

# Prayer Alert

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**Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him - a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight will be in the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:1-5)**

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

Pray for the presidential elections in Georgia (14 December): [Insight Guide](#).

## Invitation - to serve with the PA team!

How would you like to join our Prayer Alert team? We are a group of volunteers based in different parts of England. If you appreciate what we do and are confident with browsing the internet, discovering relevant articles and basic editing, we would love to hear from you! Please hit 'reply', introduce yourself, and we will be in touch.

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

May God bless and encourage you this year,

David Fletcher and the Prayer Alert team.

## Praise Reports

[He wants to 'saturate' America with Jesus Films](#)

[Hawaii ordered to allow Good News clubs at every school](#)

## British Isles

[Sara Sharif murder: questions must be answered - PM](#)

[British businesses stop shipping to Northern Ireland](#)

[Rayner insists pledge to build 1.5m homes 'can happen'](#)

['Tidal wave' of flu hits NHS as hospital cases soar](#)

[Energy bills shake-up announced](#)

[Bishop calls for healthier living with smartphones](#)

## Europe

[Ukraine: Russia could launch hypersonic missile 'within days'](#)

[France: author guilty of downplaying Rwandan genocide](#)

## Worldwide

[Syria: the role other nations played in Assad's overthrow](#)

[Syria: Israel launches airstrikes on military targets](#)

[Nepal: activists trying to halt mass slaughter of animals](#)

[Canada: nearly 5% of all deaths are medically assisted](#)

[Uganda: mental health crisis at refugee camps](#)

[Brazil: Lula's health scare causes problems for the country's left wing](#)

## Praise Reports

### [He wants to 'saturate' America with Jesus Films](#)

Phil Cohn, a passionate evangelist and president of Saturate USA, leads an ambitious project to distribute the Jesus Film and salvation pamphlets to every home in America by 2027. This initiative equips local churches with free resources, enabling members to engage neighbourhoods through door-to-door outreach or door-handle delivery. With an aim to reach 120 million households, Saturate USA has already covered 38.4 million homes across all 50 states. Phil has felt compelled to share the gospel globally since the age of 19. His vision expanded to using the Jesus Film, which has sparked revival worldwide, including starting over a million churches. From Muslim families in America to residents under Taliban rule, countless lives have been transformed. Despite challenges, Phil continues to trust God for miracles, passionately focused on saturating America with the message of Christ. His vision reflects his unwavering belief in God's power to save.

Praise: God for Phil Cohn's unwavering dedication. Pray for Saturate USA's efforts to reach every home with the Jesus Film. (Matthew 28:19)

More: [www.godreports.com/2024/12/he-wants-to-saturate-america-with-jesus-films/](http://www.godreports.com/2024/12/he-wants-to-saturate-america-with-jesus-films/)

### [Hawaii ordered to allow Good News clubs at every school](#)

Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) has won a significant legal victory, securing a permanent statewide injunction allowing Good News clubs to operate in all public school districts across Hawaii. These weekly gatherings teach children aged 5-12 about the Bible, memory verses, and praise songs, while also fostering fellowship and fun. Represented by Liberty Counsel, CEF filed a lawsuit against Hawaii education officials after several school districts blocked the clubs from using public school facilities, while permitting secular groups access. The courts ruled that such actions violated the first and 14th amendments of the US constitution, ensuring religious organizations have equal access to public spaces. Fred Pry of CEF welcomed the ruling as a triumph for religious freedom and free speech. Liberty Counsel continues to defend Christian clubs in other states, with plans to challenge similar restrictions in California. This victory highlights the enduring importance of protecting constitutional rights for faith-based organizations in public settings.

