

PRAYER ALERT...

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

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Police ban Bible from Christian café

Police in Lancashire have told the owner of a Christian café to stop displaying Bible texts on a video screen, because it breaches public order laws. Officers attended the Salt & Light Coffee House on Layton Road, Blackpool, on Monday 19 September, following a complaint about 'insulting' and 'homophobic' material. The café's owner, Mr Jamie Murray, says the officers did not specify which texts had caused the offence. The Bible texts are displayed on a TV screen at the back of the café. Mr Murray uses a set of DVDs called the Watchword Bible that cycle through the whole of the New Testament verse by verse. Mr Murray is being supported by The Christian Institute, a national charity that defends the religious liberty of Christians. There is widespread concern that the police are misusing the law to clamp down on words or material that others may find 'insulting'. Civil rights groups worry about the impact on free speech.

Pray: for the police action in this case to be overturned in court as an infringement of free speech. (Pr.4:5)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/video-police-ban-bible-from-christian-cafe/>

■ Stars attack BBC over politically correct 'drive'

The BBC is facing a backlash from leading presenters over suggestions that they should use 'religiously neutral' terms instead of 'BC' or 'AD' to avoid causing non-Christians offence. Guidance from the broadcaster's ethics specialists suggested that the modern phrases 'common era' and 'before common era' should be considered as potential replacements for Anno Domini and Before Christ. The proposal caused consternation among Christian traditionalists and some of the corporation's most famous names, who promised to ignore the idea. James Naughtie, the presenter of BBC Radio 4's Today programme, said: 'Nobody has suggested this to me, and if they do, they will get a pithy answer. His fellow Today presenter, John Humphrys, said he did not see 'a problem' with using BC and AD, as the terms were 'clearly understood' by most audiences. During his Sunday morning political programme on BBC1, Andrew Marr said that he would also continue to use the traditional date descriptions.

Pray: for the BBC to concentrate on broadcasting rather than to try and undermine internationally held convention. (Ec.3:11)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/8788038/Stars-attack-BBC-over-politically-correct-drive.html>

■ Morality still matters

Nearly half of people are prepared to change their vote for moral reasons. The personal moral standards of politicians and journalists still matter to most of the population, a ComRes poll for think tank Theos has found. The poll is featured in the Party Conference issue of Total Politics. 43% of people would change their vote if their local candidate was shown to have low personal moral standards, and even more (52%) would change the newspaper they buy because of the immoral behaviour of journalists. The majority of people (71%) think that politicians ought to have higher moral standards than the public they serve, and those most likely to vote (the elderly) have higher expectations than most. On balance, people do not believe you can divorce public from private morality. A majority of people believe that 'If a politician is unfaithful to their husband or wife it does affect their job as it shows they cannot keep their word' (51% agreeing vs. 36% disagreeing).

Pray: that morality and integrity would be considered essential for our politicians and a guide for a vote. (Jas.1:21)

More: http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/Morality_Still_Matters.aspx?ArticleID=4799&PageID=14&RefPageID=5

■ X Factor in hot water again

The X Factor was embroiled in a fresh sleaze row after screening raunchy scenes from a contestants' drink-fuelled party before the watershed. The ITV1 show was accused of 'not taking its responsibilities seriously' after it featured scenes of bikini-clad youngsters getting drunk, kissing intimately and frolicking in a hot tub. The footage, which was broadcast on Saturday at 8.15pm, was filmed over the summer during a welcome party for 186 contestants at the show's so-called Bootcamp stage. Last night, Vivienne Pattison, director of Mediawatch, said: 'A couple of weeks ago Simon Cowell was making out there wasn't going to be a re-run of the Rhianna and Christina Aguilera scenes last year. 'But they have to take their responsibilities seriously - because they are not at the moment. They also have a duty of care to the kids, not just on the show, but also those watching at home.' See also: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsvideo/celebrity-news-video/8792817/Rihanna-ordered-to-cover-up-in-music-video-appearance.html>

Pray: against this continued flow of sleaze on our airwaves. (Dt.31:29b)

More: http://www.mediawatchuk.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=452&Itemid=117

