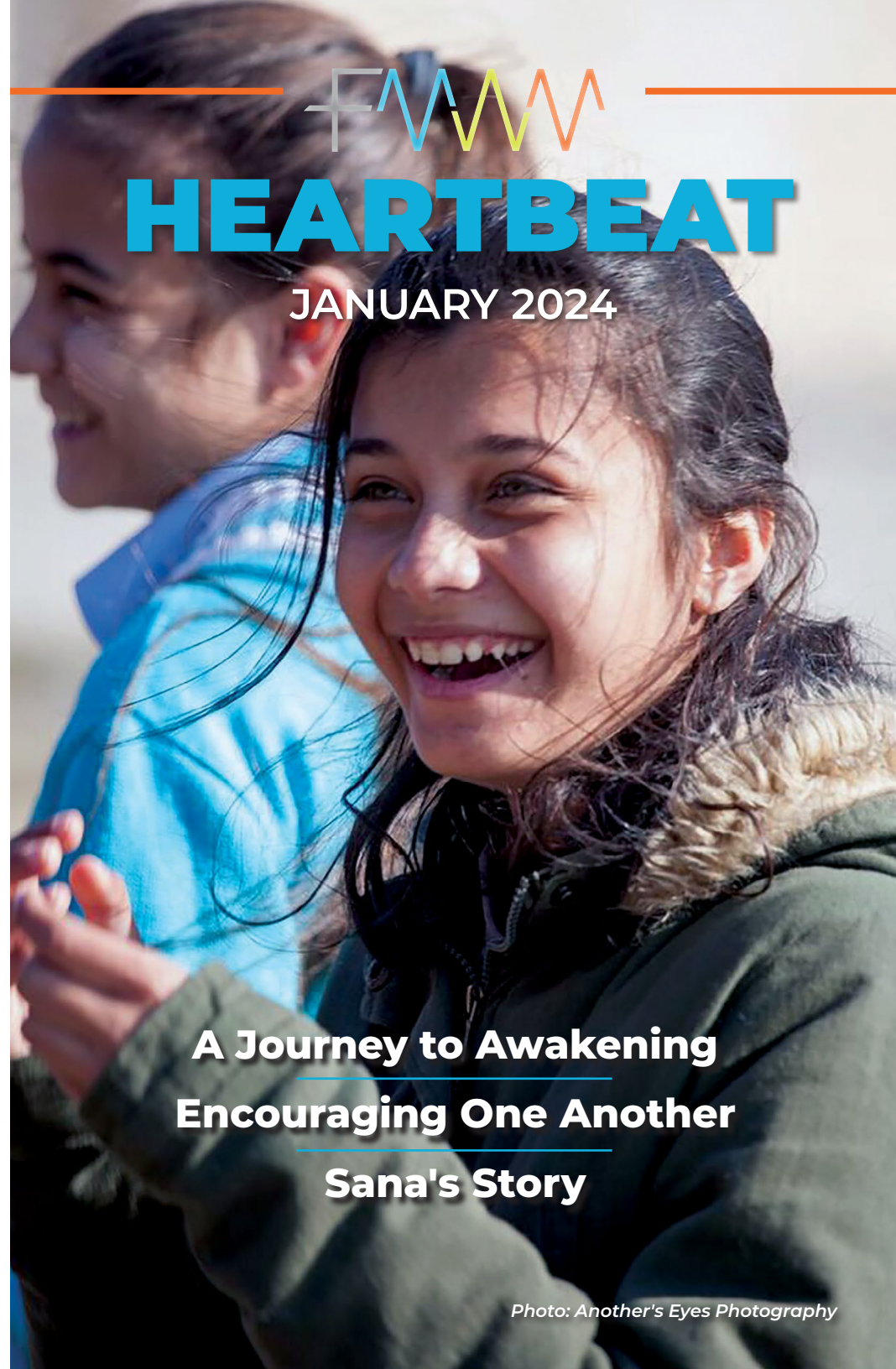
HEARTBEAT

JANUARY 2023

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STATION A, P.O. BOX 54
WINDSOR, ON N9A 6J5 CANADA
EMAIL: CPCRETURNS@WDSMAIL.COM

Free Methodist World Missions makes disciples by mobilizing the global church and empowering international leaders to establish transformational churches.



