

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 2 January 2009 - Hope over to us - Romans 12:9-21**

As the year of Hope08 has come to a close.

Pray:

- For continued prayer for the lives of those that we have been praying for during last year, and those that have been touched by Hope08 initiatives throughout 2008.
- That churches will continue to carry the Hope08 vision working together and reaching out into their local communities in practical ways throughout 2009.

More: http://worldprayer.org.uk/uploads/Friday_Focus_Prayer_Points_Jan_2009.doc

■ **Church of England to debate whether Christians should try to convert Muslims**

A discussion on the sensitive topic has been tabled for the next meeting of the Church of England's governing body amid fears that some clergy are ignoring their traditional missionary role. Some members of the General Synod believe Christ ordered all Christians to recruit non-believers and followers of other faiths, and they want to see how many bishops and vicars agree with this view. Among the speakers is likely to be the Bishop of Rochester, the Rt Rev Michael Nazir-Ali, who earlier this year warned that Church leaders had 'gone too far' in their sensitivity towards Muslims and were not doing enough to spread the word of God. At the end of the debate at next February's Synod meeting in London, bishops, clergy and lay members will vote on whether bishops should report to the Synod on 'their understanding of the uniqueness of Christ in multi-faith Britain', and give examples of how the gospel should be shared.

Pray: that General Synod will be open to the Holy Spirit and the guidance of scripture in the forthcoming debate. (Mt.24:14)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/3812363/Church-of-England-to-debate-whether-Christians-should-try-to-convert-Muslims.html>

■ **Fatal stabbings 'at highest level for three decades'**

Fatal stabbings in England and Wales have risen to their highest level in three decades, say the Conservatives. They say police figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show 277 stabbing deaths in 2007-8 - the highest since records began in 1977. Ministers say overall violent crime is falling. The government is announcing plans to make unemployed people caught carrying knives do at least 18 hours' community work a week and face curfews. The Conservatives obtained the crime figures from all police forces in England and Wales, except Bedfordshire. They showed stabbing murders in London rose by a quarter, up from 68 in 2006-7 to 86 last year. In both West Yorkshire and Northumbria fatal stabbings rose from 10 to 15 and in Lancashire deaths more than trebled from four in 2006-7 to 13 last

year, according to the statistics. It is understood the figures may change before their official release in the New Year if the police or the courts decide some homicides should be reclassified.

Pray: that this knife crime culture would cease and grant the authorities wisdom in how to handle the situation. (Pr.12:8)

More: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7802530.stm

■ Bishops hit out at 'immoral' Government

Five bishops from the Church of England have slammed the Labour Government's 11 years in office. The Bishops of Durham, Winchester, Manchester, Carlisle and Hulme said the UK was suffering under family breakdown, debt and a widening gap between rich and poor, and accused the Government of pursuing 'scandalous' policies. The Bishop of Manchester said the Government was 'beguiled by money' and had 'acted scandalously' by encouraging greed and debt. 'This is not just an economic issue, but a moral one,' he said. The Bishop of Hulme said: 'The government isn't telling people who are already deep in debt to stop overextending themselves, but instead is urging us to spend more. That is morally suspect and morally feeble. It is unfair and irresponsible of the government to put pressure on the public to spend in order to revive the economy.' The latest comments follow an extraordinary attack just last week from the Archbishop of Canterbury over the Government's response to the credit crunch.

Pray: for the leaders of the church as they challenge the government over moral issues. (Pr.21:30)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/bishops.hit.out.at.immoral.government/22208.htm>

■ Care home for elderly Christians in gay row

A care home for elderly Christians has had its council funding halted after residents refused to reveal if they were gay, lesbian or bisexual. The pensioners claimed the questionnaire from Brighton & Hove city council asking about sexual orientation – as part of its 'fair access and diversity' policy – was intrusive. When they refused to disclose their sexuality, the council accused the charity responsible for the home of being closed to the gay community and cut a £13,000 grant. Now Pilgrim Homes, which runs 10 projects for elderly Christians across the UK, is suing the council for religious discrimination. Andrew Jessop, the charity's chief executive, said: 'The council has taken overzealousness to the extreme. People in their 90s are very vulnerable and shouldn't be treated in this way.' Brighton & Hove Council criticised the home's response and said because it was based on Christianity, gay people might be deterred from applying for a place.

