

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Britain should be more Christian

The only Muslim Cabinet minister has said Britain should become more Christian. Writing in The Telegraph, Baroness Warsi suggested it was OK for Christians to be proud of their religion and that having a strong faith identity could help people to better understand people of other faiths. 'We need to create a country where people don't feel like they have to leave religion at the door. That means being proud of Christianity, not downgrading it,' she said. 'It means encouraging people to say that their faith inspires what they do. It means supporting religious charities in delivering public services in schools, hospices and rehabilitation.' Lady Warsi's message will be assuring to many Christians who have felt under increasing pressure in recent years to keep their faith private, while others have perceived a tendency towards respect for Muslims and intolerance towards Christians. Lady Warsi suggested that Christians should not feel they have to water down their faith.

Pray: for God to give the Christian Church and its members greater confidence to proclaim the faith. (Heb.10:35)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/muslim.minister.says.britain.should.be.more.christian/28832.htm>

■ Gay couples to be allowed ceremonies in church

Lynne Featherstone, the equalities minister, will say that the ban on the ceremonies in religious surroundings will be lifted on Dec 5. The move has been championed by David Cameron but is likely to be opposed by some church groups. The scheme will be 'voluntary' with no church compelled to offer same-sex services. However, it is likely that some campaigners will seek to push the matter further if churches refuse to open their doors to gay couples. It is estimated that about 1,500 civil partnerships a year would take place in religious settings once the ban is lifted. There are currently about 5,500 civil partnerships taking place every year. Liberal Jewish groups, Quakers and other minor Christian organisations have lobbied for the right to host civil partnerships with religious readings and hymns. However, the Church of England has warned that it would not bless same-sex couples.

Pray: that the Church would hold fast to God's guidance as laid down in His Word. (1Tim.1:9-11)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/8863802/Gay-couples-to-be-allowed-civil-ceremonies-in-church.html>

■ CAB dumps former SNP chief for traditional marriage views

Former leader of the Scottish National Party, Gordon Wilson, has been suspended from the board of Dundee Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) – because of his support for traditional marriage. Earlier this month Mr Wilson responded to a Government consultation on redefining marriage, saying he was opposed to the idea. He said: 'You attack the building block of society at your peril' and he called for a referendum on the issue. But expressing his beliefs appear to have cost him his position at Dundee CAB – a group that offers free advice to the public about legal rights. At yesterday's annual general meeting of Dundee CAB, members blocked his re-election as one of twelve directors. Mr Wilson was accused of being anti-equality and a total of 21 members voted against his re-election. At the meeting he pointed out the irony that CAB receives taxpayers money for tackling religious discrimination.

Pray: for Mr Wilson and praise his courage to speak out. Also pray for the CAB to recognise the double standards they are operating and to reconsider their action. (Dt.31:6)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/cab-dumps-former-snp-chief-for-traditional-marriage-views/>

■ Senior bishop criticises proposed changes to planning rules

The Bishop of Ripon and Leeds, the Rt Rev John Packer, warned that the rules would allow developments when councils had not set out local plans, which would make clear where building can take place. His intervention is the first time that a senior cleric has entered the dispute over the Government's National Planning Policy Framework. The framework distils 1,300 pages of planning guidance into as few as 52, and writes in a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. Groups including the National Trust fear this will allow developers to build on large parts of the countryside. The bishop criticised the draft rules during a House of Lords debate. He said: 'Just because no one has thought about a proposal before does not mean that it should automatically be granted. A default answer of 'yes' seems to be dangerous in legislation and could well lead to problems in, for example, the proper provision of affordable housing.'

Pray: for the Government to build in safeguards to address the concerns of many who seek to protect townscapes and countryside. (Ps.72:3)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/hands-off-our-land/8856858/Senior-bishop-criticises-proposed-changes-to-planning-rules.html>

■ Church ready to sell internet holdings

The Church of England may withdraw the millions it has invested in internet companies unless they take action to curb internet pornography. Senior officials are conducting a wide-ranging review of the Church's holdings in Internet Service Providers (ISP), which are worth tens of millions. A Church spokesman said that its Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) was considering new guidelines on pornography, which address the ease in which hardcore sexual images can be viewed through modern media. The review, which is expected to be concluded in the coming months, will recommend how part of the Church's £5.3 billion portfolio should be invested in relation to Internet companies. The Church refuses to invest in firms that fuel problems against which Christians campaign. According to Church documents, the criterion for investing in media companies is that they have a 'positive influence on society by educating, entertaining and uplifting individual experience'.

