



PRAYER ALERT...



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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Christian health worker faces sack

In a new case of shocking intolerance a Christian mental health worker has been effectively suspended by her employers because she expressed her opinion in a private conversation with colleagues and showed them a booklet containing stories of women and the devastating impact of abortion on their lives. Margaret Forrester has worked for Central North West London Mental Health Trust for over two years and the NHS for over 7 years. Earlier in November she was on a temporary secondment and sat next to two health workers whose job is to advise women on abortions. She felt that women seeking abortions were not given all of the alternatives available to help them make an informed decision, so she gave a small booklet to her co-workers which documents the testimonies of women who have been impacted by abortion. She faces a disciplinary hearing on Tuesday for 'distributing materials some people may find offensive' and may well be sacked.

Pray: for all Christians in the workplace as they face challenges over their faith that God will guide them. (Ps.20:6)

More: <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/abortion/christian-health-worker-prevented-from-working-because-of-her-personal-views>

■ Religious Christmas cards disappear from shops

Nativity scenes or references to the Bible story feature on fewer than one in 25 cards, according to a survey by The Sunday Telegraph. Christian groups said the findings were 'disappointing' and blamed the situation on 'political correctness'. The survey of more than 2,100 card designs in four stores – WHSmith, Marks & Spencer, Clinton Cards and Paperchase – found only 82 featured any religious reference. Most instead depicted Christmas trees, Father Christmas or non-religious messages such as 'Season's Greetings'. The baby Jesus was shown on only 13 cards – less than one per cent of the total. Other cards reflected changes in modern family relationships. One said: 'For a special son and partner sending you love and happy wishes at Christmas time.' Stephen Green, national director of the evangelical organisation Christian Voice, said: 'This is another sign of the impact of political correctness and how Christ is being split from Christmas'.

Pray: that God would use His people to speak up for our faith in the marketplace. (2Cor.1:21-22)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/christmas/8211402/Christmas-cards-with-religious-images-disappear-from-High-Street-shops.html>

■ Shopping centre says no to Christian 'flash mob'

Sheffield shopping centre believes that allowing a Christian 'flash mob' at Christmas would compromise its impartiality. Shops across the country may be bedecked with seasonal decorations and Christmas greetings, but one of Europe's largest shopping centres says it cannot allow a Christian 'flash mob' because of concerns over impartiality. According to Julian Mann, aka Anglican blogger Cranmer's Curate, the Meadowhall Shopping Centre in Sheffield has refused permission for a choir to sing 'the kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever' in its food court. Local Christians were inspired to attempt a Christmas flash mob in the shopping centre after a choir did something similar in the Seaway Mall in Welland, Ontario, Canada. Last week a flash mob choir

surprised commuters in Sheffield train station when they emerged from the crowds to sing a medley of Christmas carols on the main concourse.

Pray: that God will continue to stimulate His people to use different activities to promote our faith. (Heb.4:12)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/sheffield.shopping.centre.says.no.to.christian.flash.mob/27272.htm>

■ Alone at Christmas concern

With a new study predicting that more than a 10th of Britain's over-65-year-olds will be spending Christmas alone, Christians are being advised to ensure that older people in their communities are cared for this festive season. Research published last week by the public theology think tank Theos has revealed that people who are aged 65 years or above are most likely to be without the company of family or friends this Christmas. According to the study, 11 per cent of those in this age range will be on their own during next week's celebration, compared to just six per cent of the population as a whole. As a consequence, the director of Theos, Paul Woolley, is now warning that people 'should be concerned' at these findings. At the same time, church members have been reminded of the need to befriend and look after elderly people in their communities.

Pray: that the Church will reach out to the lonely this Christmas and that God will bless them with His presence. (Pro.18:16)

More: <http://www.methodistrecorder.co.uk/mrhlines.htm>

■ Christmas trees 'make non-Christians feel excluded'

Christmas trees should be removed from public places to avoid making non-Christians feel 'excluded', scientists have suggested. The scientists conducted the study using 77 Christians and 57 non-believers, including Buddhists and Sikhs. The participants did not know the survey was about Christmas, and were asked to fill in questions about themselves both when a 12-inch Christmas tree was in the room and when it was not. 'Non-celebrators' reported fewer positive feelings and less self-assurance in the Christmas room. Christians were mostly cheered by the tree. Michael Schmitt, a social psychologist behind the research, said: 'Simply having this 12-inch Christmas tree in the room with non-Christians made them feel less included in the university as a whole. 'We're not suggesting 'no Christmas' or 'no Christmas displays at all,' but in contexts where we really do value respecting and including diversity in terms of religion, the safest option is not to have these kinds of displays.

