News 26 November 2026 | English article

72 Iranians Prepare for Baptism in Vienna as Faith Grows

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

Seventy-two Iranians are preparing for baptism in the Archdiocese of Vienna this year, nearly matching the 73 native Austrians in the same class. The numbers come from the archdiocese itself, and they describe one of the most remarkable quiet revivals in Europe: people who fled a country where converting to Christianity can mean prison are now lining up, in public, to be baptized.

The pattern is not new, but it is growing. Of the 179 adults admitted to baptism in the Archdiocese of Vienna in 2025, 66 were born in Iran, compared with 71 born in Austria. This year the gap has narrowed to a single person. Among the nearly 230 catechumens preparing for baptism in 2026, the Iranians number 72 and the Austrians 73. The next-largest foreign-born groups, Afghans and Germans, number just five each.

Think about what that means. Iranians born in Vienna's archdiocese number about 18,516 people, roughly 0.9 Percent of the city's population. Yet they make up nearly a third of the adults preparing for baptism. A tiny community, most of them refugees or their children, is producing almost as many new Christians as the native population of an entire archdiocese.

Anna Maria Jalalifar knows the road these converts are walking, because she walked it herself. She fled Iran with her husband and two little girls in November 1993, after their home had been raided again and again. She arrived in Austria on a cold winter evening, speaking no German, with her husband in a detention centre and a fear that they would all be sent back.

She set out to find a church, and she could not ask for directions in words. So she drew a cross on her hand and showed it to a passerby, who pointed her in the right direction. A woman who had been raised by devout Muslim parents, who was ten years old when the revolution turned her daily life into a nightmare, found her way to a church with a cross drawn on her skin.

Today Jalalifar leads the Hananias ministry, part of the Austrian Pontifical Mission Societies, walking Persian-speaking seekers toward faith in Farsi and Dari. She has been a catechist since 1999 and has led Hananias since 2018. She screens every candidate with great care, because she knows what is at stake. In Iran, the choice these men and women are making can cost them their freedom. A British government report from June 2026 described the nearly systematic arrest and imprisonment of converts who openly practise their faith.

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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