

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 12th December - The Gift of Hope - John 1:1-14; Luke 2:8-20**

As we reflect on the amazing gift of Jesus to our world, we remember the awesome responsibility that has been entrusted to us to share this gift with others. **Give thanks:** for every Carol Service, school assembly and outreach event that will take place in my community to explain the gift of hope. **Pray:** for opportunities to share my story with friends; for events taking place in my church; that many people will discover faith in Christ this Christmas time. **Consider:** giving away something into your community this Christmas e.g. carol singing, free chocolates.

More: <http://www.worldprayer.org.uk/resources/friday-focus/>

■ **Majority say Jesus' birth is personally significant**

Most Britons say the birth of Jesus Christ is important to them personally and will celebrate Christmas as a religious festival, according to a new poll. Three-quarters (72 per cent) of Britons see the birth of Jesus as still a 'significant' part of our culture, according to theology think-tank Theos. More than half (57 per cent) will be celebrating Christmas as a religious festival. Director of Theos, Paul Woolley said: 'The extent of religious belief will no doubt surprise people, but these findings are consistent with other research we have undertaken.' Mr Woolley said he found it 'especially striking' that over half of people believed the birth of Christ was personally significant to them. He added: 'In periods of financial uncertainty, perhaps people are more open to thinking about life's ultimate questions.'

Pray: that the significance of Jesus' birth in our culture will be recognised even more at this time. (Heb.4:14)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/20081209/majority-say-jesus-birth-is-personally-significant/>

■ **Pill to be given out by chemists**

A pilot scheme allowing pharmacists to give women the contraceptive pill without a prescription has been given the go-ahead for next year. Women and girls aged over 16 will be able to get the pill at two London primary care trusts, Southwark and Lewisham, Pulse magazine says. If the pilots are successful, the pill could become available over the counter like the morning after pill. Officials say this might help reduce the UK's high teen pregnancies. Although the teenage pregnancy rate in Britain is falling in many areas, it remains the highest in Western Europe. Pharmacists will offer the pill under an arrangement called a patient group direction - a kind of mass prescription where a doctor authorises other health professionals to supply a product to a certain group of patients. There is no evidence to show that increasing young people's access to contraception results in lower teenage conception rates or reduces abortion rates.

Pray: that those involved in this pilot scheme will have wisdom and integrity in their dealings, especially with young people. (1Th.4:3-5)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7773894.stm>

■ Hundreds of children missing from care homes

Hundreds of children have disappeared from council care homes without a trace during the past 10 years, a damning report into the plight of child 'runaways' has found. A survey of 172 local authorities in England and Wales who care for 28,000 children found between 376 and 389 young people were missing and councils did not know where they were. The true figure is probably higher because six authorities said they did not keep records of missing children. Information disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act showed children at 41 authorities had gone missing without a trace. One said it had lost 110 children since 2000. The children are mainly from authorities in London and South-east England. Victoria Hull, a national development worker at the Care Leavers' Association, which carried out the research, said it was worrying that hundreds of vulnerable young people seemed to be disappearing into thin air.

Pray: for the missing youngsters and that the authorities would take their responsibility of care more seriously. (Jer.50:6)

More: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/the-hundreds-of-children-missing-from-care-homes-1059451.html>

■ More homeless families seek help

A charity which provides shelter for homeless families has said the economic downturn has sparked a 20% rise in people asking for help. Save the Family, based in Northop, Flintshire said the economic crisis was driving up demand for their services, which was more than they could meet. In just seven months it has had 121 families asking for help compared to 205 for the whole of the previous year. There are fears the situation could worsen. Tim McLachlan, chief executive of the charity said: The number of calls that we have had is going up by the day. People are getting their homes repossessed and people are finding themselves without work and without jobs.' He said clients had told the charity that without its help they would lose their children to care and end up 'dead in the gutter'.

