



PRAYER ALERT...



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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 19th December - Hope at Christmas - Matthew 2:3-18; Matthew 5:1-10**

Last year 43% of people cited financial pressures as the worst thing about Christmas (Theos poll). This year many more people will be affected owing to the current financial climate.

Confess: the times when we have allowed commercialism to mask the real meaning of Christmas.

Pray: for those in my community who are isolated, lonely, unwell or caught in debt; for my church family to be a place of welcome and hospitality; for any families/individuals I know who are under pressure.

Consider: how can I practically help someone else.

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

■ **Falling pound is no excuse to neglect poor, says Joel Edwards**

The dropping value of the pound against the Euro must not be used as an excuse for governments to neglect their promises to the poor, said Micah Challenge's new International Director. The Rev Joel Edwards spoke at his UK commissioning as Director of Micah Challenge International, a movement of Christians calling governments to account to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. 'We may fear for the value of the pound in the brink of a recession but it has as much value as ever when it comes to the help it can bring for poor communities around the world', he said. 'The clear message from church leaders in the UK and around the world, to our governments is this: keep your promises to the poor. To revise our promises on the basis of domestic self interest is a natural political response but it is a retrograde step.' He added: 'The poor should not become invisible because we are hurting.'

Pray: for governments that they will remember those who are less fortunate than themselves and keep their promises even in this time of credit squeeze. (Dt.15:11)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/falling.pound.is.no.excuse.to.neglect.poor.says.edwards/22150.htm>

■ **Teenage pregnancies rose last year, show official statistics**

The number of teenage pregnancies rose last year, despite the government's attempts to increase sex education and contraception awareness. The Office for National Statistics published figures for under-18 pregnancies in England and Wales, showing a rise of at least 2.7 per cent in the rate last year. Last year's increase means around 43,000 girls under 18 in England and Wales became pregnant, only 1,000 fewer than 1998 and at least 1,200 more from 2006. The figures mean Britain will cement its position as the country with the highest teenage pregnancy levels in Europe. Jill Kirby, from the think tank Centre for Policy Studies: 'It is very worrying, given teenage pregnancy rates are already ahead of those in the rest of

Europe that the slight decline has now gone into reverse. We need a new policy of parental consultation, limited access to contraceptives and a climate in which sexual activity among teenagers is discouraged rather than encouraged.'

Pray: that the lessons to be learnt from these statistics will be accepted by the authorities and lead to changes. (1Th.4:3-5)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/3779433/Teenage-pregnancies-rose-last-year-show-official-statistics.html>

■ Primate of All Ireland tells society to cherish children

The Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland has called on people to value all children and do their part to nurture a wholesome family life. 'Whenever we cradle a new born baby we are holding a child who may, in the fullness of time, change the world,' said the Most Rev Alan Harper in his Christmas message released on Tuesday. 'Nothing, then, is more important, more worthwhile, more socially and economically necessary than to cherish little children for all children of whatever ability are rich in unexplored promise.' The Christmas message is inspired by the Archbishop's own experience as a grandfather and his trip to the Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem earlier this year. He said that strong, secure and loving families were the 'God-given ideal within which children may grow and fulfil their potential'.

Pray: for the children of the world and for a stable, encouraging and loving family life as well as positive social care and education to help each child realise their potential. (Ps.78:4-6)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/archbishop.tells.society.to.cherish.children/22140.htm>

■ God can mend broken Britain, says Archbishop

God can mend all of the social problems afflicting Britain, but it might not necessarily happen in the way some people expect, says the Archbishop of Canterbury. Speaking to around 50 young people at the Solace pub church in Cardiff at the weekend, Dr Rowan Williams said 'God's way to mend Broken Britain is through us. God doesn't step down out of the sky, shooting thunderbolts out of his fingers. He comes down at a human level and says 'You are going to do this, I trust you',' he was quoted as saying by the South Wales Echo. 'That's how God mends – through you and me.' Solace has been meeting weekly in Edwards Bar in Cardiff city centre since it was launched one year ago by Church Army officer Wendy Sanderson and the Baptist Rev James Karren to reach people seeking a spiritual dimension to their lives but who are put off by traditional forms of church. Dr Williams was invited to the pub church to answer the question, 'Can God mend broken Britain?'

