



# PRAYER ALERT...

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

### ■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 21st December - Blessing families - Numbers 6:24-26; 1 Timothy 5:1-8**

Christmas is one of the most stressful times of the year in terms of family and relationship breakdown, affecting all generations. **Confess:** that as a nation we do not honour and respect marriage and family life. **Pray:** a BLESSing for a family I know who need God's touch at this time; for those working on national policy to protect marriage and family life; for my church and each church to become more 'family friendly', ministering to all seeking Christ. **Consider:** practically helping a family under pressure this Christmas time.

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

### ■ **Resist aggression towards those who belittle our faith**

In his 2007 Christmas message, the Rev Joel Edwards has called on Christians and non Christians alike to be tolerant of each other. The General Director of the Evangelical Alliance has addressed the question of how we embrace and worship Christ while living in multi-faith communities. He said that tolerance means people who are free not to worship should avoid making life difficult for those of us who do, but also called on Christians not to respond aggressively. 'We must resist the urge to react to any belittling of our belief or our intellect with aggression.' Mr Edwards also praised the tolerance evident in people of other faiths: 'Although people of other faiths may not bow down and worship Jesus, in the UK they have never attempted to prevent Christians from doing so. In a tolerant Britain which truly embraces diversity, freedom means the liberty to worship Christ the King. Christmas was never meant to be an imposition: it is an invitation to worship.'

**Pray:** that Christ's message of love will remain at the heart of all our dealings with other faiths. (Mt.5:43-44)

**More:** <http://www.eauk.org/media/christmas-message.cfm>

### ■ **Bishop's warning to 'militant atheists'**

The Bishop of London, the Rt Rev Richard Chartres, has warned against the rising tide of secular atheists who view religion and faith as 'delusional', comparing their views to totalitarian notions of the 20th century. In his Christmas message, the Bishop highlights how religion and faith is back on the political agenda, but that this has brought 'fear and alarm' to many. He called for Christians to 're-appropriate the wonder and the hope which has entered the world in the birth of the holy child' at Christmas. Speaking about the rise of aggressive secularism in the UK, he said: 'In our country there is a small but growing band of secular fundamentalists, encouraged by the success of Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion*, who portray faith as delusional and religion as some kind of 'virus' which needs to be extirpated if the reign of truth and goodness is ever to be realised'.

**Pray:** for all those who have been misled that God would have mercy and open their eyes. (2Cor.4:4)

**More:** <http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1355>

### ■ Charity 'may offend pupils' claim

Schools in Bristol are being advised that supporting a Christian charity may offend some of their pupils. Samaritan's Purse collects goods in the UK before sending them to children in Eastern Europe and Africa. Bristol City Council said schools adopting charities should not offend anyone on the grounds of equality, disability, race or religion. But a spokesman for Samaritan's Purse said it handed out presents to children regardless of these factors. The city council said in a letter to schools that it had received a number of concerns about Samaritan's Purse, which it described as 'evangelical'. 'Bristol City Council has advised schools to research thoroughly any charities that they wish to support through the Charity Commission to ensure that they are compatible with their own equalities policies and will not offend anyone in the school community,' he added.

**Pray:** for this ongoing politically correct battle seeking God's wisdom and spiritual guidance. (1Cor.1:17-18)

**More:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/bristol/7151621.stm>

### ■ Undercover team inspects Churches

Churches across the Midlands are being checked by 'mystery worshippers'. The 13, normally paid to inspect stores while posing as ordinary shoppers, report on issues such as sermons, music and the warmth of welcome. They have been hired by the Heart of England Christian Resources Exhibition (CRE). Five churches in Telford, Shropshire, have so far been rated by the mystery shoppers, none of whom are regular church-goers. The idea of the visits on 13 January is to find out how people's needs can be better met by churches in the region. Benita Hewitt, from the Christian Research Association which is organising the study, said: 'Although the churches in Telford were given no advance warning, several scored more than 90%, with two achieving 100%. Most of our mystery worshippers were genuinely surprised by the warmth of their experience in church and some were even keen to go back for more.'