Pray: for support for the increasing numbers of families for whom the economic downturn means total crisis. (1Co.4:11)

More: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/north_east/7773925.stm

■ UK government must do more to tackle corruption, says Christian Aid

Efforts by the UK government to tackle corruption at home and abroad must take on a new urgency if its championing of legitimate business practices is to remain credible, says Christian Aid. Corruption takes money out of the pockets of the poor, and reduces their access to essential public services such as health and education by undermining economic development. It also undermines democracy by encouraging apathy and mistrust which can lead to violent conflict. In a new report published last Monday, December 9 to coincide with the UN International Anti-Corruption Day, Christian Aid says Western governments have an important role to play in curbing corruption. But some, it says, are not doing enough. 'The UK government makes all the right noises on the world stage about tackling corruption, but in practice it doesn't live up to the rhetoric,' says report author Olivia McDonald, Christian Aid's senior governance adviser.

Pray: for guidance for governments and businesses in putting anti-corruption principles into practice. (Hos.9:9)

More: <http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/8152>

■ Scottish churches hope to boost visitor numbers

More than 1200 churches of every denomination over the whole of Scotland are to feature on a new national website to be launched by church leaders on Wednesday in Edinburgh. The project, the most comprehensive of its kind ever undertaken in Scotland, will be in place for the start of the Year of Homecoming in 2009, a Scottish Government initiative to celebrate Scotland's contribution to the world. The web project is the work of Scotland's Churches Scheme (SCS) with funding support from Historic Scotland and the Church of Scotland. Every church in the scheme will have its own detailed entry which can include updated information on events, special activities and services. There will also be links to individual church websites and to national heritage and visitor sites. The scheme was set up fifteen years ago to promote welcome to visitors in church buildings and assist congregations to become more of a focus in their own communities.

Pray: for this project that it would help people to discover a living church community to point them to Jesus. (Jn.14:16)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/scottish.churches.hope.to.boost.visitor.numbers/22084.htm>

EUROPE

■ Political party founded to defend Christian Europe

An Egyptian-born writer who was baptised by Pope Benedict XVI last Easter after converting to Christianity from Islam has announced that he has founded a political party to 'defend Christian Europe' which would field candidates in next June's European elections. Magdi Cristiano Allam, said the party, 'Protagonists for a Christian Europe', would work to defend Europe's Christian values, which were threatened by secularism and moral relativism to the point where Europe risked 'committing suicide'. The party would be open to people of all faiths. Mr Allam, an associate editor of the newspaper Corriere della Sera, was speaking at the Foreign Press Club in Rome. An outspoken critic of Muslim extremism and a supporter of Israel, Mr Allam is under armed guard because of death threats. The party symbol bears the twelve stars of the EU round an Italian flag, with the words 'Truth and Liberty', 'Faith and Reason', and 'Values and Rules'.

Pray: that this initiative will lead to a strong movement upholding Christian values across Europe. (Heb.11:26)

More: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article5269250.ece>

■ Rebellion deeply embedded in Greece

The riots that have swept Greece and look set to continue for the foreseeable future underline why the most important day in the national calendar is 'Oxi' or 'No' day. 'Oxi' day commemorates when Greek leader Ioannis Metaxas used that single

word to reply to Mussolini's ultimatum to allow Italy to invade Greece. When Greeks say no, they mean it in spades. Rebellion is deeply embedded in the Greek psyche. The students and school children who are laying siege to police stations and trying to bring down the government are undergoing a rite of passage. They may be the iPod generation, but they are the inheritors of a tradition that goes back centuries. The centre for this December rebellion is the Athens Polytechnic, where students have been out on the streets with wheelbarrows and shopping trolleys to collect and recycle rocks and pieces of marble used in the previous night's assaults. The polytechnic is the symbol of modern rebellion.

Pray: that the violence among the people of Greece will be dissipated and God will transform the nation through justice. (Tit.2:11-14)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7771628.stm>

WORLDWIDE

■ Israel: What now for Israel after settlers expelled?

