

PRAYER & PRAISE

Quarterly news from Middle East Media

ISSUE 99 JANUARY 2018

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

TAKE A LOOK BACK AT
THE HIGHLIGHTS
OF 2017

LETTERS FROM THE LAND

NEW BELIEVERS
SHARE THEIR
STORIES WITH US

middle east
media

"We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord... So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children..."

PSALM 78:4-6

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the January 2018 issue of *Prayer & Praise*, and a very happy New Year to you! The start of a new year is the perfect time to look back at the previous year and reflect on what God has done, as well as a time to ask His blessing on the year ahead.

Last year, we shared what MEM felt was on God's heart for our work and for the Middle East - that He would make 'rivers in the desert' (Isaiah 43) and raise up local people to take His message to their own lands. As we reflect on 2017, it's clear to see that this promise is coming true! In the past year, we have been training up local believers in media and leadership, from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds, who can in turn pass on what they've learnt to the next generation.

One of these training programmes was in North Africa, where we had our most successful Future Leaders training course to date. Over the summer we trained over 60 young Middle Eastern Christians in media and discipleship, so that they could resource the local church and use media to reach out to those around them. It's our hope that these trainees can train more young people themselves, creating a ripple effect across the region.

And in the Gulf, too, we have been focusing on equipping local believers, many of whom are from a Muslim background, to reach their own people through media. The idea is that we can then transfer the Gulf ministry over to them, the 'People of the Land'. We have now added 5 local people to our team - Praise God!

In this issue, we include some letters to you from this small community of Gulf believers. Some are uplifting, others are deeply challenging, and all are profoundly moving! Read more on p4-7 and please remember these brothers and sisters in your prayers, as many are going through intense struggles because of their newfound faith. You can also write back to them - turn to p5 to find out how!

As well as looking back and thanking God for the past year, we look forward to 2018 and all that it will bring. On p8-9 you'll find our full Project List for 2018. Please keep all these projects in your prayers, and if you feel inspired to give to a specific project, you can do so using the donation form on p11.

I'm sad to say this is my last ever *Prayer & Praise* for Middle East Media, as I'm moving on to another communications role. It's been a real privilege to get to know this brilliant organisation and to share the stories of our work with you. You'll meet our new Communications Manager in the next issue of *Prayer & Praise*, so please pray for them as they take the role forwards!

In Him,



Emily Shurmer

Communications Manager
comms@mem.org

COVER PHOTO: KATIEKK/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

2017

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

63

young North African Christians were trained in filmmaking and discipleship at our summer Future Leaders camp

27,000+

Facebook views of 4 videos made by our Future Leaders participants on themes of non-violence, tolerance, equality and serving others

13

episodes of the discipleship TV series *I Believe, But* have been finalised and now subtitled - the entire first series! We hope it will air on TV in the region in 2018.

360,000

likes on our Nisa'a women's Facebook page, where we provide original video content, article links and more. The website receives around 60,000 monthly views.

10

stories of the Bible have been brought to life in comic-book style through the Action Bible animated series, with a further 56 planned in 2018.

50

episodes of *On Bended Knee*, 1-minute films of poetry, prose and prayer for the Gulf, have been funded and are now in production. Some recent videos have described God's love, peace, and fatherhood.

...AND SO MUCH MORE! Thank you for your support in praying and giving to these projects in the past year.



PHOTO: ONEINCHPUNCH/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

LETTERS FROM THE LAND

Over the last year, we have been working with a growing community of believers in the Gulf. Here they share their stories with you... will you write back?

"Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth."

- Isaiah 43:6-7

Over the last year, we've been sharing the stories of believers in the Gulf who are passionate about reaching their own people for Jesus through creative media, to show them that there are believers from the same cultural background as them! Now we bring you their stories in their own words, through letters they have written.

Last January, we told you about the vision that God gave us for the Gulf team - that the local people would be 'rivers in the desert' (Isaiah 43) bringing God's healing to their own lands.

