



# PRAYER ALERT...



An initiative of the Prayer Forum of the British Isles & Ireland  
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## BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

### ■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 14th December - Gift of hope - Luke 2:8-20; Philippians 2:12-16**

In 2006, 43% of the population planned to attend a church event around Christmas (that is about 27 million people). **Give thanks:** for all those who will be explaining the Christmas story at services and outreach events. **Pray:** for many people to discover Jesus this Christmas; for God to raise up and equip more people to be able to communicate the good news; for any Christmas outreach events taking place in my community; for opportunities to share with friends/work colleagues the meaning of the season. **Consider:** offering to pray for a local outreach event/service in my area.

**More:** <http://www.worldprayer.org.uk/pagesys.cfm?plD=123>

### ■ **Trevor Phillips calls for nativity plays in all primary schools**

Trevor Phillips, Commission for Equalities and Human Rights Chairman, has said all primary schools should hold a nativity play regardless of students' religion. His comments follow a Sunday Telegraph poll suggesting only one in five primary schools would hold a nativity play this Christmas. Phillips told the BBC that Christmas was a 'very important fundamental, national celebration' adding: 'it is fine for Christ to be star of the show.' Representatives of other faith groups have made clear that a Christian Christmas doesn't offend them. 'British Hindus celebrate Christmas too,' said Anil Bhanot, general secretary of the UK Hindu Council. Sikh spokesman Indarjit Singh said: 'As ever, my family and I will send out Christmas cards to our Christian friends and others.' British Muslim leaders, voiced similar sentiments, not long after publicly condemning Sudan for jailing British teacher Gillian Gibbons who let her pupils name a teddy bear Mohammad. Muslim Council of Britain spokesman Shayk Ibrahim Mogra asked: 'Why can't we have more nativity scenes in Britain?'

**Pray:** for a paradigm shift in our national beliefs and practice concerning the story of Christ's birth and its meaning. (Jn.1:1-2 & 12-14)

**More:** <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/trevor.phillips.calls.for.nativity.plays.in.all.primary.schools/15450.htm>

### ■ **Christianity in Ireland 'disappearing from general knowledge'**

Religious knowledge levels throughout Ireland are decreasing significantly, with Northern Ireland even lower than the Republic according to a new poll. It's the first ever conducted on the subject in Northern Ireland, and follows up one conducted in the Republic on behalf of The Iona Institute and the Evangelical Alliance Ireland (EAI) which was released in April. Young people demonstrate especially low levels of basic religious knowledge and, contrary to popular belief, Northern Ireland is less religious than the South. Only 42% of respondents in the North knew there were four Gospels. 39% of Catholics knew the first of the 10 Commandments, compared to 26% of Protestants. Mr Stephen Cave of Evangelical Alliance (Northern Ireland), said: 'The results throw serious doubt on the claim that we're a 'Christian country' and the drop

in knowledge, almost halved within a generation, indicates that the Christian faith is becoming less meaningful to those under 25 years.' The findings present a serious challenge to the church and those involved in religious education.

**Pray:** for repentance and radical change throughout the whole Church in Ireland that its spiritual heritage and love for Christ will be revived. (Hos.4:6)

**More:** <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6451>

#### ■ Ex-archbishop makes hostage plea

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey has appealed for five British hostages in Iraq to be released. The kidnappers - a militia group called Islamic Shia Resistance - set a December 14th deadline for the UK to start pulling out troops from Iraq before beginning to execute their captives. In a personal message Lord Carey urged the men's safe return and then appealed on behalf of their families. Gunmen seized the men from Baghdad's finance ministry on 29 May. Lord Carey said: 'I would like to add my own personal appeal for the safe return home of these men at this holy time of Eid and Christmas, an important and peaceful time for Muslims and Christians alike,' adding: 'We remain serious and committed to exploring all options open to us.' The hostages' families chose Lord Carey to read the message as he isn't a government figure and has some influence in Middle Eastern Muslim circles. The families are worried that indirect contacts with the kidnappers have so far failed.

