

PRAYER ALERT...

‘If my people....will humble themselves and pray’ 2 Chr 7:14

Informing and equipping Christians - Online and to Inbox

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PRAISE REPORTS

■ Asda and Tesco withdraw Halloween patient outfits

Supermarket chains Tesco and Asda have withdrawn two Halloween outfits after they were criticised for stigmatising people with mental health issues. Both stores apologised for any offence caused and agreed to make donations to the mental health charity, Mind. The charity which complained that such costumes 'fuel' stigma, will receive £25,000 from Asda. Tesco has not said how much it will donate. The £20 Asda outfit included ragged clothing, fake blood, a mask and a fake meat cleaver while Tesco's orange boiler suit came with a plastic jaw restraint and offered to 'complete the look' with a machete. Online retailer Amazon had also advertised the 'psycho ward' outfit, but later said the costume was 'not available'. A Tesco spokesperson said: 'We're really sorry for any offence this has caused and we are removing this product from sale.'

Praise: God that the worst of these Halloween costumes have been withdrawn and pray that others will follow. (Ps.34:14)

More: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24278768>

■ Malala Yousafzai and Kailash Satyarthi win Nobel Peace Prize

Pakistani child education activist Malala Yousafzai and Kailash Satyarthi, an Indian child rights campaigner, have jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize. At the age of just 17, Malala is the youngest-ever recipient of the prize. The teenager was shot in the head by Taliban gunmen in October 2012 for campaigning for girls' education. She now lives in Birmingham in the UK. Mr Satyarthi has maintained the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and headed various forms of peaceful protests, 'focusing on the grave exploitation of children for financial gain,' the committee said at the Nobel Institute in Oslo. The 60-year-old founded Bachpan Bachao Andolan, or the Save the Childhood Movement, which campaigns for child rights and an end to human trafficking. Reacting to the news, Mr Satyarthi told the BBC: 'It's a great honour for all those children who have been still living in slavery despite of all the advancement in technology, market and economy.'

Praise: God for the powerful testimony given by Malala and Kailash. (Ps.18:49)

More: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-29564935>

BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Trojan Horse schools 'not improved', Ofsted warns

There are still significant problems at the five Birmingham schools placed into special measures following concerns about a hard-line Islamist takeover. England's schools' watchdog Ofsted says the action plans are still 'not fit for purpose' in some of

the five. At one, 'staff do not trust each other', it says, and 'safeguarding remains a serious concern' at another. The inspections took place early this term. The Department for Education described them as 'a snapshot'. The five schools were inspected - on an unannounced basis - between 8th and 12th September, and in some cases new governors and heads had only just started work. Inspectors raised concerns that it had taken too much time to appoint new governors and senior leaders at these schools. This meant 'very little action' had been taken to address the serious concerns raised about their performance. Ofsted chief Sir Michael Wilshaw said, 'Too much poor practice remained unchallenged during the summer term'.

Pray: that urgent action will be taken to address the serious concerns in all these schools. (Pr.9:9)

More: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-29613448>

▣ Lib Dems back getting rid of Christian assemblies

The Liberal Democrats have backed a motion to end Christian assemblies in schools. At the party's conference last week, delegates voted to repeal the existing legal requirement for all state-funded schools to hold acts of collective worship of a broadly Christian character. But a motion to ban faith-based selection in state-funded schools was defeated, after Business Secretary Vince Cable and Justice Minister Simon Hughes said it risked 'really serious harm'. Earlier this year, the Rt Revd John Pritchard, who chairs the Church of England's board of education, said Christian school assemblies should be replaced with a time of 'spiritual reflection'. He claimed changing the law could be 'liberating' for schools and churches. However, an editorial in The Daily Telegraph said replacing Christian assemblies would be a 'fundamental change', adding that there is 'no evidence' to show that parents object to their children being exposed to Christian themes. (See also Prayer Alert 25-2014)

Pray: that the pressure to get rid of Christian assemblies will be reversed and that we will see our Christian heritage upheld. (Ps.81:9)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/lib-dems-back-getting-rid-of-christian-assemblies/>

▣ Church of England: teach pupils by video link 'to prevent closure of rural primaries'