Pray: that such spurious research will never undermine public displays of Christmas celebration. (1Co.15:33)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/christmas/8214222/Christmas-trees-make-non-Christians-feel-excluded.html>

■ Churches offer homeless rolling night shelter

Twelve churches in Tower Hamlets have clubbed together to open a rolling night shelter for homeless people in the East London borough. The GrowTH project is offering homeless people a safe and warm place to sleep seven days a week until the end of February. Participating churches are taking it in turns to open their doors to guests from 7.30pm and provide a hot dinner in the evening and breakfast the following morning. Tony Uddin, of Tower Hamlets Community Church, is one of the project organisers. He said the churches were inspired to set up GrowTH because of the gap in service provision for local homeless people in their area. 'Our volunteers' generosity means that we can make a real difference this Christmas and throughout the winter,' he said. 'It is important for churches to be involved in the local community and our initiative is proof that we can make a real difference and implement the much publicised Big Society ethos.'

Pray: for this and similar initiatives across the country and that the Gospel message will be lived out in practice. (Pr.28:27)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/east.london.churches.offer.homeless.rolling.night.shelter/27260.htm>

■ Boris Johnson launches FareShare depot

On Tuesday the Mayor of London Boris Johnson opened a new food depot in London that will distribute more than 300 tonnes of surplus food a year - the equivalent of 800,000 meals - to charities, instead of clogging up landfill sites. The FareShare depot was made possible by a £362,000 grant from the London Waste and Recycling Board. It will focus on rescuing surplus and still perfectly edible food from organisations within London and redistributing it to support some of city's most disadvantaged people, helping to reduce the amount of food being sent to landfill. The Mayor Boris Johnson said: This inspiring project will have a genuine impact helping vulnerable people.

Pray: that the Government will adopt policies that will not lead to people losing their homes. (Mt.25:37)

More: <http://www.fareshare.org.uk/news.php>

EUROPE

■ Christmas omitted on EU school diary

The European Commission has come under fire for producing more than three million copies of an EU diary for secondary schools which contains no reference to Christmas. More than 330,000 copies of the diaries, accompanied by 51 pages of glossy information about the EU, have been delivered to British schools as a 'sought after' Christmas gift to pupils from the commission. But Christians have been angered because the diary section for December 25 is blank and the bottom of the page with Christmas Day is marked only with the secular message. While the euro calendar marks Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Chinese festivities as well as Europe Day and other key EU anniversaries, there are no Christian festivals marked. If the commission does not mark Christmas as a feast in its diaries then it should be working as normal on December 25.

Pray: against the authorities that keep undermining the Christian faith. (Ps.28:18)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/eu/8207411/European-Commission-criticised-for-omitting-Christmas-on-EU-school-diary.html>

■ Marginalisation of Christians in Europe

A new report has voiced concern over the ability of Christians in Europe to publicly express their faith. It warned that discriminatory laws were preventing the equal exercise of freedom in the areas of speech, conscience and religion, while the introduction of equality legislation was leading to 'side-effect discrimination' against Christians. The report raised concern over recent threats to freedom of conscience. They included the UK Supreme Court's refusal to grant an appeal to a Christian registrar who was disciplined because she refused to perform ceremonies for same-sex couples. The report pointed to the arrest of Christian street preachers in the UK and an ongoing case against Christians in Turkey for supposedly slandering Islam as evidence that freedom of expression is coming under threat in Europe. Many of the incidents of discrimination highlighted by the report related to the experiences of Christians in the UK.

