

# Prayer Alert

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**But let all who take refuge in You be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread Your protection over them, that those who love Your name may rejoice in You. (Psalm 5:11)**

We are pleased to enclose this week's edition of Prayer Alert.

You may like to explore our new online [Prayer Alert Prayer Wall](#) where we can add our own prayers and praise, interactively. We trust that you will find this helpful and encouraging, as we pray from our homes during lockdown.

Can you help? - Prayer Alert is brought to your inbox without charge thanks largely to the generosity of individuals and organisations that freely provide most of the resources we need to operate. However, we would be grateful for donations from appreciative subscribers towards our costs. Please click the 'Donations' button above to make a contribution

Thank you for partnering with us in praying for the nations.

Blessings,

David Fletcher and the Prayer Alert Team

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## Praise Reports

### [Abortion and Down's syndrome debates](#)

Many people took the time to write to their MP to oppose an amendment that would completely decriminalise abortion in the UK and support pro-life amendments to the Health and Care Bill. The amendment to decriminalise abortion was withdrawn before it could even go to a vote, and there was strong support for the amendments even though they were withdrawn. Also the second reading of the Down's Syndrome Bill was approved in the House of Commons, meaning that people with Down's syndrome would be recognised as a minority group of people. This would ensure that they are not neglected and their abilities are recognised.

Praise: God for parliament's move to preserve the lives of unborn babies, and for sending the clear message that people with Down's syndrome are not second-class citizens. (Job 29:12)

More: [mailchi.mp/christianconcern/christian-weekly-news-602312?e=354f1ab5aa](http://mailchi.mp/christianconcern/christian-weekly-news-602312?e=354f1ab5aa)

### [London: Festival of Lights](#)

Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights, is when Jewish people remember the rededication of the second temple in Jerusalem. For eight days Jewish families around the world are lighting a candle-holder called a menorah during Hanukkah. For the first time ever, on 5 December, the final night of the festival, the iconic London Eye will also be lit to symbolise a menorah. The world's second largest Ferris wheel will be transformed as its 32 observation pods rotate, beaming lights across London. We can pray for the Light of God's Truth to cut through the darkness in London and stream into our country's towns and cities, bringing enlightenment and hope.

Praise: God for beams of light that represent His faithfulness, glory, radiance, and power which consumes darkness. (Psalm 4:6b)

More: [jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/london-eye-to-transform-into-a-menorah-for-chanukah/](http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/london-eye-to-transform-into-a-menorah-for-chanukah/)

### [Spreading God's love this Christmas](#)

Rediscover Church, in Devon, has been sharing the spirit of Advent by distributing a thousand Christmas hampers to the needy for the past six years. The recipients often include families struggling with finances during the festive time when strains on bank accounts cause stress, anxiety and worry. With the reduction of Universal Credit and the ongoing effects of Covid-19, there is an even greater need for acts of kindness. The hampers hold a range of food to support people through the festive period. The church receives daily calls for help and support, and this is a practical way to make a difference while showing kindness and hope. The hampers are symbols of love that let people know that they are valued and cherished.

Praise: God for the way various churches reach out to their communities with Christmas joy. (Hebrews 13:16)

More: [premierchristian.news/en/news/article/hampers-spreading-the-symbol-of-god-s-love-this-christmas](http://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/hampers-spreading-the-symbol-of-god-s-love-this-christmas)

## British Isles

### Sage scientists' response to Omicron

The impact of the Omicron variant on the UK is uncertain but may require a very stringent response, according to the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE). Ask God to give SAGE officials all the wisdom and stamina needed as they collect data on the variant. May they have ample discernment analysing the data and preparing for a potential wave of infections. Officials are throwing everything at a campaign to roll out booster jabs to all adults this winter in response to Omicron. Pray for Pfizer and others which have already begun to explore making new vaccines. The CEO of Moderna said it will take 95 days; also, the high number of mutations the virus uses to infect humans could mean that existing vaccines need to be modified and a higher dose booster jab needed to be the 'first line of defence'. [See https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-omicron-variant-highly-infectious-and-booster-jabs-may-need-double-dose-says-moderna-ceo-12482978](https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-omicron-variant-highly-infectious-and-booster-jabs-may-need-double-dose-says-moderna-ceo-12482978)