■ Medical Council to continue case against Christian doctor

A GMC Investigatory Committee has decided to continue to pursue the case against Dr Richard Scott, the Kent GP accused by a patient of sharing his faith in a one-to-one consultation, despite the witness not being at the hearing and showing an 'unconditional disinclination to attend'. The case has now been temporarily adjourned by the GMC's Investigatory Committee whilst another attempt is made to get the complainant to attend. With no witness at the hearing this week, Dr Scott was not able to cross-examine and challenge the evidence of the complainant on what was allegedly said between the two individuals in the consulting room. Concerns have been raised that without the chance to cross-examine, any doctor would be made extremely vulnerable to allegations. (See Prayer Alert 21-2011)

Pray: for Dr Scott and pray that the GMC would be granted true wisdom. (Ps.89:21-22)

More: <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/religious-freedom/gmc-medical-council-case-dr-richard-scott>

■ Tackling poverty and injustice in York

Backed by the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, the Fairness Commission has been launched in an effort to ensure the wellbeing of every resident in the city and to ensure no-one is left out of a job. Dr Sentamu opened the first of a series of public meetings for the new organisation this week. The meeting gave an opportunity for key stakeholders across the city to give their views. The Archbishop said that a society can be judged by how it looks after the poor and vulnerable. He added, 'I am so encouraged by the establishment of this Fairness Commission for York – and so proud to be its patron. Indeed, it is a great privilege to be asked to open this 'Fairness debate' in this great city of ours. As our country goes through tough economic times we need to remember that not all in our society are greatly privileged.'

Pray: for the Commission, all who will contribute to it and the success of its work. (Job.5:16)

More: <http://www.archbishopofyork.org/articles.php/2182/archbishop-opens-first-public-meeting-for-fairness-commission>

■ Bishops demand national 'safety net' to protect child runaways

Police, teachers and councils are failing to protect tens of thousands of children who run away from home every year and face drug abuse or sexual exploitation on the streets, Church of England bishops have warned. In a letter published in The Daily Telegraph, 33 bishops are backing a campaign calling on ministers to introduce a national 'safety net' to protect runaways from harm. More than one in 10 children in the UK runs away before they reach the age of 16, with 100,000 fleeing their homes every year, but most are never reported missing. Many runaways are forced to leave by their parents or are attempting to escape abusive homes. The campaign, organised by The Children's Society, a leading charity, calls for a national action plan to ensure that schools, police, councils and health services prioritise the safety of child runaways.

Pray: for ministers to adopt the proposal for a national safety net as outlined by the bishops. (Mk.10:16)

More: <http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/2011/09/26/bishops-demand-national-safety-net-to-protect-child-runaways/>

EUROPE

■ Poland: Archbishop calls for divine intervention during EU crisis

The Polish government prayed for the health of the EU on Sunday at a special 'EU Mass' in Warsaw. 'The construction of a European union of countries, people and nations can become permanent not on the basis of a joint economy and foreign policy, but mainly on the basis of spiritual unity and common values,' Archbishop Jozef Kowalczyk said in his homily to a congregation including Poland's foreign minister. The Archbishop also prayed for Poland's EU presidency saying, 'We commend unto God the Polish presidency in the EU Council. It is a great undertaking, challenge and opportunity for our executive powers, and our whole society.' The call for divine intervention came as the Euro fell to an eight-month low and US president Barack Obama told a public meeting in Mountain View, California, that the debt crisis in Europe is 'scaring the world' Source: <http://euobserver.com/1016/113745>

Pray: for God to use the EU as a force for good in the world. (Ps.2:1)

More: <http://www.thenews.pl/1/12/Artykul/55788,Archbishop-calls-for-divine-intervention-during-EU-crisis>

■ Germany: Pope leaves Germany after calling for renewal

Pope Benedict has ended a visit to his native Germany with a call for spiritual renewal among the German people. The pope drew hundreds of thousands to services during his trip, including a final Mass Sunday that attracted about 100,000 people to an airfield beside the airport in the southern city of Freiburg. During the four-day visit, he also addressed parliament and met with victims of clerical abuse. In his parting words before leaving for Rome, Benedict wished Germans

'strength and confidence' in their faith. He said even those who doubt God's existence 'are closer to the kingdom of God than believers whose faith is routine and who regard the church merely as an institution.' The Catholic church in Germany lost 181,000 members after last year's clerical abuse scandal there.