Pray: that this report will be widely read and seriously considered. (Ps.37:18)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/report.notes.increasing.marginalisation.of.christians.in.europe/27266.htm>

WORLDWIDE

■ **INSIGHT:** Egypt: Christian's life on hold

An Egyptian who left Islam to become a Christian and consequently lost his wife, children and business is waiting to see if the government will now take away his freedom for 'defaming' Islam. Ashraf Thabet, 45, is charged with defaming a revealed religion. The charges stem from Thabet's six-year search for spiritual meaning that eventually led him to become a Christian. During his search he shared his doubts about Islam and told others what he was learning about Jesus Christ. Local religious authorities, incensed at Thabet's ideas, notified Egypt's State Security Intelligence service, and he was arrested and charged with defamation. If found guilty he would face up to five years in jail. But because prosecutors have made no move to try the case, Thabet lives in limbo and is subject to a regular barrage of death threats from his community in northeast Egypt. Read the full story at <http://www.christianpost.com/region/egypt/> For insights to aid prayer for Egyptian Christians click the 'info' button.

Pray: for God's purposes for Thabet to be fulfilled as He comforts, directs and protects him. (Ps.119:86)

Info: <http://www.prayer-alert.net/info/Egypt1.pdf>

■ Egypt attempts to convict Christian to justify Muslim riots

The high profile criminal trial of 21-year-old Christian Girgis Baroumi accused of sexually assaulting a Muslim girl, is viewed by the Christian community as an example of the Egyptian government, Attorney General, Interior Minister and Parliament Speaker using him as a scapegoat to justify Muslim assaults on Christians in 2009. On December 13th the criminal court witnessed another stormy session when Baroumi's defence team withdrew from the trial in protest over the court's rejection of several requests vital to prove the defendant's innocence. The prosecution is using religious language during the proceedings saying, 'those who cause sectarian strife ought to be killed or crucified'.

Pray: for religious discrimination in the criminal justice system of Egypt to be removed. (Ps.11:7)

More: http://english.freecopts.net/english//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1172&Itemid=9

■ Sudan: January 9 referendum vote

The UN is preparing for a possible 2.8 million displaced people if fighting breaks out over southern Sudan's independence referendum. In two weeks voters in the south decide whether to remain with the Khartoum-based north, or more likely, to secede and create the world's newest country. Tensions are high over the vote. Aircraft from the Islamic northern Sudanese military have bombed areas in the Christian south or near disputed north-south borders in recent weeks. The UN report said both the northern and southern militaries had been rearming and many southerners possessed guns and light weapons. In a 'vision' statement posted on the internet, the Muslim Brotherhood of Sudan said allowing South Sudan to be independent was a crime. They vowed to punish Christians if this takes place. The people are worried that whatever the referendum results a civil war could be ignited. If the South remains part of Sudan the voting accuracy will be questioned.

Pray: against rigging of votes, a peaceful outcome and for Christians to have no fear for the future. (Ps.112:7)

More: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ukpress/article/ALeqM5hQMq8cf9gXeZ8B2Yb-2wA8SRWxNA?docId=N0273301292983691912A>

■ Iran: Pastor facing death sentence

Yousef Nadarkhani, a father of two and an Iranian pastor was arrested in October 2009 after he objected to the teaching of Islam to Christian children in schools and he has been held in prison ever since and sentenced to death for apostasy - even though this is not a crime under the country's penal code. His wife Fatemeh Passandideh was arrested in June 2010, and sentenced to life in prison. But praise God she was released on appeal in October. Youcef was born to Muslim parents and accepted no religion before becoming a Christian aged 19. His case is seen as part of a growing campaign against Christians involved in the house church movement in Iran. The pastor will become the first person in 20 years to be executed for apostasy in Iran unless the sentence is overturned.

Pray: for the international community to pressurise the Iranian judiciary to uphold its own law and set Youcef free. (Ps.36:6)

More: <https://barabasfund.org/UK/News/News-analysis/Pastor-facing-death-sentence-in-Iran.html>

■ Vietnam: Authorities stop Protestant Christmas events

In a central government crackdown on Protestant Christianity in Vietnam, hundreds of Christians from 10 northern provinces were locked out of a Christmas celebration due to take place on December 19th when police locked the doors and sent them away. Some of the deeply disappointed Christians began singing and praying in front of the building. Police moved in,

striking some with fists and night sticks in the melee that followed. Video clips of the action were posted online by Monday Dec. 20th. Christian leaders calmed the crowd, which eventually left, but not before at least six people – including the Rev. Nguyen Huu Bao, the scheduled speaker – were arrested. Similar incidents occurred on Dec. 19 in at least four other places throughout the country. As Christmas Day approaches, it appears the 400,000 Protestants in unregistered churches will be denied celebrating together.

