



PRAYER ALERT...

An initiative of the Prayer Forum of the British Isles & Ireland
www.prayer-alert.net editor@prayer-alert.net

Issue 3608

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Friday 5 September 2008

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 5th September - Hope for the spiritually hungry - Isaiah 55:1-9; Matthew 6:5-15**

Despite the increasing secularisation of much of our society, prayer is currently popular. In the 2007 Tearfund survey, Prayer UK, 42% of the UK adult population admitted to praying regularly. **Give thanks:** for this interest in wanting to connect with 'God'. **Pray:** that each of us will be able to point people to Jesus; that every local church, including the one I attend, will become a place which welcomes those who are spiritually searching; that many people will be helped on their spiritual search by the courses, websites and books available. **Consider:** doing an act of 'random kindness for someone today.

More: <http://www.worldprayer.org.uk/pagesys.cfm?plD=144>

■ **New pressure over faith schools**

Ministers are being urged to stop faith schools in England selecting pupils and staff on the basis of their religion. Accord, a new coalition of secular and religious figures, wants the government to stop state-funded schools engaging in what they say is 'discrimination'. It argues that all children should have equal access to good local schools and that segregating them on religious grounds harms community cohesion. The government argues faith schools can help boost standards in deprived areas. There are about 6,850 faith schools in England out of a total of 21,000 schools. The vast majority of these are Roman Catholic or Church of England. But they also include about 40 Jewish schools and a handful of Muslim, Sikh and Greek Orthodox schools. In September 2007, Schools Secretary Ed Balls said the government would open more faith schools where there was parental demand. But the move has angered some teachers who complain of discriminatory employment practices.

Pray: that this challenge to faith schools will not succeed, that instead their standards would become more widely accepted. (Pr.22:6)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7587849.stm>

■ **Cocaine and ecstasy deaths up 1,200% since records began in 1993**

Death from 'middle class' drugs glamorised by celebrities are at their highest level since records began, government figures revealed today. Party drugs ecstasy and cocaine now claim nearly 300 lives a year, an increase of over 1,200 per cent since figures were first recorded in 1993. The statistics, released by the Office for National Statistics, also reveal that far more men than women are dying from drug abuse and are taking them later in life, often into their 40s. The high number of cocaine deaths is thought to be the result of mixing the drug with alcohol which produces a potentially-deadly compound called cocaine-ethynyl. There have been a number of high-profile deaths involving the drug in recent years. Yesterday drug charities warned of an 'epidemic' of recreational drug deaths as young Britons emulate stars such as Kate Moss, Pete Doherty and Amy Winehouse. Clare McNeil, of drug treatment charity Addaction, said: 'Cocaine is seen as a middle-class drug associated with success and money.

Pray: that these new statistics would 'shock' the government into reversing their liberalising decisions.

More: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1050246/Cocaine-Ecstasy-deaths-1-200-records-began-1993.html>

■ Woman prosecutes art centre over 'lewd' Jesus statue

A Christian woman is taking an art centre to court over an exhibition which included a statue of Jesus that she believes is lewd and offensive. Civil rights advocates say that this is an attempt to reinstate blasphemy laws by the back door. The private prosecution, which has been postponed to 23 September over legal technicalities, is being backed by the Christian Legal Centre and campaigners, including Stephen Green - who unsuccessfully challenged Jerry Springer - The Opera. Lawyers for Emily Mapfuwa, who comes from Brentwood in London, will put their arguments to Gateshead Magistrates Court when the case resumes. Ms Mapfuwa says she believes in free speech, but that 'this statue served no other purpose than to offend Christians and to denigrate Christ'. The Christian Legal Centre also believes in freedom of expression and agrees with Ms Mapfuwa in this matter. <http://www.christianlegalcentre.com/view.php?id=625>

Pray: for Ms. Mapfuwa and her lawyers as they face this legal challenge that denigrates our saviour. (Ez.16:43)

More: <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/7639>

■ MP's scared to talk about forced marriage

Politicians are too scared to speak out against forced marriage in case they lose valuable Muslim votes, according to a veteran Labour MP Ann Cryer. Politicians in areas with high Muslim populations should be at the forefront of the campaign to stop young couples being made to wed against their will by their families. But she claimed that some politicians are afraid to speak out on the issue in case they alienate Muslim voters. The forced marriage unit at the Foreign Office deals with an estimated 300 cases every year, most of them involving teenage girls from Pakistani or Bangladeshi families. Mrs Cryer, who is stepping down as MP for Keighley in West Yorkshire at the next general election, added that local Muslim leaders are not doing enough to encourage integration and accused them of trying to keep immigrants who move to Britain 'in the backwoods'. It comes just days after Gordon Brown praised her 'brave' campaign against forced marriage, and said her understanding of her constituency was 'second to none'.