Pray: for all who are working behind the scenes in laboratory studies, and for government deliberations in the coming weeks. (Proverbs 1:5)  
More: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-59484322](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-59484322)

### Over 17 million use 'buy now, pay later'

More than 17 million UK customers have now used a buy now pay later (BNPL) company to make an online purchase. The payment method is also set to have its biggest Christmas yet. BNPL firms allow people to manage their shopping, either by postponing their bill for a short while, or splitting it into more manageable chunks over time, interest free. But users too easily end up in debt and tougher rules are needed. Klarna, the biggest UK provider, has seen its customer base double to 15 million since 2020. Other companies, Clearpay and LayBuy, are also expanding fast. The fastest growth is among 40- and 50-year-olds. A recent Citizens Advice survey found almost one in ten plan to use BNPL for Christmas shopping. Citizens Advice urges consumers considering using BNPL to ensure they understand what they are signing up for, how they will make the repayments, and what will happen if they can't pay on time.

Pray: for the treasury to regulate BNPL so that consumers are given appropriate protections from falling into unmanageable debt. (1 Timothy 6:10)  
More: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59433904](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59433904)

### CofE's Christmas single

The Church of England has released a Christmas single as part of a campaign to encourage more people to hear the real Christmas story through their local church. The single, a new carol version of In the Bleak Midwinter by one of the country's top young composers, Rebecca Dale, will form the soundtrack to this year's CofE Christmas campaign. It was released on all streaming platforms on Wednesday 1 December and can be [downloaded online \(https://linktr.ee/churchofengland\)](https://linktr.ee/churchofengland). All royalties from the digital streams and downloads of the track will be donated to charity, helping people experiencing homelessness in the UK. The Archbishop of Canterbury said that we often dress Christmas up with trimmings, but they are not the heart of Christmas. The only thing that makes Christmas perfect is Jesus, and the only thing we need to give him and each other is our hearts.

Pray: for communities celebrating the good news of Christmas to find Jesus in a variety of ways, whatever their prevailing circumstances this winter. (Matthew 7:7-8)  
More: [www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/church-england-release-first-ever-christmas-single](http://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/church-england-release-first-ever-christmas-single)

### Aftermath of Arwen

Although Storm Arwen has abated, the widespread disruption has left tens of thousands of people in the north of England still without electricity. Damage to power equipment has been described as unprecedented. As repairs are being made, more faults are being discovered and it is expected that properties in Cumbria may not have electricity until 8 December. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-59396135> On 30 November the Met Office reported, 'There is an 80% probability of severe cold weather/icy conditions/heavy snow between 9am on Wednesday 1 December and midnight on Saturday 4 December in parts of England'. Prolonged periods of cold weather can be dangerous for older people, those with underlying health conditions, and young children. We can pray for a speedy return to full capacity electricity across all areas, and for friends, family, and neighbours to be aware of others who may be vulnerable and need support. [See also https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-59483500](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-59483500)

Pray: for safety on roads with black ice and untreated pavements. (Job 38:29-30)  
More: [www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/cold-weather-alert/](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/cold-weather-alert/)

### Homecare and social care crisis

A quiet crisis has been unfolding in the homecare sector where the system is expected to reach breaking point this winter - unless urgent action is taken. Long-standing pressures on council funding meant that homecare providers were already operating on a shoestring with a limited capacity to withstand unforeseen shocks when Covid-19 hit. They face high fuel costs and unaffordable insurance, running the risk of closing. But demand for homecare is rising, with more complex requirements due to early hospital discharges. Workers face burnout. Unless additional funding is made available, we will likely see even more care staff leave this winter, at the worst possible time. Many disabled people choose to employ their own personal assistants to help them with tasks like getting out of bed in the morning and supporting them through the day so that they can work. There are 100,000+ vacancies in the social care sector. [See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-59490621](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-59490621)