Praise: God for protecting religious freedom and the Gospel opportunity that this opens up. Pray for continued victories for Christian clubs nationwide. (Psalm 33:12)

More: [www.faithwire.com/2024/12/05/court-orders-hawaii-to-allow-good-news-clubs-at-every-public-school/](http://www.faithwire.com/2024/12/05/court-orders-hawaii-to-allow-good-news-clubs-at-every-public-school/)

## British Isles

### Sara Sharif murder: questions must be answered - PM

The murder of 10-year-old Sara Sharif has ignited calls for stronger safeguards for children, particularly those being home-schooled. Sara's father and stepmother, convicted of her murder, had subjected her to two years of horrific abuse, prompting scrutiny of existing child protection measures. The government plans to introduce a Children's Wellbeing Bill, proposing safeguards like mandatory local authority consent for home-schooling children under protection plans, a child identifier system, and multi-agency safeguarding teams. Surrey County Council, which had been alerted to Sara's welfare concerns before her death, is launching an independent review of its actions. Critics argue that current laws allowing at-risk children to be removed from school are inadequate. Keir Starmer emphasised the need for answers and better safeguards to prevent such tragedies. Proposals also include establishing a register for home-educated children and improving data-sharing between services to identify risks more effectively.

Pray: for improved child protection systems and for justice, healing, and safety for vulnerable children. (Psalm 82:3)

More: [www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgn8lp30ydo](http://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgn8lp30ydo)

### British businesses stop shipping to Northern Ireland

Small British businesses are halting shipments to Northern Ireland and the EU due to new EU customs rules and product safety regulations. These regulations require complex compliance steps, including detailed paperwork, batch numbering, and the designation of an EU or Northern Ireland-based 'authorised representative'. Many small firms, lacking resources to navigate these requirements, have chosen to cease trade rather than risk penalties. Entrepreneurs are expressing frustration over the lack of timely government communication and support. Business owners learned about the changes through social media rather than official channels, exacerbating the challenge during the busy Christmas season. While the Government claims to prioritise small businesses, the lack of tailored guidance leaves many struggling. Small businesses fear these changes favour larger corporations, potentially widening economic disparities.

Pray: for fair trade solutions that support small businesses. Pray for clarity amid changing regulations. (Psalm 72:4)

More: [news.sky.com/story/british-businesses-stop-shipping-to-northern-ireland-due-to-updated-rules-13271068](https://news.sky.com/story/british-businesses-stop-shipping-to-northern-ireland-due-to-updated-rules-13271068)

### Rayner insists pledge to build 1.5m homes 'can happen'

Deputy prime minister Angela Rayner has affirmed the Government's ambition to build 1.5 million homes over five years, a scale unseen since World War 2. This requires constructing 370,000 homes annually, a significant increase from the 220,000 built last year. Despite this bold target, Rayner refrains from committing to a specific number of social housing units, emphasising site-dependent affordability and viability. The plan prioritises 'brownfield first', encouraging redevelopment of previously used land. Councils must outline housing targets within twelve weeks, reassess green belt boundaries, and identify suitable 'grey belt' areas. Developers using green belt land must adhere to strict 'golden rules,' ensuring infrastructure like nurseries, healthcare facilities, and transport alongside affordable housing. With 1.3 million households on social housing waiting lists and record homelessness, the housing crisis is critical. To accelerate progress, the government has allocated £100 million and 300 new planning officers to streamline decision-making. The plan aims to balance local input, housing demand, and economic growth while addressing infrastructure needs.

Pray: for sustainable housing solutions that meet needs, protect communities and the environment, and ensure care for the vulnerable. (Psalm 127:1)

More: [www.itv.com/news/2024-12-12/starmer-promises-to-override-home-planning-blockers-with-changes-to-rules](http://www.itv.com/news/2024-12-12/starmer-promises-to-override-home-planning-blockers-with-changes-to-rules)