HEARTBEAT

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A Journey to Awakening Encouraging One Another Sana's Story

Photo: Another's Eyes Photography



Photo: Ahmed Elnokrashy on Unsplash

Photo is not the actual person

A Journey to *Awakening*

By Impact Middle East Leader

Although I was born to a family of the majority background and grew up in Syria, I had an extraordinary attachment to the church and loved being among Christians. I loved the sound of the church bells ringing from the church near my home, while the morning call for prayer from the mosque made me feel insecure and often caused me to cry. I also loved attending church with my Christian neighbors, lighting candles, observing communion and praying with them.

Suddenly, the war in Syria erupted, and much hatred rose from a fundamentalist group. This group became more powerful and took over; implementing their religious law. They killed, kidnaped and raped women and children. They stole the belongings of those following other religions. My resentment of this religious group grew. I continually compared this majority religion to Christianity. I found love and forgiveness in Christianity and began learning from Jesus' teachings. In my mind, I repeated the verse, "Love your enemies" However, I didn't dare tell anyone what I was thinking and experiencing. I was afraid of my family's reaction and afraid the radical militants would kill me.

One day, while I was alone in the house, a stranger came in and attacked me. He accused me of

being against the Syrian regime. He put a knife to my throat. I was horrified and began calling upon Jesus to help and save me. I told Jesus I loved Him and asked for His protection over me. Then, suddenly, I felt Jesus near me, protecting me. I received a strange strength in my body, pushed the criminal away and ran outside, screaming for help.

After this event, I was discouraged and depressed. The depression continued until one night when I saw Jesus in my dream. He had His back to me, and I asked to see His face. He turned, and all I saw was light. When I woke up, I felt His presence in my life. But I was afraid to share this experience and speak to my family about Christ. One thing had become evident: I felt the need to leave. I told my parents I wished to leave and go somewhere more secure. They agreed and encouraged me to go. I ended up in Iraq. There I met with some pastors. They listened to my story and encouraged me to become a Christian. They helped me learn more about becoming a follower of Jesus, and I asked to be baptized.

I am grateful for the grace of Jesus and how He put people in my life to help me grow in faith. Now, I pray I can share my faith in Jesus with my family and that they will be saved.

Encouraging One Another

By An Impact Middle East Leader

Fatima, a believer for many years, was disappointed and discouraged with the church. She was part of a women's ministry, and we went to follow up with her. During our visit to her, she also revealed her deep disappointment with her lifelong friend. They worked as primary school teachers for many years, and their friendship continued into retirement.

Fatima and her friend had gone on a group tour to Dubai and shared a room. While Fatima was sleeping, her friend stole most of her money. Fatima had almost nothing left and could not buy gifts for her daughters and grandchildren. She had barely enough money left to buy her food. Fatima had not expected her friend to act this way after such a long friendship.

When Fatima confronted her friend, the friend insulted her, calling her many detestable names. During the remaining days of the trip, her friend spared no opportunity to abuse her in the presence of the rest of the group. Fatima, who is very gentle and meek, was shocked by her friend's behavior and had no idea how to respond.

After Fatima finished expressing her pain to us, she cried. We could not overlook her misery and hurt. We spent some time in prayer and songs and read about the last days and how believers are to stand fast in this evil generation. We encouraged Fatima by expressing words from the scripture of how suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

In the end, Fatima was encouraged. She praised the Lord and said, "The Lord is good to my soul; he is my true treasure." Then she added, "We should not forsake His Word, for through His Word, we can encourage one another." Fatima began a small group that continues to meet in her home. It is a source of strength for many from the majority background as they navigate the unusual pressures of following Jesus in a hostile context.

Home groups in the Middle East have a special place in ministry to majority groups. Many from the majority background experience degrees of suffering and persecution we will never fully understand. Through home groups, they often find solace with others facing similar persecution and ask hard questions about God and His Word.