Pray: for radical thinking and leadership from government so that councils can fulfil their legal duties to assess people for care and maintain stable provision. (Psalm 10:12)  
More: [www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/through-a-glass-darkly-the-unseen-crisis-in-home-care](http://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/through-a-glass-darkly-the-unseen-crisis-in-home-care)

### Northern Ireland: Arlene Foster told to leave faith out of politics

Former first minister Arlene Foster has spoken out against those who say that religion and politics should never mix. When speaking at the St Patrick Centre to a live audience, she discussed her own faith as well as her political career. Expressing her frustration she said, 'Christianity doesn't call you to be neutral. It calls you to be salt and light about what you believe in. It does annoy me when people say you have to take religion out of politics and leave it at the door, or like it only happens at the weekend. It is part of who you are. Your Christianity and your faith is something that is with you all the time. You can't just leave it at home on Sunday night and go out without it on Monday.'

Pray: for Christians working in politics to take Arlene's lead and not shy away from speaking about their faith so that others see God's light in all they do and say. (Matthew 5:14)  
More: [premierchristian.news/en/news/article/arlene-foster-shares-frustrations-of-being-told-to-leave-faith-out-of-politics](http://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/arlene-foster-shares-frustrations-of-being-told-to-leave-faith-out-of-politics)

## Rising energy bills: struggling to keep warm

When she checks her son at night, Sandy Birtles can hardly see her teenager for all the coats on his bed. The single mother of two says they have to be careful not to use too much hot water, and they do all they can to keep warm but the bills keep rising. 'I do not have the heating on when the kids are at school. If I'm not running around and clearing up, then I'm wrapping up in a coat.' She said that financial pressures mean she has been 'penny-pinching all the time', but rising energy bills have added to the strain. A charity has predicted that she - and millions of others - will face a particularly difficult bill shock early next April when domestic energy prices rise. Domestic gas bills will have doubled in 18 months. Pray for suppliers to give more support to struggling customers.

Pray: for the Government to prevent energy firms from making unfair profits. (Proverbs 16:8)

More: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59483411](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59483411)

## Europe

### Netherlands: Advent calendars renamed

A well-known chocolate brand has omitted any reference to Advent from its Christmas calendars, calling them instead 'Countdown Calendars'. Known to fans simply as Tony's, the Fairtrade brand was founded in 2005 by three TV journalists who discovered that many chocolate manufacturers bought cocoa from plantations accused of modern slavery and using child labour. Launching their first festive calendar their promotion asked, 'Are you looking for a way to count down to Christmas that gives you an excuse to chomp on our chocolate for 24 days straight? This is it.' The company said making no reference to Advent keeps it 'accessible to all who celebrate the festive season'. Christian Concern expressed unease over the marketing, saying, 'To remove Advent from Christmas is to miss the meaning of Christmas.' Others also criticised the 'woke' move, asking what is a 'countdown' to if not the birth of Jesus Christ.

Pray: for Advent to be magnified as people celebrate the beginning of reconciliation between God and man. (John 1:3-4)

More: [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10225477/Woke-chocolate-firm-axes-reference-Advent-13-Christmas-calendars.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10225477/Woke-chocolate-firm-axes-reference-Advent-13-Christmas-calendars.html)

### France / England: people-smuggling industry

Days after 27 people drowned in the English Channel, the BBC discovered that smuggling gangs are still telling migrants it is safe to cross. One smuggler said that the drownings were a lie and that there was no danger in [making the journey](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-59442534) (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-59442534>). The brutal journeys migrants make across the Channel are full of stories of crisis. Pray for the detection and removal of the guerrilla-style smuggling operations among the French dunes. Pray for authorities to have more compassion for the streams of soaking passengers washing ashore in Kent. Pray for this international criminal industry to be thwarted by even more sophisticated detection. Pray for an end to the supply of specially-made boats that refugees are packed into. New arrivals in French camps are given tips on how to find a people-smuggler. One young man from Afghanistan was told to look for 'the Kurdish man' hanging around during food distribution.

