

AT OUR FINGERTIPS

Many years ago when smartphones were very new, my colleague lent me his and I was amazed to see a small image and the words 'The Bible'. I quizzed him about this and could not get my head around the fact it was something called an app that enabled him to have the whole Bible on his phone. We laughed about the question 'would Jan Hus, William Tyndale, Comenius and others have wanted this app?' We decided YES as they would love having the Bible in their own language and at their fingertips, literally.

No, I do not have this app even now; but without fear or threats we can each have the Bible in our home, often with access to various translations and different languages. At last year's Fulneck Heritage Day I wanted a display of Bibles and was surprised by how many different languages folks had on their shelves, and how interested visitors were to see the old and new, the range of languages, all telling the same stories.

It is hard to appreciate how lucky we are to safely have the Bible at our fingertips. Open Doors is a charity that works in over seventy countries around the world supporting those persecuted for their Christian faith. It all started in Europe over sixty years ago. One brave Dutchman, Brother Andrew, smuggled Bibles into Warsaw with the aim of seeking out and strengthening the persecuted church. By taking practical steps to support Christians living behind the Iron Curtain, he was laying the foundations for a charity that now operates across the globe.

Today Open Doors works in some of the most dangerous places in the world. On their website it states that 1 in 7 Christians around the world are persecuted today for their faith. Just picture what 1 in 7 means for a typical congregation at your Church. There are ten countries in the world where Christians suffer extreme persecution and a further forty where there is a high level of persecution.

Open Doors aims to work closely with local partners to strengthen their work; they do this in many ways, including:

- distributing millions of Bibles each year;
- providing financial and legal aid for those unjustly imprisoned;
- practical support to rebuild destroyed churches;
- medical aid for victims of violence.

One story copied from the Open Doors website:

Ji Ho vividly remembers the moment she saw her father for the last time. North Korean security agents had ransacked their house. They didn't find what they were looking for in the house – but they did discover something by digging deep in the garden.

"They found the book, wrapped in plastic," she remembers. "One of the policemen came inside, holding the book. He kicked over our small table as we cowered in the corner, flinging dishes everywhere, and threw the book down at my father's feet."

As Open Doors secret fieldworker Brother Simon explains, “North Korean Christians actually risk their physical lives – not only for themselves, but for their whole family. Because when they practise their Christian activities and if one of them is exposed as a Christian, the whole family gets the same punishment. Sometimes that means a whole family is killed or banished to political camps.”

Next time you reach for your Bible, or sit in Church listening to a reading, take a moment to reflect on all those people for whom such freedom is unknown. And yet, in our own country there are many for whom the Bible is not a book they turn to; we can also reflect on how we can make the message more relevant and accessible to those we meet in our lives.

Sr Mary Holmes