Photo: Another's Eyes Photography

Photo is not the actual person

On a visit with her family, Sana revealed her feelings and distrust of the new faith that brought her and her family so much trouble. Sana is a young Syrian refugee who is part of a church for majority background believers. She and her extended family moved to Northern Iraq. Sana's parents and some of her siblings had become Christians in 2018, and the family had gone through many difficulties before coming to our church in 2021. They continued to walk with Jesus and became involved in church ministries. Her father joined a discipleship group and became influential in his neighborhood, sharing his faith with relatives and neighbors. Many people did not like this, and the family was often persecuted. Sana's father made his living through a small candy shop in a crowded refugee camp, but it had to close because people boycotted the shop. He was considered an infidel due to his conversion to Christianity.

Despite all the pressure, Sana's father remained firmly committed to his faith in Jesus. Sana, like her father, was persecuted, especially at school. She was asked to cover her head but refused. She was forced to learn some verses from the Qur'an. She had to sit alone, eat alone, walk home alone, and no one wanted to be her friend.

The persecution caused Sana much pain, but she was hesitant to share her pain with her family because she didn't want to add to their sorrow. Despite her hardships, she studied hard and was an excellent student. However, Sana began to question her Christian faith. She avoided coming to church and kept to herself. Some church members began to visit her regularly and pray with her. The church family cared for Sana as she shared her pain and sorrow, inviting her to attend youth meetings. She eventually became more confident in the Word of God and His promises. Sana realized she was not following an imaginary God but a living God Who cared about her and her needs. She began to truly experience the love of Christ and His care for her through the church family. Sana learned she was not alone.

Please pray for Sana. Pray she will remain strong in her faith and rely on the promises of God. Pray for her family as they continue to face challenges. Ask the Father to provide for their needs.

Sana's STORY

By An Impact Middle East Leader



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JANUARY PRAYER GUIDE

01 > Monday | Guinea Conakry

Pray the church in Guinea Conakry will fulfill Jesus' prayer in John 17 to be one with each other and Christ.

02 > Tuesday | Creative Access-IA

Pray for the leader in this country and the redeveloping work in the north. Ask the Father to raise a leader to launch a house-church network in the capital city.

03 > Wednesday | Europe

Pray for a growing network and ministry among Iranian believers in Greece, England, Germany and the Netherlands.

04 > Thursday | 360 Mission District

Pray for the ministry of Bejuco, a skills center for early childhood development.

05 > Friday | Africa

Pray for Africa Area Director Mike Reynen as he continues to work with leaders in the mission districts and annual conferences in West Africa. Pray for the continued expansion of the Kingdom in this region.

Birthday: Mike Reynen

06 > Saturday | Egypt

Pray for the Egyptian General Conference as they seek to plant churches and reach their region for Christ.

07 > Sunday | Hungary / Ecuador

Hungary: Pray for Pastor Péter and Pastor Sylvia and the churches in Budapest and Győr. Pray the believers in both congregations will mature in faith, persevere in discipleship and have a growing passion to see the lives of others transformed through the power of the gospel.

Birthday: Larry Winckles

Ecuador: Pray for two new church-plant projects in Legarda and Ajavi. **Birthday: J.R. Crouse**

08 > Monday | ICCM

Pray for the Ahon Community Care Center in the Philippines where children are taught livelihood skills by learning to garden and care for ornamental plants. This provides food and income for the needs of the community.

09 > Tuesday | Taiwan

The Taiwan Annual Conference will elect a new superintendent this year. Pray for sensitivity to God's Spirit as leaders select the one who will lead the conference.

10 > Wednesday | Ireland

Pray for church plants in Newry in Northern Ireland and in Dublin and Kells in the Republic of Ireland.

11 > Thursday | Asia

In November, 252 video segments using eight national leaders and five FMWM-Asia missionaries were filmed for use with the Gethsemane Leadership Training initiative. Pray for the completion of the project, the funding needed and the leaders who will receive this training.

12 > Friday | Jordan

Pray for God's presence and protection for our leaders in this country. Ask the Father to give them wisdom and grace as they face difficult times.