Pray: for French officials to make it more difficult for refugees to find someone to take them across the Channel. (Psalm 2:10)

More: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-59419963](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-59419963)

## Worldwide

### Global: food shortages

The world is in a critical hunger situation. The global prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020 was equal to the previous five years combined. Nearly one in three people globally (2.37 billion) did not have enough food in 2020. Moderate or severe food insecurity affects over 30% of the world. Covid-19 had a devastating impact on the global economy, triggering an unprecedented recession not seen since the Second World War, and the food security and nutrition status of millions of people, including children, will deteriorate if we do not take swift action. We can pray for God to inspire united humanitarian and peacebuilding policies in conflict-affected areas that will ease blockages to food distribution and develop avenues of safe transit of all aid. Pray for the UN to intervene in food supply chains so that costs of nutritious foods are lowered.

Pray: for the leaders of nations to develop systems and pathways out of pandemic-generated malnutrition. (1 Cor. 4:11)

More: [www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition](http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition)

### India: spike in attacks on Christians and churches

India has the second-largest Christian population in Asia, but a recent report states that over 300 attacks on Christians took place in the first nine months of 2021. 169 of them were in four states: BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh, tribal-dominated Jharkhand, and BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh. At least nine states have planned anti-conversion laws, including Chhattisgarh which has emerged as a 'new laboratory' for anti-Christian hatred in India. Over 1,000 people recently gathered for a Stop Religious Conversions rally - one in a series of events organised in the garb of anti-conversion protests. Addressing the gathering, a far-right Hindu leader urged the people to 'arm themselves with axes to teach Christians indulging in conversions a lesson'.

Pray: for God to protect His people from the religious hatred being stoked against them. (Psalm 46:1)

More: [www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/2/india-christians-church-hindu-groups-bjp-conversion](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/2/india-christians-church-hindu-groups-bjp-conversion)

### China: digital dictatorship

In 2013, China's President Xi Jinping said that 'whoever controls data has the upper hand', and ever since he has been on a technological quest to build what some call a blueprint for a digital dictatorship. It would not only allow China's communist government to control huge volumes of data on its own citizens but also of those around the world. Dustin Carmack, who worked as chief of staff for the director of national intelligence, said, 'You are talking about vast amounts of data they are running between, either in covert or overt cyber-attacks. In other realms, they are sucking up massive amounts of data around the globe that could have nefarious purposes in the long run.' China has over 415 million surveillance cameras deployed throughout the country. Beijing uses digital currency, social security cards, social credit systems, and online interactions to keep an even closer eye on its citizens. Experts say China wants to be the global leader in exporting its authoritarian surveillance tech to other like-minded regimes.

Pray: for global security strategies to be developed that will successfully block all unwanted digital control. (Proverbs 28:3)

More: [www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2021/october/the-perfect-police-state-chinas-digital-dictatorship-goes-global](http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2021/october/the-perfect-police-state-chinas-digital-dictatorship-goes-global)

### Iran: nuclear deal talks

On 29 November, senior diplomats from Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia met Iranian officials in Vienna to discuss bringing Tehran back into compliance with the 2015 deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which eased sanctions on Iran in return for curbs on its nuclear programme. The talks could pave the way for the US to rejoin the accord. Israel is making efforts to stop a return to the previous agreement and prevent implementing an interim agreement, a plan the US is considering as a stop-gap if a full agreement [cannot be reached](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-said-to-urge-nuclear-talks-be-conditioned-on-iran-halting-uranium-enrichment/) (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-said-to-urge-nuclear-talks-be-conditioned-on-iran-halting-uranium-enrichment/>). The nuclear talks resumed with upbeat comments despite Tehran's negotiating team demanding that all US and EU sanctions imposed since 2017, including those unrelated to its nuclear programme, be removed.