Pray: for God's Holy Spirit to flood the nation with His power and renewal. (Tit.3:4-6)

More: <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/shows/cwn/Religion-Roundup/#8>

WORLDWIDE

■ Israel settlement plans condemned

The European Union and the United States have condemned Israeli plans for the construction of 1,100 new housing units in occupied East Jerusalem as being counterproductive to negotiations on peace talks with the Palestinians. They responded sharply to the Israeli interior ministry's announcement on Tuesday that it had approved plans for the new housing units in Gilo, an illegal settlement enclave in southeast Jerusalem. The ministry said construction could begin after a mandatory 60-day period for public comment, a process that is largely a formality. Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, said that the settlement plans were 'counter-productive to our efforts to resume direct negotiations between the parties'. Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, condemned the Israeli decision, saying it amounted to '1,100 no's to the resumption of peace talks'. He urged the US to change its position and support the Palestinians in their quest for full UN membership.

Pray: for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian situation, with acceptable boundaries and a lasting cease-fire. (2Ch.7:14).

More: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/09/201192851113137636.html>

■ Egypt: 100,000 Christians have left since March

In a pattern that follows the exodus of Christians from several Middle Eastern countries a reported 100,000 Coptic believers have left Egypt since the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak. The report on emigration of Christians was sent to the Egyptian cabinet and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces warning that this emigration has been prompted by the escalating intimidation and attacks on Christians by Islamists. Emigrating Copts from professional and business classes are not prompted by their need for work, but from fear of the hard line Salafists. Constitutional amendments and Salafist intention to implement Hudud laws (Sharia-based punishments, which include capital punishment by sword/crucifixion, stoning, amputation and flogging). Copts also have to pay the jizya (tax paid by non-Muslims to the state) because they are not first class citizens and can never enjoy full citizenship rights, or obtain sensitive posts. Also churches are being attacked and Christians killed.

Pray: for protection and provision for Egyptian Copts and through a future of hope within a democratic constitution. (Pr.23:15)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2011/s11090177.htm>

■ Tunisia: Muslim bid to turn Christian site into a mosque

A Muslim group of about 20 attempted to take over a Christian basilica in Tunisia – a sign of the growing threat to the country's small Church in the wake of the revolution. On 16th Sept the group went to the Roman site with the aim of turning it into a mosque, arguing that it was a place of Muslim worship before it reverted to a basilica in 1966. A spokesman said the group went there to prepare the place for Friday prayers but police dispersed them. They were invited to make an official request to the faith ministry but as things stand the monument remains a basilica. The incident is a worrying sign of what may befall Tunisia's small Christian community if the country's future is shaped by an Islamic agenda, as seems likely. There is increasing public imposition of Islam in the country - forced veiling of women, forced prayer and condemnations for apostasy.

Pray: for God to prevail over Tunisia's transition to democracy and the constitutional assembly that will be elected on 25th October. (Is.25:3,4a)

More: <http://www.barnabasfund.org/UK/News/News-analysis/Muslim-bid-to-turn-Christian-site-into-a-mosque-in-Tunisia.html>

■ Laos: Officials convert church into school

Authorities in Laos forcibly confiscated a church building in Savannakhet Province on Sept. 14th 'because the church didn't apply for a building permit'. The authorities generally ignore a lack of building permit if religious groups cause no problems. Officials posted soldiers on guard, moved in desks and chairs and converted the 212-member congregation's building into a government school. Christians are no longer allowed onto the property. The confiscation of Dongpaiwan church came after officials in a neighbouring village evicted ten Christians from shelters they had built on their rice paddies. They could only return if they gave up their faith. Forced renunciations of faith along with detentions, surveillance, harassment and confiscation of property has kept Laos on the 'watch list' of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom and clearly identified ethnic minority Protestants in Laos as the primary target of such violations.

Pray: for the Lord to strengthen Laotian Christians, show them the way forward and miraculously provide for their needs. (Is.33:2)

More: http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/laos/article_120877.html

■ Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek minister calls for Kyrgyz violence probe

In an address to the UN General Assembly Uzbekistan's deputy prime minister and foreign minister said ethnic tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz will not be resolved until there is a full investigation into last year's clashes between the two sides and perpetrators of bloodshed are punished. A statement issued on Sept 26th said it was 'a serious challenge to peace and stability in the Central Asian region, with no legal or political steps taken so far towards those who ordered, organised and perpetrated last year's violence.' More than 400 people were killed in fighting between ethnic Uzbeks and

Kyrgyz in the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, while an estimated 375,000 were displaced from their homes. Most victims were ethnic Uzbeks.