Pray: for the Church, through the EIAG, to bring its influence to combat the evil that pervades electronic media. (Ps.34:16)

More: <http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/>

■ New consortium to equip Christians in social media

HCJB Global and Feba UK have joined forces to equip Christians with new media skills and resources that will help them reach non-Christians more effectively. They hope other Christian organisations will join the OneSheep consortium and pool their know-how and experience towards researching and developing new ways of communicating the Gospel through social media. Part of the research will look at how young people are consuming and communicating via social media. Projects that impact un-reached and limited-access people groups will be prioritised, the organisations say. Social media content to emerge from the consortium will be published on a dedicated website, www.onesheep.org. The organisations will also work together on providing mentoring and training on the use of new media and how it can be used to link online and offline ministry. 'Working together is far more effective than working alone,' said Wayne Pederson, president of HCJB Global.

Pray: that this new initiative will lead to a unity of like minded organisations. (Jn.17:22)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/new-consortium.to.equip.christians.in.social.media/28842.htm>

■ Tatchell defends demoted Christian

Human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell has come to the defence of a Christian housing manager who was demoted over remarks he made on Facebook opposing same-sex marriages. (See Prayer Alert 43-2011) This is the fourth time that Tatchell has come to the defence of Christians who have become embroiled in controversy. Last year he spoke in defence of Dale McAlpine a street preacher. He also opposed the prosecutions of Harry Hammond and Shawn Holes. In the latest case, Adrian Smith, a Christian, was found guilty of gross misconduct by the publicly funded Trafford Housing Trust saying that allowing gay weddings in churches was 'an equality too far'. Also at the weekend another gay rights group criticised Trafford Housing Trust and urged the Trust to give Mr Smith his job back. The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, said: 'Trafford Housing may have acted with the best of intentions here, but we believe they have overreacted.'

Pray: with thanks for those who have spoken out against the overreaction by many under the guise of equality and that Adrian Smith would redeem his rightful seniority. (Ps.66:1-3)

More: <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/15636>

EUROPE

■ Greek bailout vote reignites euro crisis

European stocks have fallen sharply in trading after George Papandreou, the Greek prime minister, called for a national referendum on a eurozone-backed rescue package for his country's debt-crippled economy. Papandreou's call for a referendum raised the prospect that Greeks, a majority of whom oppose crippling austerity cuts which have been a precondition for international bailout funds according to polls, will derail the rescue efforts agreed by European leaders last week that would provide a \$140bn loan to Athens and write off half of the country's debt. There is concern that the referendum would be unlikely to take place before January, creating months of uncertainty for the markets. The announcement has taken other European leaders by surprise, ahead of the G20 summit in Cannes, France, this week. In Germany, a member of Angela Merkel's centre-right coalition said the news of the referendum gave the impression that Greece was trying to backtrack on its deal with EU leaders.

Pray: for the EU as it seeks a solution for the financial problems that are troubling them, especially the Greek situation. (Pro.3:13)

More: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2011/11/201111182840767842.html>

■ **Protests start ahead of G20 summit**

Politicians are facing pressure from the streets ahead of this week's G20 summit. The city of Nice has already been the venue of one big demonstration. One local woman said: 'We just want the poor of the planet to be taken into account, and for everything that happens on a global level to take human rights into account.' Protest groups say they are determined to make their voices heard. A man from Spain said: 'While we're political we are non-partisan, and we're not anti-system, we're anti-capitalist. We believe that there are good politicians as there are good policies, of course there are. What is happening is that the 'bad' ones are the ones who have a lot of power.' Security has been stepped up ahead of the summit, with hundreds of extra police officers on duty. Protesters from numerous countries are descending on the French Riviera.