Hebron, in the south of the West Bank, is a town of 170,000 Palestinians, with a small enclave of 600-800 Jewish settlers living around the site of Abraham's tomb. Last week Israeli police and soldiers sought to evict 200-250 Jewish settlers from a house that the settlers said they had bought legally from a Palestinian man. The man said that he had not sold it and the Israeli Supreme Court gave the Israeli authorities the right to evacuate the building until ownership was confirmed. Israeli police say the sales contract is forged. In response, the settlers attacked Israeli soldiers, the houses and cars and olive groves of neighbouring Palestinians, headstones in a Muslim cemetery and sprayed slurs on a mosque wall. The Israeli PM, Ehud Olmert condemned the attacks by settlers. It is believed that this is a calculated policy by a minority of radical settlers who say there will be a 'price to pay' for the Israeli government to remove any further settlements. There have been about 700 cases of settler violence against Palestinians and Israeli soldiers in 2008. The great fear on the part of Israeli and Palestinian authorities is that this could escalate with reprisals from Palestinians, and even incite global Muslim anger.

Pray: that the violence would not escalate and that the peace of God through Jesus, the Prince of peace, would rule in the land where he walked. (Pr.16:7)

More: <http://jta.org/news/article/2008/12/08/1001408/unchecked-settler-violence-prompts-fears-of-intifada>

■ Gambia: British Christian missionaries arrested

The adopted daughter of David and Fiona Fulton is being cared for by a friend since her parents were arrested on seditious charges. Mr Fulton a former army major is held at a high security jail while Mrs Fulton is held in the capital, Banjul. Mr Fulton was a chaplain in the mainly Muslim country's army, and first moved to The Gambia 12 years ago when God called him out of the Prison ministry in England to develop a flourishing Christian ministry within the prison system in The Gambia. In 2007, David started training Gambian soldiers to become chaplains so that every unit of the Gambian army could have its own chaplain. A friend said that David is not eating and is not well; it is not known if he is on hunger strike, or fearful of being poisoned. The Gambia is ruled by President Jammeh who told supporters he would 'cut off the head' of homosexuals in the Gambia. In the past President Jammeh has made money claiming he had an 'Anointing' to cure anyone with the Aids virus in three days.

Pray: for the British Foreign office to achieve the release of the Fulton's and for all Christians in this predominantly Muslim country as they continue to witness to their faith and live their lives in accordance with the gospel. (Ex.23:1-3 & Ac.2:42-47)

More: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/north_east/7771255.stm

■ Iraq: Mosul needs more prayer

Christian groups that work in war torn Iraq are crying out for targeted prayer against a genocidal attack on Iraqi Christians. Open Doors, USA's Iraq country coordinator said 10,000 Christians have left Mosul because of the escalating terrorism specifically targeting Christians. A local contact of Open Doors said that the number of families fleeing Mosul has reached almost 2,000 since mid-October 2008 due to Muslim extremist violence, which has killed approximately 25 to 40 Christians. On November 12 2008 two Catholic nuns were killed in the AlQahirda section in Mosul, Iraq, by Islamic terrorists. Their mother was wounded in the attack, and the US military said the family's house was destroyed by bombs planted inside. The incident happened as many Christians were attempting to return to Mosul after more troops were deployed to the area.

Pray: for God's protection over hundreds displaced through violence and injustice. Pray also for His wisdom for the state authorities as they attempt to calm situations that remain tense. (Dt.5:7; Ex.20:13; Mt.19:19)

More: <http://issuu.com/windowinternationalnetwork/docs/reporterdecember2008/5?mode=embed&documentId=081205194957-cdecdc8e105d4fbe8b1115d71491526e&layout=grey>

■ Churches' declaration for protection of religious freedom

In a statement to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Wednesday, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe has called on churches to work to defend religious freedom as a fundamental human right. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Release International and the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is are also marking the 60th anniversary with a call to Prime Minister Gordon Brown to improve international efforts to protect freedom of religion and belief, specifically through the appointment of an Ambassador-at-Large for Freedom of Religion and Belief. Also provision of adequate training within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on freedom of religion issues, and the allocation of international financial and technical support to enable the better protection of freedom of religion and belief.

Pray: for this action to bring the international community further along the road of upholding human rights. (Am.5:14,15)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/protection.of.religious.freedom.is.common.task.for.churches/22097.htm>

■ India: Hindu radicals threaten Christmas

With a little more than two weeks until Christmas Christians in India are bracing for more violence, particularly in the state of Orissa where homes and churches have been destroyed and thousands made homeless. Hindu militant organizations have gone on record saying, 'If the government does not make some arrests of those who killed their leaders, December 25th will be a day of violence.' Christmas for Christians in India does not bode very well right now and we really need to be upholding our brothers and sisters in prayer. Recent violence in Kandhamal district left 60 Christians dead and more than 5,000 Christian houses looted or torched. In the last three or four years violence has escalated and in the last year there have been two waves of attacks. There is a huge humanitarian crisis in Orissa. Christian people are in refugee camps some of which the government is trying to close down, forcing people to go home but they have nothing to go back to.