**Pray:** that many over this Christmas period will be surprised like these 'mystery worshippers' and meet with Jesus. (Mk.9:37)

**More:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7151585.stm>

### ■ Knife crime plans 'may not work'

Measures to cut knife crime may not work because nobody knows if the problem is genuinely getting better or worse, experts have warned. A report by King's College London criminologists says attempts to cut knife-carrying are held back by the lack of a 'considered, clear strategy'. At least 20 young people have died in stabbings during 2007, with the latest death in London days ago. The Home Office says figures show that overall violent crime has been falling. It warned that ministers were introducing policies to clamp down on knife carrying without taking into account underlying fear and insecurity. A key factor was that many carriers were young people who had been previous victims of crime and now believed a knife offered them some safety. Despite a spate of deaths during 2007, it was impossible to tell whether the trend for knife-related violence was genuinely up or down over the long-term. (See also Prayer Alert 4407)

**Pray:** for the authorities as they seek ways of addressing crime especially amongst the young. Pray for those involved and their families.

**More:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7150851.stm>

### ■ UK should shame USA on climate change says Churches' agency.

The time is fast approaching for the UK and its European partners to name and shame the United States for its blatant attempts to derail any meaningful international agreement on climate change, says the international development agency Christian Aid. With environment ministers from across the globe having been working in Bali to agree on a 'roadmap' to prevent climate catastrophe, the time for softly-softly diplomacy is fast coming to an end, the UK churches' agency declares. Andrew Pendleton, Christian Aid's senior analyst, said: 'If European ministers are serious about tackling climate change, then the days when they can stand discreetly by while the United States shamelessly wrecks the negotiations by rejecting any mention of clear and binding targets for reductions in rich countries' greenhouse gas emissions are numbered.'

**Pray:** that all that was achieved at the Bali conference will bear fruit and that the USA will learn to cooperate. (Gen.2:15)

**More:** <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6477>

## EUROPE

### ■ Austrian Churches team up for Euro 2008 soccer championship

Churches in Austria have launched an evangelisation programme for the Euro 2008 football championships, which the country is hosting jointly with neighbouring Switzerland in June. 'These soccer events will offer young people from various countries a chance to meet,' said Cardinal Schönborn, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Austria. 'Football, like the Christian faith, requires team work where each participant trains for a common aim and, by getting involved, the churches will seek to reveal Christ to people.' At the same time, the chairperson of Austria's Ecumenical Council of Churches, Lutheran Bishop Sturm, said Christian leaders hope to be close to competitors and fans throughout the competition. 'This will be the first time Christian churches have co-operated on such a wide scale,' Sturm told journalists in Vienna, along with the head of Austria's Football Association, Friedrich Stickler. 'Through our initiatives, we want to help create a joyful and peaceful climate for each match, and to highlight the teamwork spirit which will be needed by Euro 2008 footballers.'

**Pray:** that this initiative will bring the churches together and be a strong witness to all those at Euro 2008.

**More:** <http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=1462>

### ■ Vatican blasts 'Golden Compass' as Godless, hopeless

The Vatican on Wednesday condemned the US film 'The Golden Compass', which some have called anti-Christian, saying it promotes a cold and hopeless world without God. In a long editorial, the Vatican newspaper l'Osservatore Romano, also slammed Philip Pullman, the bestselling British author of the book on which the family fantasy movie is based. It was the Vatican's most stinging broadside against an author and a film since it roundly condemned 'The Da Vinci Code' in 2005 and 2006. 'In Pullman's world, hope simply does not exist, because there is no salvation but only personal, individualistic capacity to control the situation and dominate events,' the editorial said. The Vatican newspaper said 'honest' viewers would find it 'devoid of any particular emotion apart from a great chill'. The Vatican newspaper called the movie 'the most anti-Christian film possible' and said that it was 'consoling' that its first weekend ticket sales were a disappointing \$26 million. (See also Prayer Alert 4607)

**Pray:** that the message behind this film will not lead to people rejecting God. (Pr.15:4)

**More:** <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/vatican.blasts.golden.compass.as.godless.hopeless/15696.htm>