We also shared with you the story of Basma, a believer from a Muslim background who had to leave her life and family behind when she became a follower of Jesus. She is now making her own short films and writing poetry to share her faith with people of her background, and is part of a growing community of believers in our Gulf team. *(If you'd like to read more, you can find all previous issues of Prayer & Praise on our website at www.mem.org/prayer-praise)*

For this small community, the path to finding Jesus hasn't always been easy. Many of them first learnt about Jesus through online media, but as you will see from their letters, sadly their interactions with Christians weren't always positive. Furthermore, since finding faith they have experienced major pressure, discrimination and even violence from their friends, families and societies.

But despite all the challenges, they are

willing and ready to reach as many of their people as possible through media!

Leina, Gulf Director, said, "In Deuteronomy 11:11 we read, 'But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven.' This is coming true in the Gulf! It is no longer a dry land. Already the small cloud is there, we are just for it to burst and bring the rains from heaven."

"We need to be ready to let go and hand over control to these local believers," Leina continued. "This is their season."

Overleaf are letters from some of the believers we have been working with, sharing their stories with you.

Some are powerful and uplifting... others are very challenging, particularly to believers from a Christian background. We encourage you to spend time reading each one carefully, and to pray regularly for each believer and their families represented here. There are many more like them across the Gulf.

ENCOURAGE A GULF BELIEVER

We would love it if you would reply to these new believers! If you'd like to write back to any of the believers with your prayers, encouragement and whatever you feel God wants to say to them, please send your letters to comms@mem.org or the MEM address on the back page, and we will pass them on to Leina and her team.

Turn over to read the believers' letters >

I am Fatma.

I was veiled, and I considered Christians to be infidels but I didn't hate them.

One day I had a problem, and I visited my Christian friend who knew my problem. She asked me if I wanted her to pray for me (it was the first time I knew about someone praying for me) and I agreed.

I was surprised afterwards that she contacted me to ask about my problem. It meant a lot to me that in spite of our differences, she was praying and following up with me.

Dear Friends,

Please allow us to thank you for all your efforts in media production.

We are a family of four. Our children were able to learn a lot from Christian programmes on TV and the internet. When we first came to faith, it was through watching stories of others who walked this path before us. At this point both my husband and I were struggling with many issues. As we watched Christian families, we were captured by the happiness they were living in and we wondered why they are different. We started searching the internet till we ran across some testimonies (as you call them!). We know we still have a lot to learn but we are sure we took the right step.

Thank you,
A family who worships the Lord.

No one spoke to me about Jesus but I saw him in the behaviour of his children, as if they were a living Bible. I decided to understand the secret of this behaviour and started reading the Bible. I asked them about things in their creed but unfortunately they didn't have answers.

They were believers in their hearts, but most of them were ignorant in the Bible and the scriptures, unlike Muslims.

Fatima



I know Jesus through Christian sites and shows that declared Jesus and salvation. One Christian site adopted and followed me till I was freed from my previous thoughts and I accepted salvation. But after that, their role in my life ended.

I feel salvation is only the first step in the Christian life, not the last. How can we grow without discipleship to transform daily into His likeness? This gives us the wrong concept of becoming a follower of Christ.

Sometimes we feel that we are only as valuable as a tick on a report. Even worse, we are being taught that all we need to do is accept salvation, go to heaven and that is it. This is not what the Bible says.

Sahan

I am Christian, but my husband converted to Islam. I have two kids and I am pregnant with the third. He changed my kid's religion to Islam and when I asked why, he said the children follow the superior religion. In our culture Islam is considered superior. Also, children follow their father's religion.

They are still children. They still come with me to the church, but they are registered as Muslims. They are studying Islamic religion at school. I don't know what to do.

