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Iranian Converts Nearly Match Native Austrians in Vienna Baptisms

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"I thought that a god who treats human beings with such harshness and cruelty could not be the true God, and many of my compatriots have come to the same conclusion,"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Something remarkable is happening in one of Europe's oldest churches. In Vienna, Iranian-born adults now nearly match native Austrians among those preparing for baptism - 72 Iranians beside 73 Austrians in the 2026 class, according to figures from the Archdiocese of Vienna. Last year the pattern was the same: of the 179 adults baptized in the archdiocese in 2025, 66 were born in Iran and 71 were born in Austria.

In a city where Iranian-born residents make up less than one per cent of the population, they now fill nearly a third of the baptismal classes.

The numbers tell a story, but the story belongs to a woman who has lived it herself. Anna Maria Jalalifar fled Iran with her husband and two little girls in 1993, after their home was raided again and again. Today she leads the Hananias ministry in Vienna, walking Persian-speaking seekers toward the Catholic Church in Farsi and Dari.

"I thought that a god who treats human beings with such harshness and cruelty could not be the true God, and many of my compatriots have come to the same conclusion," Jalalifar told the National Catholic Register. It was on a cold Austrian winter evening, shortly after fleeing Iran with her family, that she set out in search of a church.

What she found there changed the direction of her life - and now she spends her days helping others find the same door.

Vienna Iranian Converts: 72 Iranians Among 2026 Catechumens

The trend does not look like a one-off. Vienna's municipal statistics recorded 18,516 Iranian-born residents in 2025, about 0.9 Per cent of the city's population. Yet among the nearly 230 catechumens preparing for baptism in 2026, 72 are Iranian.

Father Christoph Matyssek, who leads the Afghan-Persian Catholic community in Vienna, says that of roughly 240 catechumens this year, about 100 come from Muslim-majority countries - not only Iran, but Syria, Kosovo, Turkey, Egypt and Azerbaijan.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

READ THE FULL STORY

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