### 'Tidal wave' of flu hits NHS as hospital cases soar

The NHS is grappling with a 'tidal wave' of flu cases, with hospital admissions rising by 70% in a week, contributing to severe pressure on emergency services. In one week, hospitals in England averaged 1,861 flu patients daily, including 66 in critical care - up from 1,099 and 39 in the previous week. Combined with increasing cases of Covid, RSV, and norovirus, this 'quad-demic' is straining A&E departments and ambulance services. Sir Stephen Powis, NHS England's national medical director, urged eligible individuals to get vaccinated to prevent severe illness and alleviate pressure on the healthcare system. Of the 30 million eligible for NHS flu jabs, so far only half have come forward. With 95% of hospital beds occupied and lengthy waits for emergency care, NHS leaders are prioritising treating the sickest patients over meeting waiting time targets. This winter is expected to be one of the most challenging yet for the NHS, despite efforts to manage rising demand. See <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birmingham-doctors-issue-virus-warning-30558868>

Pray: for strength and protection for NHS staff, swift care for patients, and positive community responses to health guidance. (Psalm 41:3)

More: [www.thetimes.com/uk/healthcare/article/flu-cases-rise-nhs-hospital-vxsv6mrl7](http://www.thetimes.com/uk/healthcare/article/flu-cases-rise-nhs-hospital-vxsv6mrl7)

### Energy bills shake-up announced

Ofgem has announced plans to offer 'no standing charge' energy tariffs and provide debt relief for struggling households. The standing charge, a fixed daily fee averaging 92p, has risen significantly in recent years and disproportionately impacts low-energy users and prepayment meter customers. The new tariffs will eliminate these charges, though higher unit rates for gas and electricity may offset savings for higher energy users. Additionally, Ofgem is proposing debt relief measures, including partial or full debt write-offs and debt-matching schemes, where suppliers match customers' repayments to reduce arrears. With energy debt exceeding £3.8 billion and average arrears rising 37% in the past year, these changes aim to alleviate financial strain on vulnerable households. Funding for the initiatives will be spread across network charges and energy suppliers, with plans to implement zero-standing charge tariffs by next winter. Ofgem also encourages households to register for support programs like the Priority Services Register and contact suppliers early if facing energy debt.

Pray: for equitable solutions to energy challenges, relief for struggling households, and wisdom for decision-makers. (Galatians 6:2)

More: [apple.news/AijewnpjQ--BFEBJ4Y59iw](https://apple.news/AijewnpjQ--BFEBJ4Y59iw)

## Bishop calls for healthier living with smartphones

Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford, has urged smartphone-free schools to promote healthier lifestyles for young people. Speaking in the House of Lords, he highlighted efforts by his diocese, which oversees 285 church schools, to educate students on the risks associated with smartphone use. He noted that in a school in his diocese, banning smartphones led to improved behavior, reduced bullying, increased concentration, and better academic performance. He argued that these changes foster healthier communities and higher levels of learning. His comments follow similar initiatives, including a top CofE school adopting 'brick phone only' policies to encourage a balanced relationship with technology. While there is broad consensus on the benefits of smartphone-free schools, Dr Croft acknowledged the need for further discussions on implementing such measures across the board. The debate reflects growing concerns about the impact of smart devices on young people's well-being and development.

Pray: for wisdom in addressing smartphone challenges and for healthier habits that nurture young minds and communities. (Romans 12:2)

More: [premierchristian.news/en/news/article/bishop-of-oxford-calls-for-healthier-living-with-smartphones](https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/bishop-of-oxford-calls-for-healthier-living-with-smartphones)

## Europe

### Ukraine: Russia could launch hypersonic missile 'within days'

US intelligence suggests Russia may launch its experimental Oreshnik hypersonic missile against Ukraine within days. First used in an attack on Dnipro in November, the missile displayed astonishing speed and precision, striking a military facility with devastating fireballs. Despite its limited number and smaller warhead compared to other missiles, its deployment is seen as an intimidation tactic rather than a battlefield game-changer. Vladimir Putin boasted about its capabilities on national television, warning NATO allies that supporting Ukraine with longer-range weapons could provoke similar strikes on their territories. This statement followed Putin's signing of a revised nuclear doctrine lowering the threshold for nuclear weapon use, allowing for retaliation even against conventional attacks supported by nuclear powers. Meanwhile, tensions rise as the USA loosens restrictions on Ukraine's use of long-range weapons to counter Russian aggression.