13 > Saturday | Latin America

Pastor David López coordinates an area-wide team for the multiplication of committed disciples. Pray the Lord will give him wisdom and effectiveness as he mentors other leaders. **Birthday: David López (International Missionary)**

14 > Sunday | Creative Access-TB

The FMC in a neighboring country is establishing a small church (ministry outpost) on the border of TB. They are carrying materials through the mountains piece by piece. Pray for the remaining resources needed to complete this project and the expansion of further ministry in Creative Access-TB.

15 > Monday | Mozambique

In November, eight students graduated from the Maputo Bible School. Pray for the fruitfulness of these graduates as they go out to serve the church.

16 > Tuesday | Uruguay

Pray for the establishment of three church-planting projects: two in Durazno and one in Montevideo. Ask the Father to give them grace and love as they reach these communities for Christ.

17 > **Wednesday** | Ivory Coast

Praise God for how He is at work in Ivory Coast! In recent months, there have been baptisms in Guiglo and Daloa. Superintendent Maho also reports the healing of a blind woman.

18 > **Thursday** | Asia

Pray the Father will give Alan and Ammabelle Bacus spiritual knowledge and wisdom as they discern and explore ways to start a movement of multiplying small groups in gateway cities across Asia.

Birthday: Alan Bacus (International Missionary)

19 > **Friday** | Rwanda

Pray for the Spiritual Rounds ministry at Kibogora Hospital. They make rounds to pray with patients. Students, chaplaincy staff and young people from the community are part of this group led by missionary Emmanuel Nzungize.

20 > **Saturday** | Middle East

Use the words of John 16:33 to pray for believers across the region. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

21 > **Sunday** | Spain

Give thanks to God for His goodness and faithfulness in the life of Abigail Arana. Ask the Lord to give her wisdom, strength and passion for the coming year as she continues to serve Him in Spain.

Birthday: Abigail Arana (National Missionary)

22 > **Monday** | Paraguay

Pray for an awakening in the churches, guiding them to serve the Lord in unity and igniting a passion and renewed mission for sharing the good news of Christ in their communities.

23 > **Tuesday** | Set Free Movement

Pray for Sokleap, the new Set Free leader in Cambodia, as she identifies specific needs, develops partnerships and educates the vulnerable.

24 > **Wednesday** | Iraq

Since the beginning of the Whole Woman Initiative, 10 local nurses and midwives have been trained, and the team has entered over 500 homes. Pray for this growing work that is expanding into a new refugee camp. **Birthday: Joanne**

25 > **Thursday** | Creative Access-NP

One pastor from a minority ethnic group in this country reports the Holy Spirit helped him lead 30 people to Christ in 2023. Pray each of these new believers will lead others to Christ in 2024.

26 > **Friday** | Hungary

Pray for Set Free ministry at the women's and children's shelter in Budapest and the children's home in Győr as the team provides materials, spiritual support and education to help prevent human trafficking among these vulnerable groups. **Birthday: Katie Winckles**

27 > **Saturday** | Ethiopia

Pray for a new church plant among the Menja people. This group has been the most discriminated against, marginalized and oppressed people in Ethiopia. Pray for the FMC as they serve this people group.

28 > **Sunday** | Peru

Peru has faced increased crime in recent months. Pray for security in every part of the country and for clear laws that will be enforced.

29 > **Monday** | Creative Access-CA

Pray for Keith as he focuses more time on outreach training for reaching those of Muslim background. **Birthday: Keith**

30 > **Tuesday** | Malawi

Praise the Lord! In October, evangelistic crusades reached over 30,000 people. More than 9,000 people decided to follow Christ, demons were cast out, curses were broken, and sick people were healed. Pray these new believers will become dedicated disciples of Jesus.

31 > **Wednesday** | Latin America

Guy and Betsy Crawford serve as the pastoral care couple for missionaries in Latin America. Pray for Guy and Betsy as they conduct bimonthly care groups with the missionary team. **Birthday: Guy Crawford**

Bear up the hands that hang down, by faith and prayer; support the tottering knees. Have you any days of fasting and prayer? Storm the throne of grace and persevere therein, and mercy will come down."

– John Wesley