Suha



I used to carry a lot of negative feelings of loneliness and isolation. After receiving Christ as my saviour, I felt that I lived in a deserted island. I was no longer able to communicate with my family, friends or neighbours because of my new faith. For years, I thought I was alone and that nobody else could have taken that crazy step of becoming a believer.

But now, I know I was wrong. I met people that made that decision. We have regular fellowship time together, pray together, study the Bible together, and are there for each other. We know there are more but we don't know where they are. We are praying for them that they find a fellowship. We are also praying for others from our countries to know Jesus.

Praise God,
Farah.



We thank God for each of these believers.

Would you remember them regularly in your prayers, and considering writing back?

For security reasons, real names have not been used, and photos are for illustrative purposes only.

PROJECT LIST 2018



Here is a full list of all our projects for 2018 with a short summary of each. We hope it will help you pray for our work! If you'd like to know more about any of the projects listed, please do get in touch.

NORTH AFRICA

Animating the Action Bible: The Action Bible is a comic-book style Bible, telling God's story through beautiful illustrations by Marvel artist Sergio Cariello. We have produced 10 episodes, and hope to produce the remaining 56 stories this year. Each episode is a 2-minute motion-graphic style animation with an Arabic voiceover.

Blossoms: Blossoms provides spiritual and emotional healing to women and young adults in North Africa. We will provide psychological training and art, drama and media therapy workshops to enable women and young people to identify and express their heartfelt needs.

DreamMaker Workshops: We have developed a curriculum for refugee children around our existing 3D animated children's TV series, DreamMaker. We hope to run 5 workshops in 2018, to give children a healthy sense of self, and to show them that God has a great plan for their lives beyond their present circumstances.

Future Leaders: We run media and leadership training courses for young leaders from the North African Church, to enable them to impart transformational messages of hope, love and reconciliation to their peers in the communities around them. This year, we hope to run a Future Leaders training camp for 50 young people.

Got IT! Through dynamic, 1-2 minute animations, Got IT takes common misconceptions that many Muslims have about Christians and Christian theology, and explains simply and clearly what Christians actually believe. We hope to produce and broadcast 12 new episodes in 2018.

Life in the Desert: This will be a 26-part animated series for Middle Eastern children aged 5-9, many of whom are dealing with trauma, fear, loss and grief. It tells the story of a young girl, Farah, who is going through a difficult time and finds comfort and inspiration from the heroes of the Bible. We hope to produce at least 7 more episodes in 2018.

Life in the Desert Workshops: In partnership with child psychologists, our North Africa team has developed a series of trauma recovery workshops to go alongside our Life in the Desert animated series. We hope to run these workshops with groups of refugee children in Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan. Ultimately, the aim is to encourage traumatised children to lift their eyes to God, in whom true healing is found.

Leaders at the Well: We hope to train a group of young people in scriptwriting, so they can write a short film retelling the biblical story of the Woman at the Well in contemporary setting. The aim is to draw out themes of good leadership that arise from the way Jesus interacts with the woman in the story, and to build an educational curriculum around the final film to teach leadership skills in the community.

Nisa'a Women's Project: Through our women's website and meet-ups we seek to challenge women's core beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of themselves and others. We encourage women of all faiths and backgrounds to question inherited cultural patterns, empower them to undertake new endeavours, and inform them about gender equality, citizenship and human rights.

Speak Your Heart Workshops: The idea of these workshops is to go one step further with the readers of our Nisa'a women's website, to bring them together in a physical, rather than virtual community. It gives our team members the opportunity to come alongside and mentor North African women from every background, as well as helping them get to know the real struggles and issues that women face.

THE GULF

People of the Land: This is the focus for the Gulf for 2018. Our aim is to empower new believers in the Gulf to reach their own people through media, and to transition the Gulf ministry to be entirely led by local believers. We are training Gulf believers in filmmaking and provide them with holistic discipleship training, so they can make their own films in their own dialect. We now have a group of dedicated believers who are trained in filmmaking, which hope to expand to around 15-20 individuals in 2018.