Pray: that the current problems in the EU will not dominate the G20 meeting but allow for open discussion. (Pro.13:10)

More: <http://www.euronews.net/2011/11/01/protests-start-ahead-of-g20-summit-in-cannes/>

WORLDWIDE

■ **Afghanistan/Pakistan: Christian NGOs are targeted**

A brother in India received from a reliable source information issued on 17th October warning that the Taliban will be especially targeting Christian NGOs, organizations and believers. Please continue to pray for divine protection for all God's people throughout this region. Pray for signs and wonders, for a Spirit of Revelation for those who are so blindly bent on hatred and persecution.

Pray: the Lord will give His people every place where they set their feet, that no one will be able to stand against the purposes of God in the region. (Jos.1:2-6)

■ **Iran: Authorities attempt to corrupt Christianity**

Iran is spending large amounts of money to counteract and confuse the Christianity that is spreading among Iranian youth. Haghghat-e-sabz-e-Gilan was formed to 'identify religious teachings about both Islam and Christianity' and to be 'responsive to religious questions.' The office of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Gilan province's concern for the youth prompted a series of conferences 'The Journey from Christianity to Islam' with speeches by converts from Christianity to Islam. They are also establishing an Islamic internet radio station called 'Voice of Christ' with the intention of deceptively using Christ's name to fight against Christianity. The station will answer questions about Christianity and targets Farsi speaking countries of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The programmes will be broadcast in the Gilaki dialect (dialect of the people of Gilan) and the Taleshi dialect (the local language of the people in northwest Iran).

Pray: that not one Gilaki, Taleshi or Farsi speaking searcher will be deceived and for seekers to hear the truth through Christian broadcasts. (Ps.119:17-19)

More: http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3197:iranian-religious-authorities-deceive-youth-by-fighting-christianity-with-the-name-of-christ&catid=36:iranian-christians&Itemid=279

■ **Gaza Strip and West Bank: Christianity**

The economy is improving in the Gaza Strip, but many families are trapped in a cycle of poverty and hopelessness. Missile attacks carried out by Hamas against Israel also continue to plague this territory - with Israel retaliating and causing damage to buildings and lives. Persecution by radical Muslims is a great challenge for Christians who are a minority of the population, however, Christian humanitarian aid workers report, 'the Lord is moving in the Gaza Strip. The tremendous need is bringing a great openness to the Gospel.' More than 90% of the residents in the West Bank are Arab and mostly Muslim. The percentage of Christians is very small and they too face persecution for their faith. However, according to Operation World, 'the number of evangelicals has grown into the thousands. They are persevering and praying for a great harvest of souls despite Islamic intimidation.'

Pray: for peace and unity between Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews, and for those who have been misled by Islam so they won't have the opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel. (Ps.133:1-2; 2Cor.4:4)

More: <http://win1040.com/page.php?id=541>

■ **Libya: Christians keep low profile**

Following last week's announcement that 'Islamic Sharia Law will be the basis for the country's new government.' (See Prayer Alert 43-2011) Open Doors report, 'For now the small minority of local Libyan Christians will continue to keep a low profile.' While Gadhafi was in power Christians were apprehensive and didn't know whom they could trust. If they shared with a friend or relative that they had become a Christian, they might go to the security service or would even take action themselves. In addition to the few local Christians, there are many foreign Christians from sub-Saharan African countries who became targets for revenge attacks, because they were thought to be mercenaries. It is not very likely that the situation for the Christians will quickly change. Christians are asking for humanitarian aid, Christian literature and Bibles.

Pray: that God will protect and strengthen our brothers and sisters in Libya and release many Christian NGOs to help rebuild the nation. (Is.32:17-18)

More: <http://www.opendoorsusa.org/pray/prayer-updates/2011/October/Libyan-Christians-Keeping-Low-Profile-after->

■ **Vietnam: The harvest field**

Repression of all types of freedom continues, drug addiction, AIDS, prostitution and exploitation of children are common and the land has seen great violence. In spite of repression of religious, economic and political freedoms the Church continues to grow, although it is still small. Please pray that the government will lift harsh restrictions on religious activities

and give a free reign to pastors and believers in the registered churches. Unregistered churches are harassed with meetings broken up and leaders arrested. Pray for unity between leaders of registered and unregistered churches. Many pastors are old, and younger churches are often led by those with little opportunity for theological study and are susceptible to error or bias in their teaching; pray for leadership training, study materials, theological books and commentaries to be imported. Christian literature production is strictly monitored, though Bibles are printed and available for purchase in Vietnam. Please pray for increased production and distribution.