## WORLDWIDE

### ■ Angry Muslims attack stores owned by Christians

Seven Muslims were detained for setting fire to 13 stores owned by Egyptian Christians in the southern city of Isna late on Saturday. They also threw Molotov cocktails at a local church, the source told the news service. They told police they were acting in retaliation for the alleged rape last week of a Muslim girl by three Christian boys. AFP reported the three Christians were detained on Saturday and taken to a police station, where an angry crowd of about 150 Muslims hurled stones and bottles. 'Then they left the protest and started setting fire to property owned by Christians,' the source told AFP. AFP said that tensions often run high between Egypt's Muslim and Christian communities in an increasingly religious society that is dominated by Sunni Muslims.

**Pray:** that our brothers and sisters in Christ will be strengthened in their faith to resist those who persecute them. (Mt.10:22)

**More:** <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2007/s07120110.htm>

### ■ Hamas 'complicit in persecution of Gaza Christians'

'Hamas has issued verbal condemnations of Muslim persecution of Christians in the Gaza Strip for mainstream media consumption, but Christians living in fear say their Islamic rulers have failed to arrest any of their tormentors,' says a story carried on the <http://www.israeltoday.co.il> web site. The report continued, 'Last week Islamic militants attempted to abduct a Christian worker as he left work at a local Baptist church. He managed to escape with the help of nearby shopkeepers'. Two months earlier similarly masked gunman publicly executed the Bible Society manager reportedly for witnessing to local Muslims. It was later learned that the ringleader in his murder was a senior Hamas security official. It concluded by saying, 'Hamas has tried to present as moderate a face as possible for the international community, but elements in the Gaza Strip allied with the ruling terror group openly admit that they intend to either force non-Muslims to submit to Islamic law or convert.'

**Pray:** for Christians in Gaza and that Hamas will be enabled to protect them from extremists. (1Cor.15:58)

**More:** <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2007/s07120120.htm>

### ■ Priest stabbed after Sunday mass in Turkey

A Catholic priest was stabbed in the stomach after Sunday mass yesterday in the latest in a series of attacks on Turkey's tiny Christian minority. The victim, Adriano Franchini, was taken to hospital in Izmir in western Turkey. His injuries were reportedly not life threatening. Turkish police said they had detained the suspected attacker. There have been a number of similar attacks over the past two years. In February 2006 a 16-year-old boy shot and killed a priest as he prayed in a church in the city of Trabzon. After that murder a Catholic priest was attacked in Izmir and another was stabbed in the Black Sea port of Samsun. In April three Christians were killed at a publishing house that produces Bibles. Last week Turkey began an investigation into alleged collusion between police officers and at least one of the suspects charged in the killings. The three victims, a German and two Turks who had converted to Christianity, were tied up and had their throats slit. (See Prayer Alert 4807, 1607, & 1707)

**Pray:** for Christians in Turkey that the persecutions will cease. (2Cor.4:8-9)

**More:** [http://www.guardian.co.uk/turkey/story/0,,2228711,00.html#article\\_continue](http://www.guardian.co.uk/turkey/story/0,,2228711,00.html#article_continue)

### ■ Christmas in North Korea

No bright lights, no Christmas dinner and not even a Christmas Eve service for the followers of Jesus Christ in North Korea. This Christmas—just like any other day in the year—there are no festive lights in the streets of Pyongyang. The city is largely shrouded in darkness. North Korea is the only country in the world where the Cold War is not yet over, and one of the few countries in which it is not permitted to celebrate Christmas at all. Yet even here, Christians find ways to celebrate Christmas. There is an active underground Church which celebrates the birth of Christ in their hearts. 'But, of course, Christians do reflect on the birth of Jesus Christ,' says Brother Simon, who coordinates the work of Open Doors—from a secret location. 'Only they can't just go along to church to sing or listen to a sermon. They can't even visit one another to read the Bible together. Being a Christian in North Korea is very lonely.'