Pray: to God that He would empower His people, young and old, to be His instruments in bringing new life to this nation. (2Ch.7:14)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/god.can.mend.broken.britain.says.archbishop/22135.htm>

■ Archbishop backs disestablishment

The Archbishop of Canterbury has surprisingly reignited the row today over the separation of church and state by saying it is 'not the end of the world' if the established church were to disappear. Rowan Williams, the most senior figure in the Church of England, argues that there is a 'certain integrity' to a church that has become free from state sanctions. He said: 'I can see that it's by no means the end of the world if the establishment disappears. The strength of the disestablished Church of Wales is that the last vestiges of state sanction disappeared, so when you took a vote at the Welsh synod, it didn't have to be nodded through by parliament afterwards. There is a certain integrity to that.' But he was concerned that secularists would exploit a move towards disestablishment. Williams said: 'It's a very shaky time for the public presence of faith in society.'

Pray: that at a time when, more than ever, society needs good moral guidance and leadership, the Church of England can find its place in a way that allows it to bring the Christian message to the nation. (Ac.16:5)

More: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/dec/18/rowan-williams-anglican-disestablishment-muppets>

EUROPE

■ Holland: Liberal policies on drugs and brothels to be scrapped

The Dutch are rethinking their famously liberal policies on legalised brothels, prostitution and soft drugs, such as magic mushrooms and cannabis, amid fears of growing crime and social decline. New restrictions on marijuana selling cafés, a ban on the sale of magic mushrooms and plans to clean up Amsterdam's red light district have been announced across Holland. 'The nation's ideals are being tested by the reality they brought,' said sociologist Dick Houtman of Rotterdam's Erasmus University. 'The Netherlands went further in allowing all sorts of liberties than many other countries. The test is severe. There is a feeling that our tolerance is the principal cause of many of the problems we experience now. The debate is about where liberty and tolerance should end and where order should begin.' Now the Dutch government has announced new plans to strictly regulate the sex industry, massage parlours and brothels by imposing a tough licensing system to drive out organised crime.

Pray: that these proposed changes will lead to the desired transformation and be a model for other nations and thank God for this answer to prayer!

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/netherlands/3777696/Holland-scrapping-liberal-policies-on-drugs-and-brothels-to-clean-up-image.html>

■ Turkey: Regulations hobble protestant churches

In the last three years Agape church members in Samsun have endured false allegations and verbal abuse from Muslim and nationalist locals. Their pastor received death threats and their building has been vandalized in an attempt to stop the

Christians meeting. Local authorities have threatened them with legal action based on spurious charges. The Provincial Directorate of Associations inspected the building and told them to remove scriptures and a cross because their rented rooms looked too much like a church. It was this sort of harassment that led the Alliance of Protestant Churches of Turkey (TEK) to write a report on the unfounded obstacles and challenges facing Christian congregations wishing to construct or reclassify church buildings. 'The process of becoming a place of worship, although legally possible, is in practice almost impossible,' said a member of the TEK's legal committee.

Pray: for equality of rights for Christian communities that they are allowed to have places of worship just as the Muslim masjid (privately owned mosque). (Ps.9:8)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=short&idelement=5726&backpage=summaries>

WORLDWIDE

■ Gambia: Delay to missionary workers' case

A missionary couple due to appear in a Gambian court on sedition charges had their case adjourned until 24th December. David and Fiona Fulton are in separate high security prisons accused of undermining the government. Mr Fulton was a chaplain in the mainly Muslim country's army. (See Prayer Alert 5008) Friends have had little contact with the couple since their arrest, but were told trial is delayed to allow their solicitor to travel from England. The couple's 2-year-old daughter is with friends. Mr Fulton had been writing a book about his life, touching on challenges facing a missionary in the Gambia, and how difficult it is to do good. The book will be used against him in the trial. They are accused of writing letters to individuals and groups abroad to 'bring into hatred or contempt, to excite disaffection' against the Gambian president. The government has been criticised by international rights groups for its attitude to civil liberties, especially freedom of the press. The Fultons face either jail or deportation.