Village primary schools should consider teaching pupils by video link and allowing buildings to be used as post offices or community centres to stave off closure, according to the Church of England. Radical action is needed to prevent many of the 2,222 small Anglican schools – teaching almost 230,000 pupils – from being shut, it is claimed. In a major report, the CofE said rural primaries remained one of the state's last points of contact with the countryside following a 'steady decline' in the number of shops, libraries, pubs and police and fire stations in recent years. But it said the days of fully autonomous primary schools – some teaching as few as 20 pupils – were 'numbered' because of a 'constant salami slicing of budgets' combined with teacher recruitment problems. The report called on the governors of all Anglican primaries in rural areas to carry out an internal review into their long-term viability, saying 'doing nothing is not an option'.

Pray: for our village schools and for new initiatives that will help maintain their viability into the future. (Php.4:13)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/11157163/Church-of-England-teach-pupils-by-video-link-to-prevent-closure-of-rural-primaries.html>

▣ David Cameron courting tycoons - despite anti-lobbying bill

According to recently leaked documents seen by the Guardian and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, representatives of big business rubbed shoulders with senior politicians at a 'black and white' ball in February. David Cameron and other top politicians dined with billionaire donors at a dinner costing £1,000 per head. Among the guests were executives of a highly controversial doorstep lending firm criticized for soliciting retired elderly people and who had donated more than £25,000 to the party in the past three years. The first donation came when the government was being encouraged to regulate payday loan companies. Property tycoons and a Ukrainian energy boss also attended the event. The leak comes following accusations that Mr Cameron backtracked on his pledge to clean up politics by getting rid of giant company lobbying. Last year a network of bankers, businesspeople and lobby groups attended a Conservative fundraising dinner costing £12,000 per person.

Pray: for politicians to adhere to rules set out by the Electoral Commission, and pray against government policies being influenced by commerce and industry. (Pr.4:5)

More: <http://rt.com/uk/195584-cameron-donor-lobby-fund/>

▣ Shocking divisions between rich and poor in UK

Many perceive the distribution of wealth in the UK to be more equal than it actually is. For 30 years the gap between the rich and the rest has widened and the trend shows no sign of slowing. The share of income going to the top 1% has doubled from 6% to 14%. If this growth continues at its current rate we are heading towards Victorian extremes in 20 years. The UK has the fourth highest level of inequality after Mexico, the US and Israel. Owners of multi-million-pound homes in central London (often the international super-rich) seem to live in a different world from those hit by the bedroom tax. However both are part of the same social fabric. The unequal society is driven by a more interlinked world economy keeping down wages at the bottom of the income scale so that working people compete with low-wage economies internationally.

Pray: for commerce, industry and politicians to recognise the destructive route the UK is taking towards wealth disparities and begin to consider informed and fair solutions. (Ps.140:12-13)

More: <http://highpaycentre.org/blog/New-film-the-shocking-rise-of-inequality-in-britain>

▣ National day of prayer about abortion

A National Day of Prayer about abortion is held each year on 27th October, the anniversary of the passing of the Abortion Act. When the Act was passed 47 years ago assurances were given that abortion would be limited to a small number of exceptional cases. Now we have virtually abortion on demand. In 2013 202,577 babies were aborted in England, Wales and Scotland - on average, 555 each day. 98% of all abortions were 'social abortions' and more than one quarter of these were repeat abortions.

Pray: against any further expansion in the numbers of abortions.

More: <http://imagenet.org.uk/prayerguide.html>

EUROPE

▣ Thousands attend pro-family demonstration in Paris

More than 250,000 people took to the streets in Paris on Sunday to express their opposition to 'anti-family' proposals in France, including plans to legalise medical procedures that will allow same-sex couples to have children. Alan Craig of the GayMarriageNoThanks campaign, who was invited to represent the UK by organisers, La Manif Pour Tous, said: 'The youthfulness of the protesters was noticeable. Overwhelmingly the participants were in their twenties and thirties, and teenagers were conspicuous by their noisy enthusiasm and, often, street dancing too. 'As in the UK, the government is ignoring the people as it drives through its anti-family proposals. But, clearly, at the grass-roots the traditional natural family is alive and well and full of youthful support in France.' On Sunday, contributions were made by delegates from Spain, Italy, Portugal, Poland and Slovakia, as well as GayMarriageNoThanks from the UK.