Online presence: We want to establish an online platform led entirely by believers from a Muslim background. This will create an online community where new believers can upload their productions, reach others like them through social media, and engage in discipleship.

On Bended Knee: As part of the People of the Land project, we want to continue producing 365 short film clips of poetry, prose, scripture and prayers, showing Gulf believers praying for their own nations. These clips will give new believers a safe way to communicate about their faith, and will be a powerful witness to Gulf Muslims. We also hope to expand this series to create episodes specifically for children.

The Refuge: Our dream is to establish a 'safe place' for Muslims who are coming to faith, as they often have to flee their homes in difficult circumstances. This would need to be outside the Gulf, and would be a place where we can mentor believers and provide discipleship and counselling, as well as producing more media.

You can find more detail about all of these projects on our website - visit www.mem.org/projects to read more.

PRAYER POINTS:

- **Thank God for our staff in the Middle East** - all our trainers, administrators, animators, filmmakers, producers, poets, writers, and more. Pray that God would bless them and their families, and continue to give them creativity and passion to reach their own people with His love.
- **Pray for all those who watch our programmes, attend our training and development courses, and come into contact with our work in any way in 2018.** Pray that their hearts would be open to hear from God, and that they would have a real encounter with Him. Thank God for the scope of these projects - that MEM is reaching the men, women, children, young people of the Middle East in a huge variety of ways.
- **Pray that God would provide funding for the projects which are not yet funded,** so that we can reach as many people as possible through all the creative media projects we have planned!

What your
£10
can do

IMAGE: EUGENIO MARON/SIB/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

For just £10, you can empower a North African woman to speak her heart...

As part of our Nisa'a women's project, we run monthly Speak Your Heart workshops, where North African women can come together, tell their stories and build deeper relationships with our women's team.

The Speak Your Heart workshops give our team members the opportunity to come alongside North African women from every background, to help them get to know the real struggles and issues that women face. Recent topics have included body image, self-esteem, finding your value, and dealing with pain and fear. The meet-ups have grown organically, and now occur monthly in 5 different cities.

Just some of the comments from women who attended recent workshops:

"I come out of these sessions more aware of myself, I know my thoughts about myself, and I let go of some of the negative energy inside me."

"I tell my story and feel comforted, like someone has removed a big load off of me."

"I get to meet people who overcame similar obstacles as those I have been through, in order to restore my desire to dream again."

It only costs £10 for one woman to attend a Speak Your Heart workshop. Will you help us empower North African women by giving a gift today?

Yes! I want to join with MEM to make a difference in the Middle East...

Full name

Address

Postcode

Email

I WISH TO DONATE: £10 £20 £50 £100

Other amount: £

TO: North Africa The Gulf Where most needed

HOW TO GIVE:

Cheque or Voucher (CAF/Stewardship): Please make your cheque/voucher payable to Middle East Media and return to FREEPOST MEM.

Card payments: Visit www.mem.org/give to pay by debit card, credit card or Paypal.

Standing order: Tick if you'd like us to send you a standing order form:

You can also download a standing order form at www.mem.org/give

Legacy: If you'd like more information on leaving a legacy to MEM, tick here:

GIFT AID DECLARATION (Extra 25%) Please tick as appropriate:

I am a UK taxpayer and I want to Gift Aid my donation to MEM and any donation I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years. I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

I am not a UK taxpayer.

Signed

Date

Please detach this form and send to FREEPOST MEM along with your gift. Thank you!

If you are not in the UK, please visit www.mem.org/give to donate online.

Prayer Blog

If you'd like to pray for MEM and the region on a regular basis, visit our Prayer Blog at www.mem.org/pray. You'll find lots of way to pray through current news stories and issues, updates on our work, and more. You can also receive these blogs as a prayer email every 2 weeks - visit the blog to sign up!

PHOTO: THINAIR SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Sowing seeds of transformation

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