Pray: for Christians everywhere as they are challenged over faith issues that God will grant them strength and wisdom to stand firm. (Ac.14:22)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/3999004/Care-home-for-elderly-Christians-in-gay-row.html>

■ Alcohol 'toll on young soaring'

The number of young people admitted to hospital with liver disease linked to drinking too much alcohol has soared, government figures for England show. Hospital admissions for alcoholic liver disease among the 18-40 age group rose from 2,967 in 1997-98 to 6,495 in 2006-07. The figures were obtained by Liberal Democrat MP Paul Burstow. A government spokeswoman said ministers were determined to tackle the problem of alcohol misuse. The figures show that among all age groups there were 43,548 hospital admissions in 2006/07 for alcoholic liver disease. Another 27,040 hospital admissions were linked to the toxic effects of alcohol. In addition, there were 158,656 admissions for mental health problems related to drinking, including 6,612 among those aged 17 and under. Mr Burstow said the figures showed that ministers had failed to reduce the harm caused by alcohol. He said: 'These figures expose an iceberg effect where enormous problems are being stored up for the NHS in the future'.

Pray: for our government and authorities that they will recognise some of the regulations they have passed are not helpful in controlling excessive alcohol consumption. (Rev.18:24)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7804896.stm>

EUROPE

■ European Union pushes for Gaza cease-fire

European Union foreign ministers pushed for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip to allow in aid and support a diplomatic process to end the conflict, as Israel stepped up its attack on the Islamic Hamas movement. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said, 'It's urgent in the current critical situation to find ways out of the spiral of violence.' Bloomberg reported the statement was made as foreign ministers from the EU's 27 states gather in Paris to discuss the situation. Israel bombed navy installations and other Hamas bases in Gaza as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert indicated the conflict may broaden. Palestinian officials said. Bloomberg reported at least 360 Palestinians have been killed and 1,400 wounded since Israel started its aerial campaign on Dec. 27, according to the Palestinian emergency services office in Gaza City. Three Israeli civilians and one soldier have died in the rocket attacks that Israeli leaders say the offensive is designed to stop after a six-month cease-fire expired December 19. (See also World entry)

Pray: that the pressure the EU and other nations exert on Israel and Hamas will lead to a speedy ceasefire. (Mt.5:9)

More: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aTkk78F5y6N0>

■ Spain: Massive pro-family rally in Madrid

As part of a huge public outcry a pro-life Mass drew hundreds of thousands of people to central Madrid on Sunday to hear the case for the traditional family. Although city officials and police would not give an official estimate of the number of people present, the Associated Press said the crowd in the Plaza de Colon appeared to number in the hundreds of

thousands. In a message played at the start of the service, Pope Benedict XVI appealed to families to keep their love strong. The Mass was joined by the Archbishop of Madrid, Antonio Maria Rouco Varela, who told the crowd that 'the future of humanity depends on the family, the Christian family'. More than 300 priests, 22 bishops and five more archbishops also attended the Mass. The Roman Catholic Church has been a fierce advocate of the traditional family in the face of Spain's liberal Socialist Government, which has legalized gay civil unions and introduced measures making it easier to divorce.