**Pray:** for the safety and speedy release of the hostages and for the comfort and peace of mind of their families. (Is.61:1-3)

**More:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7141033.stm>

#### ■ Help centre in race against time

Bronson Wright 17 teetered on the edge of criminality until he found the help centre of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) in Peckham, in 2006. Bronson said: 'This is different from a normal youth centre like the Damilola Taylor centre where people just want to fight.' Since joining it as an 'assistant' Bronson has started college hoping to become a physiotherapist or PE teacher. The UCKG began in a small park shelter in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro in 1977 and has since expanded to 12 million members worldwide. The Peckham centre offers counselling, careers guidance, training programmes and mentoring. But the lease on its Rye Lane building has almost expired. To continue their work, congregants need to raise another £300,000 to purchase the site they've called home since 1997. The centre has attracted much corporate support for its fundraising bid. Even legendary footballer Pele donated a signed football t-shirt that raised more than £5,000 in a raffle and 50 church members recently completed a sponsored climb of Ben Nevis.

**Pray:** thanking God for the many lives that have been changed through this ministry and intercede for an urgent breakthrough in purchasing the building. (2Ch.6:36-40)

**More:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7092815.stm>

#### ■ Police call for Jacqui Smith to resign

An emergency meeting of the Police Federation, representing 140,000 officers in England and Wales, passed a vote of no confidence in Home Secretary Jacqui Smith over her refusal to fulfil a promise to backdate a pay rise. Officers will now be balloted in the New Year on whether they should lobby for a change in the law to give them the right to strike. Jan Berry, the federation chairman, said: 'I don't remember such a call by the Police Federation being made previously.' She said it was 'alien' for police officers to consider striking but they felt 'pushed into a corner'. Labour backbenchers were among signatories to a Commons motion that condemned the pay deal as 'petty'. The dispute is over a 2.5 per cent pay rise that has not been backdated to September. Miss Smith's move effectively reduced the value of the award this year to 1.9 per cent - taking it within the Government's two per cent pay target for the public sector.

**Pray:** for a change of heart on both sides and for justice to be seen to be done in the New Year. (Lk.10:7b)

**More:** <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml;jsessionid=ZYDSCOX5TNUHBQFIQMGCFF4AVCBQUIV0?xml=/news/2007/12/13/npolice113.xml>

## EUROPE

#### ■ What next for Kosovo?

The talks about the final status of Kosovo, which have dragged on for months, are officially over. What happens next seems to be anybody's guess, says the Balkans commentator Micha Glenny, writing in Britain's New Statesman. Kosovo Albanians are planning to declare independence soon and Serbia is refusing to listen to any argument containing the word 'independence', so can we expect another war in the province? Officially at least, both the Kosovo Albanian and Serbian sides have offered guarantees that they're not planning a return to war in the next few months. But the reality on the ground may be different. Britain's Financial Times says that Kosovo officials should get the backing of the EU before they declare independence. But even if they do, Serbs in northern Kosovo and Bosnian Serbs won't want to sit still, while Russia might want to 'stir up trouble', according to the FT. Nobody wants Kosovo independent, of course. But it's clear Serbia can't do much about it, (See Prayer Alert 4807 & 4707)

**Pray:** for the various factions that they will learn to get on with each other and live in peace. (Ps.133)

**More:** [http://www.alertnet.org/db/an\\_art/1265/2007/11/12-125401-1.htm](http://www.alertnet.org/db/an_art/1265/2007/11/12-125401-1.htm)

#### ■ Russia's new front in UK spat

You may have thought that relations between Britain and Russia could not get any worse. 'I thought relations between Britain and Russia could not get any worse. I was wrong', says BBC's Rupert Wingfield-Hayes. 'Russia has decided to raise the stakes again and the victim is the poor old British Council. You may have never heard of the British Council. Even if you have, you may have no idea what it does. Plenty of people do not. Even the British Ambassador to Moscow seemed a bit

confused as to whether the Russians were ordering the closure of the British Council or the British Consul. What it does elsewhere, I am not sure, but in Russia, the British Council teaches a lot of people English and offers rather fewer scholarships to study in Britain. Closing down its offices outside Moscow sounds rather self-defeating, but then the Russian government has repeatedly shown itself willing to do things that hurt Russia in order to make a political point'.