Pray: for restraint in the war, and for leaders to pursue peace over escalation. (Psalm 34:14)

More: [www.express.co.uk/news/world/1987480/russia-ukraine-war-hypersonic-missile-days](https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1987480/russia-ukraine-war-hypersonic-missile-days)

### France: author guilty of downplaying Rwandan genocide

French-Cameroonian author Charles Onana has been found guilty of downplaying the Rwandan genocide, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 800,000 people in 1994. He was fined €8,400, and his publisher was fined €5,000. The two must also pay €11,000 in compensation to human rights organisations which filed the lawsuit. A Paris court ruled that Onana's book, published in 2019, trivialised and contested the genocide in an 'outrageous manner', violating France's laws against genocide denial and incitement to hatred. The book suggested that the narrative of a planned genocide by the Hutu government was a 'scam', a claim criticised for distorting historical facts. Rwanda's foreign minister has welcomed the court's decision as a victory. This is the first time in Europe that those denying the genocide have been punished under French law.

Pray: for healing for the survivors and victims of genocide, and for this decision to deter others who want to try to rewrite history. (Psalm 89:14)

More: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj30nm7pp67o](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj30nm7pp67o)

## Worldwide

### Syria: the role other nations played in Assad's overthrow

On 8 December, Syrian rebels overthrew Bashar al-Assad, ending his 24-year rule and his family's half-century grip on power. Their victory caps a devastating 13-year civil war which killed over 500,000 people, displaced millions, and involved major global powers. Turkey, a key player, supported rebel groups, primarily to counter Kurdish militias. Turkey, which would also like to repatriate three million Syrian refugees, has played a role in brokering ceasefires and aiding the rebels' recent offensive. Russia, Assad's staunch ally, provided air support and troops starting in 2015, securing key military bases in Syria. However, its focus on the Ukraine war weakened its ability to sustain Assad's regime, leading to his downfall. Assad has reportedly fled to Moscow. The USA has backed moderate rebels and Kurdish-led forces against Assad and ISIS, maintaining about 900 troops in the northeast. Iran and Hezbollah, longtime Assad allies, have also seen their influence wane due to internal and external conflicts. Breaking news: the rebels have announced that the Syrian parliament and constitution will be suspended for three months (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/new-syria-govt-to-suspend-constitution-and-parliament-for-three-months-after-assads-ouster/articleshow/116255721.cms>).

Pray: for healing and reconciliation in Syria as it seeks a peaceful future. (Psalm 147:3)

More: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd75e8gdy9jo](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd75e8gdy9jo)

### Syria: Israel launches airstrikes on military targets

Israel has launched a series of airstrikes and naval operations in Syria, targeting military assets and creating a buffer zone near the Golan Heights. Defence minister Israel Katz stated the actions aim to establish a 'sterile defence zone' to prevent terrorist activities. Israeli strikes reportedly destroyed Syria's naval fleet, military warehouses, air-defense facilities, and weaponry near Damascus. There were probably as many as 250 strikes, with video evidence of naval wreckage in Latakia. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirmed significant damage to Syria's military infrastructure. Israel claims its operations are temporary and limited to precluding advanced weaponry from extremist groups. However, several nations have condemned the strikes as violations of international law. The UN criticised the buffer zone seizure as a breach of the 1974 disengagement agreement, despite Israel's assurances of its defensive intent.

Pray: that Israel's actions will not lead to wider conflict in the region. Continue to pray for peace in the Middle East and safety for all innocent lives. (John 14:27)

More: [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-syria-strike-damascus-warship-b2661901.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-syria-strike-damascus-warship-b2661901.html)

### **Nepal: activists trying to halt mass slaughter of animals**

Animal rights activists are urging the Nepali government to halt the mass slaughter of animals during the Gadhimai festival, a tradition held every five years in a village near the Nepal-India border. Despite a 2016 supreme court order to phase out animal sacrifices, thousands of buffaloes, goats, and pigeons were reportedly killed this year. Participants believe that sacrificing animals pleases the goddess Gadhimai, bringing them good fortune and fulfilling wishes. Efforts by organisations like the Humane Society have led to a reduction in the number of animals sacrificed, but activists argue that more needs to be done. Local officials claim that measures are being taken to limit the practice, and some villagers have shown openness to alternatives, such as monetary donations instead of animal offerings. However, many community members resist change, viewing the sacrifices as an integral part of their 200-year-old cultural tradition. Activists continue to work on the ground, focusing on education and awareness to shift attitudes towards ending the practice.