Pray: for God's peace as they face irrational opposition, comfort in difficult emotional circumstances and protection for their physical well-being. Also continue to pray that the Foreign Office and solicitors will liberate the family before Christmas. (Ps.26)

More: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/glasgow_and_west/7785085.stm

■ Bangladesh: Emergency prayer alert

Urgent prayer is needed for Bangladesh as they face potentially divisive national elections on December 29. The last time Bangladesh prepared for elections in 2006, months of strikes and street violence forced the army to step in. Militant Islamists have been quietly taking ground in Bangladesh. Terrorist incidents and assaults against Christians have been increasing with the Talibanization of the country. A Christian Church leader predicts that full Shariah law will be implemented if the situation does not change. The prayers of the international community are very much needed for political stability and Godly leaders to be elected who will end corruption and allow freedom to convert from one belief system to another.

Pray: that God will prompt the police to protect the Christian converts and for the demonic forces in operation in Bangladesh to be bound, so that Christians are free to worship in spirit and truth. (Is.32:18)

More: http://ausprayernet.org.au/newsletter/DisplayNewsletter.php?e_id=00000001647#st5

■ Zimbabwe: African Union asked to intensify pressure on Robert Mugabe

The AACC Assembly said, 'International leaders and churches have failed to bring about an amicable solution' and called churches to confess their failure and take action by advocacy visits to leaders of nations and regional structures; organise marches and demonstrations, particularly outside of Zimbabwean embassies and consulates; collect funds and material to provide humanitarian aid and address the cholera crisis. The most forceful recommendations called upon leaders of nations to 'state clearly that the current Zimbabwean regime is illegitimate and to withdraw recognition of the Zimbabwean government.' Also to involve international bodies, such as the International Criminal Court, where appropriate to intensify pressure on Mugabe to relinquish control of the government. The Assembly cautioned that 'negotiation must never be allowed to replace legitimate democratic elections.' The statement also asked governments, international bodies and churches to 'recognize people fleeing the economic, political and humanitarian crises in Zimbabwe as refugees, to offer them protection and hospitality and to treat them with respect and dignity' and to 'support activists in Zimbabwe'.

Pray: as the Lord leads on the above and particularly intercede for Zimbabwe on the Africa Day of Prayer and Fasting for Justice in Zimbabwe on January 25th 2009. (Ps.54)

More: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1722/aacc-asks-african-union-t.html>

■ Somalia: UN Approves Land, Air Attacks On Pirates

UN Security Council voted unanimously to authorize nations to conduct land and air attacks on pirate bases on the coast of the Horn of Africa, if the government in Somalia gives its approval. America announced the creation of a Contact Group to share intelligence, and to create a UN peacekeeping mission. The Russian Foreign Minister said piracy is the tip of the iceberg of lawlessness in coastal waters off Somalia, and must be addressed within an inclusive political settlement. The council authorized nations to use 'all necessary measures that are appropriate in Somalia' to stop Somali territory being used to plan or carry out piracy in the nearby waters navigated each year by thousands of cargo ships, many carrying much needed aid to war torn, and drought areas of Africa. Somali pirates evading international naval flotillas have hijacked more than 40 vessels this year, 15 remain in pirate captivity with more than 250 crew members also held to ransom.