**Pray:** for our relationship with Russia that the spirit of 'entente cordiale' would return. (Jer.29:7)

**More:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7141708.stm>

## WORLDWIDE

### ■ **SPECIAL FEATURE - Iraq City Profile - Diwaniya**

Diwaniya is in a fertile region of Iraq near to the River Euphrates, between Baghdad and Basra. Early civilisations can be traced back to 3500BC in the region. This city of over 400,000 now not only hosts the market for the region's agriculture, it is the scene of fierce rivalry between rival Shi'ite factions seeking control of the city's affairs – legal and otherwise. Having suffered violence throughout history, ancient and modern, does Diwaniya have to put up with another violent chapter, or can God bring change to this city through our compassion and prayer? Please download this week's city profile and pray for Diwaniya.

**Pray:** that Diwaniya becomes an 'open house' to the peace and glory of God and not to further jealousy and violence. (Pr.16:7)

**More:** [www.iraqprayer.org/city%20profiles.htm](http://www.iraqprayer.org/city%20profiles.htm)

### ■ **Urgent call to pray for South Africa**

Prayer-Alert office has received the following request from South Africa, 'Thoughts and words of fear, confusion, anger and condemnation are currently at the rampart in the hearts and minds of both believers and unbelievers concerning the election of the next presidential candidate for the ANC. It is most likely that the same person will also become the next president of South Africa.' During the past months corruption, crime, violence and more are threatening to consume SA. 'Will you not consider over the next days to fast and pray about this issue in our country.' December 16-20 is the date of the party congress.

**Pray:** that the foundations of righteousness, justice, truth and faithfulness will be established in the hearts and minds of those hoping for leadership in S.A. (Ps.89:14;97:2).

**More:** <http://www.nationalpost.com/news/world/story.html?id=d21fd1f6-69ed-420e-9db4-ae0d6a4ffb2a&k=89934>

### ■ **Lebanon blast kills army general**

Brigadier General Francois al-Hajj, Lebanon's Army Chief of Operations, was killed in an explosion in a Christian suburb east of Beirut. The criminal had targeted his car with a bomb as he drove opposite Baabda municipality. This is a significant unfolding of events because the army was the only military institution that is seen as neutral, and not taking sides in the political crisis in Lebanon. The explosion came as Lebanon is embroiled in its worst political crisis since the end of the 1975-90 civil war and amid heightened tensions between pro-government and opposition groups. The country has been without a president since Nov. 23. The slain officer was a leading candidate to take over as army commander if and when the current head, General Michel Suleiman, was elected president. Presidential elections were again postponed until Dec. 17th because the majority and minority faction leaders are unable to reach a consensus.

**Pray:** that God will raise up a righteous leader at this time of crisis and prevent a civil war in the Lebanon. (Prov.21:1&Jas.2:5)

**More:** <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/4484D3D5-0076-4C5D-AEA0-DF317BB784CF.htm>

### ■ **Christian lawyers in Vietnam still not released**

Two Christian lawyers from Hanoi have had their sentences cut on appeal but failed to win a reprieve. (see Prayer-Alert issues 1607 and 1807) Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan appeared in court to appeal a conviction for 'disseminating slanderous and libellous information' against the state. Their original sentences, of five and four years respectively, handed down in May were reduced by one year. In a statement to the court, Dai's wife Vu Minh Khanh argued that her husband had become the victim of a government smear campaign. Dai, a church elder, came to prominence when he defended Mennonite pastor Nguyen Hong Quang from Ho Chi Minh City. Dai and Le, who work in the same office have both been involved in advocating for religious liberty. In March Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly was jailed for eight years for 'spreading propaganda' criticising the government. Release International sources report that he is being held in solitary confinement and has been denied a Bible and communion wine.

**Pray:** for the men and their families as they come to terms with dashed hopes – but continue to pray for their freedom and the release of Thaddeus in solitary confinement. (Is.61:1-3)

**More:** <http://www.releaseinternational.org/pages/posts/vietnam-two-christian-lawyers-have-sentences-reduced314.php>

### ■ **Police vow 'big fish' drug busts in Bahrain**

More high-profile drug busts are on the way following the bumper seizure of 676kg of hashish, Bahrain's deputy police chief pledged. Authorities are now going after the 'big fish' responsible for smuggling narcotics into the country. Police who previously targeted drug dealers were now on the trail of importers - many of whom are thought to be fishermen. Earlier they were targeting the sellers on the streets, but now they are looking for the big fish. 99 per cent of the drugs that make their way into Bahrain arrive by sea, and some of the thousands of fishing boats that operate in Bahraini waters are engaged in this business.