Pray: for those beaten and wounded to know God's comfort and healing and for officials to see Christians in a positive light and no threat to their authority. (Is.9:6)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/vietnam/30101>

■ Israel: Children forgoing meals due to economic status

More than half of the country's children living below the poverty line went without at least one meal a day over the past year due to their families' economic difficulties. Based on data collected from more than 100 food aid charities countrywide and on in-depth interviews with individuals and families living below the poverty line, the organization's Alternative Poverty Report for 2010 shows 55% of the estimated 850,300 children in this category had to forgo a nutritious meal every day because of their families' economic status. This is an increase of 38% over the previous year. During the past 10 years poverty has significantly increased; more than 15,000 families joined the ranks of the poor in 2009, and overall 435,100 families – 1,774,800 Israelis – lived below the poverty line in 2009. For those living below the poverty line recession or economic growth makes little difference in their troubled lives, the poor are abandoned and neglected.

Pray: for the gap between rich and poor to decrease and for the poor in Israel to have a voice. (Ex.23:6)

More: <http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=200513>

■ USA: Government inaction on asylum seekers

They came to the USA seeking protection from persecution in their home country but have been caught up in what some are calling an 'Alice in Wonderland' situation. In one case a young man from South Sudan trying for years to get permanent residence in the USA was denied sanctuary because of his possible ties to a terrorist organization. The tie is the time he was held at a Sudanese rebel army's training camp for a month after being abducted as a child. He escaped and resettled in the U.S. but his case remains on hold. Human rights groups argue provisions in immigration are overly broad. Others who have been placed in the terrorist category include doctors who assisted the wounded and were unaware that the patients were terrorists and women who were forced to feed terrorists at the threat of their lives.

Pray: that the United States continues to be a beacon of freedom and hope for those seeking asylum. (Lev.19:15)

More: <http://au.christiantoday.com/article/us-evangelicals-human-rights-group-decry-government-inaction-on-asylum-seekers/9848.htm>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Cumbria Police payout for arrest of Christian

In a second similar case in recent days, a Christian street preacher has won £7,000 plus costs from Cumbria Police in settlement for a claim of wrongful arrest, unlawful imprisonment and breach of his human rights. The police have accepted they acted unlawfully. Mr Mcalpine was preaching from the Bible in Workington town centre on 20 April 2010. His sermon contained no mention of homosexuality. When he finished he was approached by Police Community Support Officer, Sam Adams. Even though Mr Mcalpine had never mentioned homosexuality, PCSO Adams warned him that he could be arrested if he made homophobic remarks. Mr Mcalpine replied that he was not homophobic, but he sometimes preaches that homosexual conduct is a sin because that is what the Bible says. Uniformed police officers were called to the scene and wrongly informed Mr Mcalpine that 'it is against the law' to describe homosexual conduct as a sin. (See Prayer Alert 1910)

Praise: that this will provide clarification for the police and all those involved in such matters leaving preachers unhindered in future. (Pr.1:5)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/cumbria-police-payout-for-arrest-of-christian/>

■ Non-stop prayer transforming Arizona

The 'Torch' is a non stop prayer journey across Arizona that has impacted all levels of society, bringing unity and decimating crime rates. It was launched on Dec. 31st 2008 by 15 people from 13 churches committed to fill 2009 with continual prayer by 52 prayer teams each covering one week of non stop prayer within their community of churches. As one team finished their week of prayer a person from the host church travelled to the next host location passing on a cheap camping lantern. The new hosts started their week with the lantern and a time of worship and sharing stories of what God has done and is doing. This non stop prayer continued through the following two years. The police report amazing crime rate decrease and the churches have seen incredible fruit including salvations, deliverances, new jobs and family reconciliations. The Torch will have been in almost 40 cities by the end of 2010

Praise: to God for the faith and perseverance of the team and may God continue to birth new prayer initiatives in the coming year. (Mk.9:23)

More: <http://www.24-7prayer.com/features/1409>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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