Pray: for God to enable the Indian authorities to be aware of and restrain potential hostility towards Christians during this season of terrorism and internal violence. (2Sa.22:3)

More: <http://www.mnnonline.org/article/11994>

■ North America: The new Anglican church

On December 3 members of the Episcopal Church of the USA (ECUSA), unveiled a draft constitution for a newly formed 'Anglican Church in North America' to be headed by Bishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh. Formed by four breakaway US dioceses and conservative parishes from the US and Canada, the move is unprecedented and threatens the schism the Archbishop of Canterbury has been trying to avoid. On Wednesday a previously arranged meeting of evangelical archbishops from Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the Southern Cone (in Latin America) met with Rowan Williams to discuss the development of the new province. A spokesperson for the new American Anglican Church said that these leaders from other countries give guidance, and the teaching is no different than what has been taught for 2,000 years. 'We want the world to conform to the Bible, not the Bible to the world.' There are many technical issues to be resolved, not the least of which is the question of the ownership of land in the form of church property.

Pray: for the different Primates of the Anglican Communion as they seek to resolve this difficult situation, that God's way will be descendered. (Ps.133)

More: <http://www.edgeboston.com/index.php?ch=news&sc=&sc2=features&sc3=&id=84454>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Pioneering in worldwide prayer for revival

Eastbourne-based organisation Revival has been publishing its International Daily Prayer Bulletin for 35 years. Featuring wide ranging prayer topics from around the world, the bulletin seeks to 'tell the news behind the news'. It circulates to about 6,500 UK readers and to around 650 overseas, mostly in South Africa, Australia, USA and Western Europe. Revival also produces Christian radio programmes, supports an orphanage in Malawi and runs the Eastbourne Prayer Centre. The bulletin which is also available online can be obtained via the 'More' link herewith.

Praise: God for movements such as Revival that encourage prayer amongst the people of God. (Is.52:7)

More: <http://www.revivalmedia.org>

■ Kenya: Revival prayer gathering

TheCall, a growing movement that seeks God's mercy and spiritual revival through prayer and fasting, held an eight-hour long mass prayer event attended by thousands of African prayer warriors on Saturday in Nairobi. It was the first time TheCall was held on the continent of Africa. 'Kenya stands at a critical juncture as its newspaper headlines expose the frailty of the nation's moral fabric,' said TheCall founder Lou Engle, 'but there is the promise of a great awakening on the horizon. 'It is always darkest before dawn, and the church is set to enter its finest hour,' he proclaimed. 'When it seems like there is no hope, God still has a holy prescription: 'Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a fast, call a sacred assembly!'

Praise: God for TheCall. Ask Him to wake up the prayer warriors globally to enable the church to go deeper into strategic warfare for our nations. (Eph.5:14)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/thousands.seek.revival.in.kenya.at.mass.prayer.gathering/22090.htm>

■ Netherlands: Jesus heals in the pub

In the Netherlands there is a growing network of Christians who share Jesus with people through the ministry of healing. One of them is Marjan Spijkman, who last month organized an evening on 'miracles and healings' in a local pub. 'Nine people, mainly women from the neighbourhood, showed up,' she reports. 'God was powerfully present and healed them from rheumatic conditions, emotional wounds, urination problems, and other hurts. One woman, who was nearly deaf, could hear again. These women have a reputation in their neighbourhood for being hard and bitter. But Jesus Christ touched them, they cried in our arms. Afterwards two women applied for an introductory course about Jesus. The owners of the pub invited us back and suggested that we use the larger room as they are expecting more people to come.'

Praise: God for the way He powerfully blesses those who step out in faith and sets the captives free. (Is.49:8-10)

More: <http://www.joelnews.org/frontpage.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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