**Pray:** for the Christians in North Korea that the light of Christ will shine in their hearts. (1Jn.1:3-7)

**More:** [http://www.breakingchristiannews.com/articles/display\\_art.html?ID=4791](http://www.breakingchristiannews.com/articles/display_art.html?ID=4791)

#### ■ UN warns on soaring food prices

The soaring cost of food is threatening millions of people in poor countries, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has warned. Food prices have risen an unprecedented 40% in the last year and many nations may be unable to cope, the agency says. It is calling for help for farmers in poor countries to buy seeds and fertiliser, and for a review of the impact of bio-fuels on food production. The FAO says 37 countries face food crises due to conflict and disaster. 'Without support for poor farmers and their families in the hardest-hit countries, they will not be able to cope,' said FAO. The agency's food price index has jumped almost 40% from last year, hitting its highest level since its inception in 1990. The increases are partly due to droughts and floods linked to climate change, as well as rising oil prices boosting demand for bio-fuels, the FAO said. International cereal prices have already sparked food riots in several countries, the FAO points out.

**Pray:** for all those who are hungry that those who have plenty will be generous. (Mt.25:31-40)

**More:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/7148880.stm>

#### ■ Church leaders split over Zuma victory

The success of Jacob Zuma in the election to become the president of the ANC has split opinion in the religious world. With the election success behind him, Mr Zuma, a former Deputy President of South Africa, is now in line to become the successor to President Thabo Mbeki, but his recent past has caused serious questions to be asked. South Africa's top prosecutor says there is enough evidence to charge the new leader with corruption. Prior to yesterday's election, the former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, indicated that neither Mr Zuma, nor President Mbeki, were the right candidates for the job of leading the country. 'The nation is distressed and needs a political leader who cares for them and makes them feel as though they matter,' he told the local Mail and Guardian newspaper last weekend. Archbishop Tutu said the country needed a leader in the mould of former president Nelson Mandela, but suggested neither of the candidates measured up.

**Pray:** for the leadership of the ANC and South Africa as it goes through this difficult period in its history.

**More:** <http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1354>

## PRAISE REPORTS

#### ■ Jesus' birthplace to host major Christmas Eve festival

Bethlehem's Manger Square, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, will host its largest event since 1999 on Christmas Eve this year. The Bethlehem Christmas Eve concert is the highlight of a four-city Holy Land Christmas Choir tour which began in Nazareth on Monday. The tour, entitled 'Prepare the Way Concert Tour 2007: Peace on Earth, Good Will to All', will unite American, Israeli, and Palestinian musicians in an effort to 'prepare the way' for peace between Israel and Palestinians. Last month, Israeli and Palestinian leaders made a historic agreement to begin to negotiate a peace treaty that will create a Palestinian state by the end of 2008. Some 150 American volunteer musicians from seven states began their journey to the Holy Land last Friday to join 20 singers based in Jerusalem and members of The Palestine Youth Orchestra (PYO) of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music.

**Praise:** God for this opportunity to praise Him in the birthplace of our Saviour. (Lk.2:14)

**More:** <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/jesus.birthplace.to.host.major.christmas.eve.festival/15682.htm>

#### ■ Ugandan Christians believe Kampala can become a City of God

On December 7 Ugandan Karoro Okurut reports that he attended a three-day 'Kampala City of God' programme to dedicate the City of Kampala to God. The programme, he says, was the idea of First Daughter Pastor Patience Rwabwogo, and promoted by her church, the Covenant Nations Church. Says Okurut: 'After the declaration and dedication, the bigger challenge now is implementation so that Kampala, as far as is humanly possible, assumes the character of God,' and, he adds, it should be shouldered by 'all of us.' Patience and her colleagues have set the pace, he notes, saying that her church 'is not just into teaching the word of God, but also about demonstrating it'. They have sent out teams to help clean up the city, clear up the garbage, etc., to demonstrate the love of God and teach practical cleanliness that will improve the city's living conditions. Okurut shared of an old friend who used to be a rabble-rouser and God hater, but after seeing the power of God demonstrated mightily over the last few weeks, his friend surrendered to Christ.

**Praise:** God for this vision and pray that Kampala will become a City of God. (Ps.48:1-3)

**More:** [http://www.breakingchristiannews.com/articles/display\\_art.html?ID=4783](http://www.breakingchristiannews.com/articles/display_art.html?ID=4783)

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