Pray: that this demonstration will draw attention to the people's apparent desire for traditional family life. (Pr.11:29)

More: <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/family/thousands-attend-pro-family-demonstration-in-paris>

▣ Europe is concerned about progression of jihadism on its territory

The growing involvement of European citizens in jihadist groups is a reason for concern here, where authorities estimate that some 3,000 Europeans, mostly French citizens, have enrolled in Islamic fundamentalist groups. According to statistics from the Ministry of the Interior, some 1,000 French citizens or residents in France are linked to extremist groups that operate in Syria or Iraq. The issue became relevant a few months ago, when four journalists who were held hostages by the so-called Islamic State (IS) for nearly a year revealed that some of their captors spoke with a French accent. Shortly afterwards it was learned that the executioner of US journalist James Foley is of British origin. Most French citizens involved in the jihad join the groups voluntarily after being recruited by cells that operate in the country, and many of them are recruited on the Internet.

Pray: against any further growth in recruiting for jihadist groups. (Ps.108:12)

More: <http://www.cadenagramonte.eu/english/index.php/show/articles/20025:europe-is-concerned-about-progression-of-jihadism-on-its-territory>

WORLDWIDE

▣ Middle East: Persecuted Christians sing of forgiveness

A number of the 120,000 Christians who fled Mosul and the Nineveh plains to areas like Kurdistan had the Arabic letter N ('noon') painted on their homes by IS to identify them as Christians (Nazarenes). IS view Christians as non-believers, but refugee Christians in Kurdistan have written a song to explain that being 'N' means 'unconditional love, to build bridges of peace, to believe in Jesus Christ, to teach, to forgive regardless of the crimes against you'. In Sept 2014 at SAT-7 a current affairs programme 'Bridges' visited Christian refugees from Mosul and Qaraqosh in Iraqi Kurdistan. As well as describing their losses and hopes these believers with the label of N hanging over them sang this remarkable song. The song, musicians, images and the words of love, belief, peacefulness, and forgiveness translated into English can be viewed by clicking the 'More' button.

Pray: for God's Holy Spirit to rule and reign over, in and throughout the region and for the influence of evil to shrink. (Is.14:5)

More: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2aL3sgZRuc>

▣ Liberia: Political leaders spearhead prayer against Ebola

Committed Christian, Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said, 'When you meet circumstances that you don't understand and can't control, you have to turn to God and that's a deep rooted Liberian experience.' The Ebola crisis has driven many to their knees. Churches are overcrowded with people pouring out their hearts before God. Bethel Cathedral of Hope is one such church experiencing unprecedented attendance. 'Liberia is not a stranger to crisis and so we have that resilience by the grace of God to be hopeful and to rise up in the midst of impossible situations,' said Bishop Wollo Belleh. A few weeks after the Ebola crisis erupted, Liberian Vice-president Joseph Boakai helped launch weekly prayer meetings encouraging Christians to take hold of God. 'My prayer is that God would help us overcome this in the shortest time possible, console the bereaved, help us to understand our predicament and work as a nation.'

Pray: for the nation as it puts all natural and spiritual resources together to defeat Ebola.(Ps.3:3-4)

More: <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2014/October/God-Help-Us-Liberian-Leaders-Lead-Prayer-Charge/>

▣ Global: Ebola caregivers - fear, risk and bravery

They dedicate their lives to saving others, but as Ebola spreads worldwide, healthcare workers must also focus on saving themselves. At least 416 health care workers have contracted Ebola and at least 233 have died. Doctors and nurses have described working conditions no one should endure. Every single move they make in treating a patient must be perfect. One slip-up - a torn glove or the smallest splat of infected fluid that gets on them - could cost them their lives. Some wake up every morning with a sore throat from constantly breathing in chlorine fumes. In a profession that already demands much emotionally and physically, these caregivers are pushed to the edge in both respects. They have lost friends, colleagues and patients. All this as they beat back their own understandable paranoia and fear. In a clinic in Monrovia (Liberia's capital) patients lie on stretchers on filthy floors near open buckets with objects and substances in them.