Pray: Pray for the end of animal cruelty and respect for God's creation. (Proverbs 12:10)

More: [edition.cnn.com/2024/12/09/asia/nepal-animal-slaughter-festival-hnk-intl/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/09/asia/nepal-animal-slaughter-festival-hnk-intl/index.html)

### **Canada: nearly 5% of all deaths are medically assisted**

In Canada, the rate of medical assistance in dying, aka euthanasia, has increased for the fifth consecutive year, though at a slower pace. In 2023, about 15,300 people underwent assisted dying - 4.7% of all deaths in the country. This marks a 16% increase from the previous year, a sharp decline compared to the 31% annual rise in earlier years. The government is exploring expanding euthanasia to include those with mental illnesses, but that decision has been delayed because the provinces are concerned about whether the system could cope with such an expansion. Also, concerns about potential gaps in safeguards have grown, with some instances of individuals seeking euthanasia for non-terminal conditions, such as chronic disabilities or housing issues. These controversial cases have sparked ongoing debates about the program's ethics and future expansion.

Pray: for discernment and compassion in addressing the ethical complexities of assisted dying, and for other countries considering such legislation to note Canada's statistics. (Psalm 34:18)

More: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0j1z14p57po](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0j1z14p57po)

### **Uganda: mental health crisis at refugee camps**

The mental health crisis at Kiryandongo refugee camp is escalating, with suicides and suicide attempts surging. Between January and October 2024, 41 suicides and over 130 attempts were recorded, highlighting the profound psychological distress faced by refugees. Many are haunted by memories of past trauma, such as bombings. These ongoing fears disrupt daily life and contribute to widespread mental health struggles. Despite the existence of psychosocial support programs, resources at the camp are insufficient to meet the overwhelming demand. With over 1.7 million refugees in Uganda, local healthcare services are under immense pressure, but specialised care is often inaccessible due to high costs. The UNHCR is calling on governments, the private sector, and international donors to increase funding for mental health programs to address this urgent need.

Pray: for God's peace and healing for those suffering from trauma and despair. (Psalm 82:3)

More: [www.africanews.com/2024/12/10/uganda-unhcr-raises-alarm-over-suicide-rates-among-refugees/](https://www.africanews.com/2024/12/10/uganda-unhcr-raises-alarm-over-suicide-rates-among-refugees/)

### **Brazil: Lula's health scare causes problems for the country's left wing**

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's recent health scare has raised questions about his political future and Brazil's left-wing leadership. At 79, Lula has undergone emergency surgery in São Paulo after a fall at home led to a cranial hemorrhage. His health issues, coupled with his central role in negotiating key policies, have cast uncertainty over the future of his minority government, which is grappling with essential reforms in spending cuts and tax policies. There are also concerns over his ability to run for reelection in 2026, with the Workers Party lacking a clear successor. He has said that he would like to see a political 'renovation' in the next election, but if his candidacy is required to defeat the far right, then 'obviously I'll be ready to run'. Analysts believe the party is unprepared for a future without his leadership; the failure to develop new leaders has made it challenging for it to gain traction in recent elections.

Pray: for President Lula's health, guidance for Brazil's leadership, and the future of the nation. (Proverbs 16:9)

More: [www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazils-left-caught-long-shadow-ailing-patriarch-lula-2024-12-10/](https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazils-left-caught-long-shadow-ailing-patriarch-lula-2024-12-10/)

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