Pray: for peace, security and economic development for Somalia so that the anarchy that produces piracy will end. (Job.8:6)

More: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/12/16/world/main4672356.shtml?tag=lowerContent;homeSectionBlock202>

■ Vietnam: Freedom and oppression

Eight years ago over 500 Hmong Christians joined thousands of others fleeing persecution in Vietnam's northwest provinces. In September 08 they erected a church building, large enough for them all to meet in a single location. On December 17 government officials and police, wielding electric cattle prods, beat back hundreds of Christians and destroyed the church. Five injured people were taken away and one badly injured woman is still missing. In contrast to this hostility toward ethnic minority Christians several Ho Chi Minh City congregations of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam were allowed to hold a large Christmas celebration on Dec.12-13 in a soccer stadium with an estimated 100,000 attending each night and hundreds responding to altar calls. Authorities work against the spread of Christianity to new and remote areas. In a remote commune of Lao Cai Province, officials pressured new Hmong Christians to recant their new faith and re-establish their ancestral altars.

Pray: for God's provision and protection over the Vietnamese Christians caught up in this spiritual battle and for the gospel to continue to be fearlessly proclaimed in every area. (Eph.6:12)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=5738& backpage=summaries&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=>

■ Israel: Peace plan?

A poll conducted among the Israeli public revealed nearly two-thirds reject the plan put forward by the Arab League in 2002. It calls for Israel's surrender of the strategic Golan Heights and its biblical heartland, which is the cradle of its nationhood, in return for promises of peace and pledges that relations between Israel and all the Arab states will be normalized. On Friday a six-month lull brokered by Egypt between Gaza militants and Israel expires and all Gaza militant groups said that Israel was the only side which earned benefits from it, and the Palestinians' suffering remained the same. A day before the 6-month truce ends violence has mounted in which Gaza militants fired a barrage of rockets at Israel, prompting the Israeli forces to launch air strikes which killed one civilian.

Pray: for stability in the region as 2009 brings government changes in Israel, the Palestinian territories and the United States. (Is.42:9 & Jer.31:19-21)

More: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/18/content_10525454.htm

PRAISE REPORTS

■ India: Mutilated Christian girl forgives attackers

Hindu extremists may have burned a 10-year-old Christian girl's face, inflicted shrapnel wounds on 40 percent of her body and forced her family to hide in a forest and flee to a refugee camp in Orissa, India, but her plight hasn't shaken her faith and thankfulness to God this season. 'Christmas is a time to thank the baby Jesus who saved me from the fire and saved my face which was disfigured,' Namrata Nayak told Asia News. Nayak's face was severely mutilated after Hindu extremists bombed the home where she was staying on Aug. 26. They broke into the house and burned it while Nayak and her siblings hid in a small bathroom. Before exiting the home, they left a bomb in a dresser, according to the report. While the little girl surveyed the destruction, the bomb detonated and burned her face. The explosion also lodged shrapnel into her face, hands and back. Despite all her troubles, she is cheerful and giving thanks to God for healing her.

Praise: God for the testimony of this little girl and pray that it may help bring healing within the peoples of Orissa. (Ro.8:28)

More: <http://worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=83778>

■ Prime Minister recognises Hope08 movement

The Prime Minister has invited Hope08 representatives to a Christmas reception at 10 Downing Street in recognition of all Hope08 has accomplished throughout the UK this year. Hope08 is a national cross-denominational initiative that is encouraging groups of churches to work together to impact their communities by serving the needs of those around them. Over three times the target number of locations signed up to do Hope08 projects. Churches from 1,500 different villages, towns & cities are delivering projects such as detached youth work, providing food and accommodation for rough sleepers and visiting elderly people. Hope08 has selected 20 people to attend the reception, along with members of the national leadership team. The delegates have been chosen because of their level of involvement with Hope08 projects in their local areas. Locations such as Preston, Bedford, Southampton, Croydon, Sheffield and Merseyside will be represented.

Praise: God for the work of Hope08 and the lasting benefits that will affect the communities. (Col.3:25)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/prime.minister.recognises.hope08.movement/22122.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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