Pray: for God to walk with those battling the fear and the deadly virus, pray that international communities will recognize

and act on the measures they are able to take to support front line workers. (Ps.32:7)

More: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/10/12/health/ebola-health-care-workers/>

▣ **China: Pastor 'grateful' for prison sentence**

Many Chinese Christians are saying that China is facing its worst persecution since the Cultural Revolution. However, Pastor Huang Yizi of Wenzhou, Zhejiang province said he is 'grateful' for the opportunity to go to jail; 'Prison is a mission field with so many hungry and thirsty souls waiting to listen to the Gospel.' He could face up to seven years in jail after being accused of gathering to assault a state organ. (he criticised police violence against churches). His lawyer Zhang Kai said, 'Judging from the evidence I don't think Huang's actions constituted any crime. Personally, I believe his arrest is directly related to the general crackdown on churches in Zhejiang.' Salvation Church is just one of hundreds to be targeted in Zhejiang province. At least 360 have already been completely or partially demolished, ostensibly as a result of defying building regulations.

Pray: for the protection and comfort of the congregation of Pastor Huang's church. Pray also for God to watch over, protect and give wisdom to China's churches at this time as they bear witness to Jesus. (Ps.90:17)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/chinese.pastor.grateful.for.prison.sentence/41643.htm>

▣ **Syria: Battle for Kobane - wide regional repercussions**

As the Islamic State continues to push into the majority Kurdish town of Kobane in northern Syria, broad regional battles start to surface, it seems that geopolitics will prevent international assistance beyond limited airstrikes by coalition forces. The Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in an interview with CNN said, 'We will not interfere on the ground as long as the US strategy does not include intervention against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.' Many believe international coalition airstrikes are incapable of defeating IS in the vicinity of Kobane, and there is a need for Turkey's involvement. There is a contradiction between the international and Turkish visions. US strategy seeks first to eliminate the enemy slaughtering Western hostages. The Turkish Kurdish political division goes back to the failure of applying an agreement to share management between the Syrian Kurdish political parties.

Pray: for God to reduce the tension between the Turkish and Kurdish bringing His solution to the border crossing situation. Pray for a united Turkey and international coalition. (Ps.18:17)

More: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/home.html>

▣ **USA: Racism**

The UN committee on racism slammed the USA over police brutality after Michael Brown was killed and now calls for a review of 'Stand Your Ground' laws. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination concluded that minorities in US are victims of persistent discrimination and the UN racism watchdog has urged the US to halt the excessive use of force by police. Young African-Americans are victims of disparities and racial and ethnic discrimination remains a serious and persistent problem in all areas of life, such as existing school segregation, access to health care and housing. Meanwhile a death threat emailed to hundreds of Asian students at Harvard University had authorities on alert last weekend. Using racist language the email warned recipients they will be shot on campus. Some received a second email with similar language. See: <http://www.newser.com/story/196786/harvard-university-students-get-racial-death-threat.html>

Pray: for effective training, education and implementation of principles governing discrimination towards African-Americans and other minorities. (Ps.43:1)

More: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2738734/UN-committee-racism-slams-US-police-brutality-Michael-Brown-killing-calls-review-Stand-Your-Ground-laws.html>

▣ **Iraq: Detention facilities**

Hundreds of Iraqi Yezidi men, women and children are in IS detention facilities in Iraq and Syria. Young women and teenage girls are separated from their families and some have been forced to marry (or be concubines for) IS fighters, according to relatives of the detainees, escaped hostages, and two detained women interviewed by phone. They said the group has taken away boys and forced captives to convert to Islam. IS's litany of horrific crimes against the Yezidis in Iraq only keeps growing. Human Rights Watch heard shocking stories of forced religious conversions, forced marriage, sexual assault and slavery – and some of the victims are children. The prisoners were caught during IS's offensive in northwest Iraq in August. IS separated captives into categories: 1) women and mothers with younger children and older men or husbands; 2) women in their early 20s and adolescent girls; 3) younger men and older boys.

Pray: for the release of Yezidis, Christians, Shia Shabaks and Turkmen being held by IS. Pray also for the refugees now living in neighbouring countries due to the IS invasion. (Ps.72:3-4)

More: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/11/iraq-forced-marriage-conversion-yezidis>

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE WORLD PRAYER CENTRE, BIRMINGHAM, UK

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