Pray: for our politicians that they will stand firm and not be too scared to speak out against forced marriages.

More: http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/MPs_Too_Scared_To_Talk_About_Forced_Marriage_In_Case_They_Lose_Muslim_Votes.aspx?ArticleID=2450&PageID=12&RefPageID=5

■ Ban on buying sex has public support, Harman says

Harriet Harman has today stepped up her drive to make buying sex illegal as new figures show brothels are charging as little as £15. Harman, the minister for women and equality, will highlight cultural double standards after some respondents in a poll, particularly older men, condoned buying sex but condemned those who sell it. Trafficked women's charity the Poppy Project surveyed more than 900 brothels and found many offered high-risk 'services' such as unprotected anal sex for £10 extra. Researchers posed as potential customers and phoned 921 brothels that advertised in local newspapers. Harman, Labour's deputy leader, is due to release separate government figures today. The Ipsos-Mori poll, conducted in July and August, shows that more than 58% of men and women support making it illegal to pay for sex if it will help reduce the number of women and children being trafficked into the UK for sexual exploitation.

Pray: for the success of these moves that we would see a reduction in sexual exploitation and trafficking. (Ps.106:39)

More: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/sep/04/harrietharman.labour>

■ Police officer discriminated against for traditional beliefs

PC Graham Cogman, twice commended by his force for his loyalty and diligence, has taken his police force to an Employment Tribunal on grounds of harassment because of his traditional Christian values. PC Cogman, 49, from Sea Palling in North Norfolk, has been an officer with the Norfolk Police for 15 years and has previously served in the RAF for 12 years. PC Cogman is taking the unprecedented action as a serving policeman after a series of complaints and investigations suggesting he is 'homophobic' - something he strenuously denies. He says that the 'over the top' promotion of homosexual rights within Norfolk Police makes being a Christian policeman, or an officer with traditional family values, extremely difficult, unless a person is prepared to ignore his or her conscience. In 2006, PC Cogman was working at the force's Great Yarmouth headquarters when gay liaison officers put 'politically correct' pressure on all colleagues to wear a pink ribbon supporting Gay History Month.

Pray: for all those who stand up for their faith especially those in public service. (1Co.6:9)

More: <http://www.christianlegalcentre.com/view.php?id=626>

EUROPE

■ Cyprus: Rivals begin peace talks

Rival leaders of the divided island of Cyprus are meeting to launch negotiations aimed at reunifying the island after 34 years of division. Cyprus President Demetris Christofias and rival Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat met at a compound in Nicosia. Analysts say the talks have a real chance of resolving the dispute, which threatens Turkey's EU membership hopes. The island has been divided since a Turkish invasion in 1974, triggered by a brief Greek-inspired coup in Nicosia. 'We must, at long last, put an end to the suffering of our people and reunite our country,' Mr Christofias told reporters as he headed for the meeting, held in an abandoned airport compound on the outskirts of the divided capital. Mr Talat said their aim was to make 'a divided island a common place where two nations are living. Ankara is, as you know, supporting a solution. That is why after four years of stalemate we are here - we are in favour of a solution.'

Pray: that this meeting will lead at last to a solution to this stalemate and unity for the people of Cyprus. (Ec.3:7-8)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7595359.stm>

■ Ukraine: Snap election warning

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko has threatened to dissolve parliament and call elections after the collapse of the country's ruling coalition. Mr Yushchenko's supporters walked out in protest on Tuesday night following new laws to trim presidential powers. The laws were introduced by the pro-Russian opposition and backed by Prime Minister Yulia

Tymoshenko's party. Former allies, the prime minister and president are now at odds despite sharing pro-Western political goals. This move is seen by many as the first shots in a presidential campaign in which Mr Yushchenko and Ms Tymoshenko are both candidates, our correspondent says. Polls have shown that Ms Tymoshenko would win a presidential election, with Yushchenko coming last. In a parliamentary election, she would increase her seats, while Mr Yushchenko's Our Ukraine party would lose some. If parliamentary elections are called, they would be the third in as many years since the 2004 'Orange Revolution', which swept Mr Yushchenko to power.

Pray: for the leaders of Ukraine that they would put aside their differences and seek the common good.