Pray: that suitable people will take up the opportunities to work in Vietnam in development and professional work, particularly with the ethnic groups scarcely touched by the Gospel. (Mt.16:18-19)

More: <http://www.operationworld.org/viet#prayer>

■ **Maldives: Fears of religious liberty crackdown**

Police in the Maldives deported Shijo Kokkattu, an Indian teacher, for having a Bible in his house – confirming fears that repressive religious laws are being enforced in the island nation. He was detained for a fortnight, charged with preaching Christianity, then sent home after a police raid on his house. There had been hopes that religious restrictions introduced under the former dictator would not be enforced under President Mohamed Nasheed who is considered to be a progressive Muslim. But new regulations were published in the Government's gazette last month signalling a renewed commitment to enforce legal bans on the 'propagation, display and expression' of any religion other than Islam. Violation of the Act is punishable by imprisonment of up to five years, banishment or house arrest. Foreigners found to be proselytising are to be deported.

Pray: that the Maldivian authorities will yield to calls by World Evangelical Alliance, Compass Direct and others for greater religious freedom. (Ps.74:18-19)

More: <http://www.releaseinternational.org/pages/posts/maldives-teachers-deportation-sparks-fears-of-religious-liberty-crackdown-900.php>

■ **Polynesia: Threat from rising sea levels**

Archbishop Winston Halapua, of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia made a desperate appeal for prayer for the island of Tuvalu in the Pacific. Children roam the streets because their schools have closed due to water shortages. Wells are contaminated by sea water and they are critically short of drinking water. Breadfruit, banana and coconut trees roots are being contaminated by sea water and are dying. They are the main source of food. The Archbishop's concerns about rising sea levels are no longer abstract theory but reality, with no rain forecast for Tuvalu for the next three months. The Archbishop has issued a call to the worldwide church to pray for Tuvalu adding, 'Immediate relief is only a tiny part of the story, the bigger story is this - please do something about climate change.'

Pray: for funding for the Anglican Missions Board as they work with the Church of Tuvalu to provide food and water for the islanders. (Dt.25:4)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/appeal.for.prayer.for.pacific.island.under.threat.from.rising.sea.levels/28845.htm>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ **Mexico: Miraculous multiplication of food**

They had only prepared food for 70 people. But once the service in the prison in Pochutla had started, 200 men joined in. During Operation Mobilization Mexico's outreach in the state of Oaxaca, a group of volunteers realized they hadn't enough food and prayed for God to multiply it. Their prayer was answered. 'I could hardly believe it, but it happened. As we were handing the food out to the inmates, it didn't run out. We even had enough plates and spoons for 200 men!' Source: Jennifer LeClaire, OMI.

Praise: God for He is the God of miracles. (Ps.77:14)

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

■ **UK Soccer Star wants to start prayer group**

According to the Metro newspaper, English premier league player Anton Ferdinand, who is known for his spirituality, explained that at his former club a group of players would get together to pray, and said he hoped he could bring this experience over to Queens Park Rangers. Ferdinand said: 'At Sunderland we had a group who prayed. There was me, Kieran Richardson, Stephane Sessegnon, Asamoah Gyan, John Mensah, Nedum Onuoha. Hopefully I will start building that here.' The Metro reported that the sportsman also revealed his religious background, but said that he didn't appreciate the Church as much as he should have in his younger days. He credited his faith with making him 'more of a man' than he was six years ago. The 26-year-old said that he believes his career is still to peak - great news for Queens Park Rangers.

Praise: God for Ferdinand and his faith: fulfil his wish to draw others close to God. (Ps.6:1-2)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2011/s11100143.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF THE BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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