Pray: for thorough investigations into the bloodshed, workable resolutions to ethnic conflict, and healing for the emotionally and spiritually wounded. (Ps.103:6)

More: http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan_uzbekistan_ethnic_violence_un/24341036.html

■ USA: Couple fined for holding Bible study in own home

Chuck and Stephanie Fromm have been fined for holding Bible studies in their home in Southern California. According to City officials they are in violation of a municipal code prohibiting 'religious, fraternal or non-profit' organisations in residential neighbourhoods without a permit. Without warning they were fined in May, then again in June, for \$300 dollars and appeals were denied because they need a 'Conditional Use Permit.' Without the permit they face \$500 for each additional gathering. A conditional use permit is costly and difficult to obtain as it requires traffic and environmental impact reports and making the home accessible to wheelchairs. The President of the Pacific Justice Institute said, 'Informal gathering in a home cannot be treated with suspicion by the government just because it is religious. We cannot allow this to happen in America, and we will fight as long and as hard as it takes to restore this group's religious freedom.'

Pray: for common sense to prevail and for God to use this situation positively for the community. (Ps.11:7)

More: <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/religious-freedom/american-couple-fined-for-holding-bible-study-in-own-home>

■ Indonesia: Church attacked by suicide bomber

A suicide bomber attacked a church packed with hundreds of worshippers in Solo, Central Java, Indonesia, on Sunday, killing himself and wounding at least 20 other people. The church is one of Saddleback Church Pastor Rick Warren's sister churches and the pastor posted a notice on his Facebook page reading, 'Purpose Driven Network Alert - Our sister church in Solo City, Indonesia, Bethel Full Gospel Church, has just been bombed.' A Muslim suicide bomber, whose identity has not been revealed, was responsible for the attack. The site also says some news reports indicate 27 people were injured in the blast - one critically. Others put the number as high as 30 people. Indonesia's President called the attack 'terrorism.' The city of Solo is also radical Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Bashir's hometown. Bashir is considered the spiritual leader for the group that killed more than 200 people in Bali in 2002, according to media reports.

Pray: for spiritual, physical, and emotional protection for the millions of Indonesian Christians. (Mal.4:2)

More: <http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue14046.html>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Argentina: Churches celebrate the 'month of the Bible'

In Argentina, as in many Latin American countries, September is a month to celebrate the Bible. Churches coordinate lectures, workshops and conferences for youth, according to a news release from the World Council of Churches (WCC). 'Spending a month each year focusing on the Bible helps us to affirm the Word as an essential nutrient to our faith and our commitment to life and justice,' said Pastor Gerardo Oberman, from the Reformed Churches of Argentina associated with the Evangelical Church of the River Plate, the WCC reported. 'The overall experience has different local nuances, but we are also motivated by the spirit of the Reformation in which one of the main slogans was the Sola Scriptura - that is, salvation by Scripture alone,' said Oberman. September activities help believers 'remember the centrality of the Word of God and highlight the work of Bible societies', said Bishop Nully Frank Brown of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina.

Praise: God for His living word and pray that it will take root in the peoples. (Col.2:7)

More: <http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=5150>

■ Support for those threatened for defending marriage

The National Organization for Marriage announced that it is launching the Marriage Anti-Defamation Alliance, a new project to defend the freedom to express one's belief that marriage should be the union of a man and woman without fear of harassment or punishment, reports Catholic News Agency. 'My sense is that there are too many of us who believe that marriage is the union of husband and wife to stigmatize or marginalize if we come together,' said Maggie Gallagher, co-founder of National Organization for Marriage. Gallagher told CNA that the Alliance was created in response to 'increased reports, both public and private, of people whose livelihoods are being threatened because they disagree with gay marriage. Gay marriage advocates are seeking to create an America in which decent, loving, law-abiding Americans are afraid to stand up for the idea that marriage is the union of husband and wife, for fear of reprisals,' she said.

Praise: God for this new American initiative and pray that it will be picked up by other marriage organisations worldwide. (Heb.13:4)

More: <http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue14052.html>

PRAYER FORUM OF THE BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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C/O World Prayer Centre, Cornerstone House, 5 Ethel Street, Birmingham, B2 4BG, England