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7595667.stm>

WORLDWIDE

■ India: Archbishop calls for end to Orissa violence

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, has added his voice to calls for an immediate end to the violence being waged against Christians in India's Orissa state. Hindu extremists have been on the rampage in the north-eastern state since the murder of Hindu leader Swami Lakshmananda Saraswati last month. Christian homes, orphanages and churches have been burned down, whilst 16 people have been killed. In one of the worst incidents, a young woman was burned alive when she tried to protect children from an attack on their Christian orphanage. Rights groups estimate that around 16,000 Christians have fled the area, with many seeking shelter in makeshift government refugee camps. One temporary camp in Raikia village has 8,000 people crammed into two floors of a government office, where they are sleeping on the bare floor and surviving on a rice and lentil meal given twice daily. (See also Prayer Alert 3508)

Pray: for the people of Orissa that this violence would cease and the work of the extremists would be confounded. (Ps.55:9)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/archbishop.calls.for.end.to.orissa.violence/21342.htm>

■ Vietnam: Prayers and protests

As Vietnam marks its National Day, the holiday spirit in Hanoi's Dong Da district is being marred by an ongoing land dispute between a local Catholic church and the authorities. Last Sunday up to 3,000 were attending an evening prayer when a canister of poisonous gas was thrown in, making dozens sick. The police denied involvement. 'The authorities are unsure about what to do,' said a Hanoi-based political analyst, who wished to stay anonymous. 'If the police act hard, they'd be accused of repressing religious freedom. But if they don't act, the protest is going to spread fast,' he said, adding: 'This seems to be a major headache for them'. The latest wave of protest began a fortnight ago, when hundreds of Catholics knocked down walls to create a make-shift prayer site on the land that, according to them, belonged to the Thai Ha Parish but was given unlawfully by the government to a state company.

Pray: for a meeting of minds between church and state that a solution would be found without violence. (1Tim.2:8)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7593251.stm>

■ Philippines: To scrap peace panel

The Philippine government has scrapped a panel that has been negotiating with southern Muslim rebels, officials say. Manila would instead shift towards direct dialogue with local communities in a bid to end the violence, a presidential official said. The move follows recent lethal clashes in the southern island of Mindanao. Dozens of civilians have been killed in fighting which erupted after the Supreme Court blocked a controversial autonomy deal with the rebels. The government had hoped that the deal - to expand an existing Muslim autonomous zone - would help end four decades of violence in the region. But Christian communities opposed the plan, and when the court suspended it in early August, some rebel commanders launched attacks. The Philippines government has been holding talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) since the late 1990s. A formal ceasefire has been in place for five years and Malaysian-brokered negotiations have been continuing but relations between the two sides have faltered over the failed autonomy deal. (See also Prayer Alert 3408 & 3508)

Pray: that the relationship between the government and the MILF would ease and they would find a just solution

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7595232.stm>

■ Bangladesh: Two million people marooned by floods

More than two million people have been marooned by late monsoon floods in 15 of the country's 64 districts, according to the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB). The flood waters first hit the country from the neighbouring Indian provinces of Bihar, West Bengal, Arunachal, Assam and Meghalaya at end-August, entering Bangladesh's three major rivers systems, including the Brahmaputra, Ganges and Meghna. Inundating the north-western and north-eastern districts, that same water is now flowing south through the country's heartland - threatening to flood Dhaka, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Faridpur and Shariatpur districts in the south-central region. Water levels along the Ganges-Padma and the Meghna river systems continue to rise. And while the Brahmaputra-Jamuna system registered a drop at points upstream, it is still rising downstream. As of 4 September, 29 out of the country's 73 rivers monitored by the FFWC registered an increase in water levels over the previous 24 hours, with 23 now flowing above the danger level.

Pray: for those marooned that their needs for drinking water, food and fodder for livestock will be met.

More: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=80159>

■ Haiti: Facing storm 'catastrophe'

Haiti faces a 'catastrophe' after being hit by a series of storms in recent weeks, President Rene Preval has said. Three storms in less than 21 days have killed more than 200 people and forced thousands to flee their homes in the Caribbean nation, officials say. The latest, Tropical Storm Hanna, could prove even more deadly than one that killed more than 3,000 people in 2004, Mr Preval warned. The northern city of Gonaives bore the brunt of Hanna's maximum sustained winds of 100km/h (65mph), with people on roof-tops screaming for help as floods reached depths of 2m (6.5ft). 'There are a lot of

people who have been on top of the roofs of their homes over 24 hours now. They have no water, no food and we can't even help them,' Haitian Interior Minister Paul Antoine Bien-Aime told Reuters news agency. UN peacekeepers and aid workers say that the storm has left some 600,000 people in desperate need of help. See video <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7599502.stm> Hanna has now passed the Bahamas leaving some 60 dead and is approaching the American coast.