**Pray:** that this entry point into the Gulf States will be closed. (Ps.29:3)

**More:** <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/Story.asp?Article=202686&Sn=BNEW&IssueID=30267>

#### ■ **More House Church Pastors detained in China**

China Aid Association reports that 270 House Church Pastors have been detained for what Chinese officials are calling an 'illegal religious gathering'. (This follows last week's PA report of forty Chinese house church leaders detained in Henan.) On December 7 at 1:30pm, House Church pastors in Hedeng District, Linyi City, were gathered for a Bible Study when their meeting was disrupted by police officials. According to Pastor Li, an eyewitness, 40-50 policemen from 12 different towns were involved in the massive detention. The pastors were handcuffed two-by-two and taken to the local police station for questioning. 150 pastors remain in custody. The others have been released on a 300 Yuan (\$40 USD) interrogation fee. China Aid says: 'The humiliation these pastors received by being led away in handcuffs as common criminals, for attending a Bible study is an unjustifiable act of religious persecution. In addition, the large scale and high profile of the detentions shows the apathy of Chinese officials in moving towards a policy for toleration of religious freedom. China Aid will continue to monitor the situation.

**Pray:** for the Christian communion in China to stand firm in the face of the present persecution and to have boldness as they declare God's word and His praises. (Ps.22:22)

**More:** <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2007/s07120069.htm>

#### ■ **UK pastor killed in Philippines**

Last week we reported Pastor David Brash was missing, assumed kidnapped. This week's update reveals he was killed by hitmen hired by his Filipino wife.

**More:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7138074.stm>

## PRAISE REPORTS

#### ■ **Computer says no to a 'miracle'**

A woman who claims she was healed by prayer had to battle the benefits system to stop her disability payments. Officials said the computer did not 'have a button for miracles'. June Clarke from Plymouth, Devon, slipped on a wet canteen floor at work in January 2000 and badly damaged her hip, pelvis and lower spine. Last year she says she received healing at a Christian conference and within hours she was able to fold away her wheelchair and stop taking painkillers. When Mrs Clarke realised she was completely healed she contacted the government Industrial Injury Department to put a stop to the benefits she had been receiving, but the payments continued. Mr and Mrs Clarke sent letters and made phone calls, but officials told them the system was unable to recognise an apparently miraculous recovery.

**Praise:** God for this testimony of His wonderful power. (Ac.4:9-10)

**More:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/devon/7137895.stm>

#### ■ **Exeter Christian Union wins right to appoint Christian leaders**

Exeter University's Christian Union (CU) has won a crucial vote in its highly-publicised human rights battle with the campus Students' Guild and University authorities. The Student body voted 122 to 47 that the relationship between the CU and Student Guild should reflect proposed new guidelines on religious societies as agreed between the National Union of Students and UCCF. The vote means that it is now acceptable for the CU to ask officers and members to sign up to the aims and belief of the society, whilst all meetings and events are open to all students at Exeter University. The CU also has permission once again to use and advertise CU events on Guild/campus premises, and, more importantly, the right to restrict membership of the CU and its leadership to those able to sign up a statement of faith. Students of all faiths and none can attend meetings. (See Prayer Alert 4506 & 0107)

**Praise:** God for this answer to our prayers. (Lk.18:1)

**More:** <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/exeter.christian.union.wins.right.to.appoint.christian.leaders/15433.htm>

#### ■ **SAT-7 KIDS channel launched on 10 December**

After more than a year and a half of preparation Arabic speaking children all over the Middle East and North Africa will have had their prayers answered. A new Christian channel just for them is now on the air. The new channel will enable children living across the five time zones in the region to tune in and watch quality Arabic Christian programming, enabling many more viewers to watch. During December SAT-7 KIDS will broadcast many Christmas themed cartoons as well as The JESUS Film for Children. There will be other such programmes including one in which children are interviewed about what they believe is the true meaning of Christmas.

**Praise:** Pray that the launch of the new channel will be a success, reaching many more children with His message of hope. (Pr.22:6)

**More:** [http://www.sat7.org/downloads/0712\\_Newsletter\\_KIDSUpdateUK.html](http://www.sat7.org/downloads/0712_Newsletter_KIDSUpdateUK.html)

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