Pray: for negotiators to engage constructively. (Job 28:12)

More: [edition.cnn.com/2021/11/30/europe/iran-vienna-talks-restart-intl/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/30/europe/iran-vienna-talks-restart-intl/index.html)

### Global: violence against hospitals, patients, healthcare workers

A disturbing but common feature of modern warfare is incidents of violence against hospitals, patients and healthcare workers. A recent report cites 806 incidents of violence against or obstruction of healthcare in 43 countries and territories in ongoing wars and violent conflicts in 2020, ranging from the bombing of hospitals in Yemen to the abduction of doctors in Nigeria. At least 185 health workers were killed and 117 kidnapped. Attacks continue with impunity, as several states fail to act on global commitments and frameworks intended to safeguard medical professionals saving lives. The nature of conflict now includes more non-state armed groups, but they all attack healthcare. Pray for health workers alone, with very little support, suffering trauma from violence.

Pray: for more warring nations to provide safe zones and protection avenues to protect health carers and safe access to and from healthcare providers. (Psalm 5:11)

More: [www.thenewhumanitarian.org/](https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/)

### Paraguay: ten-year-olds forced to carry pregnancies to term

Amnesty International, in a new report called They Are Girls Not Mothers, found draconian abortion laws and systemic failure to tackle child sexual violence have forced girls as young as ten years old to carry out full-term pregnancies. The report focuses on sexual violence against children - specifically girls under the age of 14 - who become pregnant and are forced to carry the pregnancy to term. It also analyses the failures of the system in Paraguay to address cases of sexual violence against children and teenagers. Amnesty International said Paraguay is turning its back on girls and teenagers facing unimaginable abuses. Although on paper there is a legal framework to support survivors of sexual violence, in practice they are at the mercy of a chaotic system that does not listen to them or prioritise their well-being. Forcing someone to continue with a pregnancy, particularly when it is the result of rape, can be considered torture.

Pray: for laws preventing sexual abuse and pledges of ample care for child survivors, plus thorough sex education so that children have the necessary skills to speak out if they are threatened. (Matthew 19:14)

More: [www.ekklesia.co.uk/2021/12/02/girls-as-young-as-ten-forced-to-carry-out-pregnancies-in-paraguay/](https://www.ekklesia.co.uk/2021/12/02/girls-as-young-as-ten-forced-to-carry-out-pregnancies-in-paraguay/)

### World: Omicron and politics

The Omicron variant has spread globally. Leaders hoping lockdowns and travel bans had ended now face disruptions that could affect their economies and popularity. Italy's PM Mario Draghi has made economic recovery a cornerstone of his leadership, but he is under fire for enforcing some of the strictest vaccine mandates in Europe. His honeymoon period could be derailed if further lockdowns or disruptions send the economy into a nose-dive. Inflation and supply-chain chaos are headaches for America. Uncertainty over Omicron threatens to make things worse after a wobbly economy and a shambolic departure of troops from Afghanistan. Biden's handling of the pandemic previously inspired voter confidence but has now caused his popularity to drop. It is unlikely that he will take risks that could harm the US economy. China's president is pursuing an increasingly elusive zero Covid strategy. If Omicron is more transmissible than previous variants, China's leadership could be questioned domestically.

Pray: for leaders of nations to make wise decisions, putting health and safety at the top of their agendas ahead of popularity or premiership. (Proverbs 9:10)

More: [uk.news.yahoo.com/biden-faces-political-threat-omicron-234823584.html](https://uk.news.yahoo.com/biden-faces-political-threat-omicron-234823584.html)

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