Pray: that God would have mercy and calm the storms. (Lk.8:24-25)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7597307.stm>

■ Zimbabwe: Mugabe gives deal deadline to MDC

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe has said the opposition MDC has until Thursday to agree a power-sharing deal, or he will form a government. 'We feel frozen at the moment [without a government],' he told state media. The MDC has rejected the ultimatum and says it will not be 'bullied' into signing a deal. At talks mediated by South Africa the two rivals agreed that Mr Tsvangirai would be named prime minister while Mr Mugabe remained president, but they cannot agree on how to share powers. The MDC said its negotiating teams had returned from South Africa on Sunday without having achieved a breakthrough in the talks. 'Nothing was achieved in the latest round of engagement in South Africa to break the deadlock. We remain where we were,' Mr Chamisa told the Reuters news agency. The MDC wants Mr Mugabe to become a ceremonial president, while the ruling Zanu-PF party insists he retain control of the security forces and the powers to appoint and dismiss ministers.

Pray: for this troubled nation that the politicians would reach agreement for the sake of the suffering people. (Ps.28:2)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7597493.stm>

■ Mexico: Drug wars provoke mass protests

Hundreds of thousands of Mexicans demonstrated over soaring levels of drug-related brutality and gang warfare that have left at least 2,700 dead this year. The weekend protests followed a particularly violent week, which saw over 130 killings including 18 decapitations, 12 of which were in the normally peaceful Yucatan peninsula, a popular tourist destination home to the resort of Cancun. The protesters demanded action against the bloody tide of executions, shoot-outs and kidnappings waged by drug cartels battling not only one another but government forces engaged in a nearly two-year crackdown. Many of the protesters waved photographs of relatives killed in the violence, which has radiated out from traditional smuggling routes along the US/Mexican border to affect even usually tranquil pockets of the country. In Mexico City, demonstrators cried 'enough' and 'long live Mexico' as they challenged President Felipe Calderon's anti-crime policies, under which 36,000 soldiers and police have been dispatched to rein in the cartels.

Pray: that the authorities would be able to break the hold the drug cartels have on this country. (Nu.10:9)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/centralamericaandthecaribbean/mexico/2656944/Mexicos-drug-wars-provoke-mass-protests.html>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Young Scots more positive about church than believed – survey

A survey conducted on behalf of the Church of Scotland has found that young Scots are more positive about the Church and Christianity than previously believed. Among the 2,221 Scottish secondary school pupils surveyed in the Ipsos MORI poll, 10 per cent said they attend a service every week, whilst more than a third had attended a Church of Scotland service in the last year. The majority of respondents agreed that having a religious belief is positive or potentially positive. Interestingly, 27 per cent of respondents said that they believe in God, against 26 per cent who said they do not believe in God. Yet 43 per cent stated that they believe in Heaven. Youth specialist with the Church of Scotland, Steve Mallon, welcomed the findings. 'The numbers saying they believe in God or know about the Kirk are higher than many commentators would expect,' he said. 'Clearly many young people still value the religious dimension in life.'

Praise: God that so many young people have such a positive attitude to faith and long may it continue to exceed our expectations.

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/young.scots.more.positive.about.church.than.believed.survey/21350.htm>

■ USA: Lakeland outpouring spills over into San Francisco

During a visit to Lakeland, Florida in May, San Francisco pastor Michael Brodeur blogged some thoughts for his church members back home who were praying for revival. 'I believe this is just the beginning of a fresh wave of the Holy Spirit in our midst,' said Brodeur, senior pastor of Promised Land Fellowship. 'I encourage you to put on your wet suits, grab your surfboards and paddle out into the coming move of God. This could be the ride of your life.' Now, after 67 days of nightly meetings, his church and staff are in the midst of something not unlike the Lakeland Outpouring, though Brodeur calls what's happening in San Francisco 'a different animal.' 'The character of our outpouring has been much more just soaking in the presence of God and seeking His face,' he told Charisma. At least 2,000 people have been drawn to what has been dubbed the Golden Gate Outpouring, which began June 20 and was expected to last only 10 days. (See also Prayer Alert 3108)

Praise: God for this blessing. May we all grab for our wetsuits, surfboards and get into this move of God (Dt.28:2)

More: http://www.openheaven.com/forums/forum_posts.asp?TID=23539&PN=1&TPN=1

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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