

## PRAYER LETTER 49



This letter is written by the friends of the **Synod of Evangelical Church of Iran in Diaspora**, as the country faces financial pressure and struggles with the spread of Covid19.

**We invite our partners and sister churches to pray for the people of Iran, including the Christian communities and churches**, as they trust in the Lord's protection and guidance and work hard to remain faithful witnesses in these difficult situations.

### General information

**Political Situation-** Presidential election were held in Iran on 18 June 2021. No applicant from the so called "Reformist" group was considered as qualified candidate for the election. Ebrahim Raisi, a protege of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, won the election amid low turnout. He is hardline judge who is under **U.S.** sanctions for human rights abuses. The ruling party is very excited and believes that as a result of this election, with uniform leadership in Legislative, Executive and Judiciary branches they will be able to achieve the goals of the Islamic Revolution that are long overdue.

**Covid 19-** As you can read in the News, Iran continues to be a Covid 19 hotspot, They are experiencing the fifth wave of surges in the country and many major cities including the capital Tehran are considered a red zone. There are strict regulations, which are very difficult to follow, since many have to work to take care of their families. There is no form of financial support by the government. Vaccinations are available in limited numbers. Those who have the financial ability travel to Armenia that offers free vaccination tourists. Recently they require the vaccination tourists to stay at least a week or longer after receiving the shots. Many of the church members and the leaders have contracted the virus, some with very serious symptoms, that required ventilations and ICU rooms. Unfortunately, the death rate in the country is very high. On the other hand, since many have contracted the virus, they feel they have immunity, therefore continue planning social events and ignore the safely guidelines and spread the virus even more.

**Financial Situation-** Iran has been under sanctions for decades, which has impacted the country as a whole and every family and person, individually. During the last 40 years The Iranian currency has been losing its value continuously, and government's efforts to control the situation has failed time and time again. It is a real puzzle how people survive. The average monthly salary is about 250-300 US dollars, while the food cost is very similar to costs in USA, where the average salary is at least ten times more. There were some hopes that signing of the Nuclear Deal may bring some positive change in the economic situation of the country, but the recent presidential election has created some doubts about any positive results.

**Hope?**- Many are depressed and have almost lost the hope for change in the economic or political situation. The wave of immigration to Western countries stopped about five years ago. Many Iranian Armenians started moving to Armenia, but the last year's war of Artsakh and its negative impact on the political situation of Armenia stopped that process. At present every person struggles for survival. The stress and anxiety have affected the physical and mental health of community. As a result, the family relationships are suffering as well.

**Churches**- Due to the new surge of Covid 19, churches are not yet back to in-person activities. Due to lack of proper internet services, having live and online video services or zoom meetings are impossible. Pastors have created chat groups and recorded audio messages; scripture readings and worship songs are sent to members. Despite the intense pressure, church members are well connected through WhatsApp and try to encourage and support each other. The situation for the new converts and house churches remains very challenging and dangerous. Despite the threats, the underground church continues growing in number and faith.

**SECID**- Some leaders of the church who have already left the country, have created the Evangelical Synod of Iran in Diaspora (SECID). The goal is to support our brothers and sisters in the country and the worldwide Iranian Presbyterians, to maintain the unity of the scattered members, groups and congregations in coordination with the partners and international organizations. The vision of SECID is to enable, equip, and encourage the global Iranian Evangelical Presbyterians.

### **Prayers Topics:**

#### **Please pray for...**

1. The health of those suffering from Covid and other illnesses as the healthcare system in the country faces many challenges.
2. The physical and mental health and strength of the pastors and the lay leadership of the churches (as they are exhausted and extremely overwhelmed) so they are able to offer hope and encouragement in this difficult situation, and have passion in matters of faith and Christian witness.
3. The financial needs of the families. Wisdom for the leadership to find creative ways to support the increasing numbers of needy families,
4. The unity of the leaders of different Evangelical churches.
5. Raising and preparing of a new generation of church leaders to serve inside the country.
6. The Evangelical churches who are facing serious challenges in keeping their status as recognized religious organizations.
7. The many legal issues the church leadership deals with, as authorities do not miss any opportunity to seize different church properties. For the Lord's wisdom and protection in such matters, the right people and the necessary funds.
8. Lord's guidance for the SECID leadership as they come together to evaluate present and future possibilities and set goals.
9. The political situation of the country, for some opening and an end to the continuous injustices. And also, for freedom in the country and peace in the area.