Pray: that the message of the traditional family will be accepted not only here in Spain but across Europe. (Dt.12:7)

More: http://www.breakingchristiannews.com/articles/display_art.html?ID=6197

WORLDWIDE

■ Gambia: British missionaries jailed for emails

A British couple working as Christian missionaries in Gambia have been jailed for one year with hard labour for sending emails that were critical of the Muslim state. David Fulton, 60, a former Army major, and his wife, Fiona, 46, pleaded guilty to making seditious comments 'with intent to bring hatred or contempt against the president or the government'. Their sentence, in a country which has one of west Africa's worst human rights records, sparked concern after reports that other prisoners on similar charges have been poisoned while in jail. They were sentenced in the capital, Banjul, and will be held at one of Africa's toughest jails, the former colonial penal institute of Mile Two Prison. They were also fined 250,000 Dalasis (£6,500). According to Pastor Martin Speed, of Westthoughton Pentecostal Church in Bolton, who has been campaigning for the Fultons' release, the couple were advised to admit the sedition charge in the hope that the judge might show leniency. (See Prayer Alert 5008, 5108)

Pray: for the Fulton's as they face this sentence and pray that the authorities even now will show leniency. (2Cor.2:6-7)

More: http://www.theway.co.uk/news/shownews.php?news_id=6555

■ Palestine: Gaza violence goes into sixth day

Violence has continued in the Gaza Strip for a sixth day, after calls for a UN-backed ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian militants foundered. Since the Israeli air offensive began on Saturday air attacks have targeted Hamas security compounds, government buildings, smuggling tunnels under the border with Egypt and homes belonging to militant leaders. Israel reported over 300 rockets fired by Hamas, some landed in Beersheba, some 40km inside Israel. A draft UN resolution put forward by Egypt and Libya failed after the US and UK complained that it called on Israel to end its air assaults but made no mention of Hamas rocket attacks, which they say started the latest hostilities. Palestinian officials say over 400 Palestinians have died in the Israeli air strikes; a number of Israelis have also been killed by rockets fired from Gaza. The Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem has expressed his dismay at the latest conflict to hit the Holy Land. He said in a statement that his diocese was 'stunned and saddened' as well as 'grieved by the severity' of the ongoing military operations in Gaza.

Pray: that God will hear the cries of the people as they seek Him for a breakthrough and a peaceful solution. (1Kg.8:28)

More: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7806844.stm

■ Congo: Caritas says 400 killed in church massacre

The Catholic aid agency said it believes 400 people were killed in massacres carried out in Congo by Ugandan rebels on Christmas Day and the days following. Caritas said it had received 'disturbing' reports from the field of mass killings perpetrated by the notorious Ugandan rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA has denied responsibility for the attacks, one of which took place during a Christmas Day concert organised by the Catholic Church in Farajde City. Around 150 people are believed to have been killed in the attack over two days. In another attack in Duru, Caritas said 75 people had been killed and a church burned down. Attacks are believed to have continued along the Sudan border, killing more than 250 people and prompting 6,500 to seek refuge with the Catholic Church. The northern region of Congo has been hit with attacks from the LRA over the last two months. Villages have been burned down and people killed or abducted.

Pray: for the peoples of this remote area that God will have mercy and that the authorities will be given insight into how they can control the LRA. (Ps.28:2)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/caritas.says.400.killed.in.congo.church.massacre/22221.htm>

■ Cuba: A church leader on trial over 'offensive behaviour'

A prominent church leader was put on trial on Monday (December 29, 2008) in what members of his organisation say is a government campaign to silence and discredit him. Rev. Robert Rodriguez, pastor of the Los Pinos Nuevos de Sagua la Grande Church and the National President of the Interdenominational Fellowship of Evangelical Pastors and Ministers in Cuba, and his son, Pastor Eric Gabriel Rodriguez del Toro, have been accused of 'offensive behaviour' by a neighbour, according to the UK-based Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). CSW says religious freedom in Cuba has worsened significantly over the past year. Another church leader, Pastor Omar Gude Perez has been imprisoned since May without being brought to trial. According to church leaders in Cuba, these situations illustrate a pattern of official intolerance towards religious leaders who resist government interference in church organizations. Stuart Windsor, National Director of CSW said, 'The international community must make it clear to the Cuban government that this is unacceptable and that religious freedom must be respected.'

Pray: for the church in Cuba that God will protect them from persecution and confuse the work of the enemy. (Ac.14:22)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2008/s08120173.htm>

■ **Somalia: Fears grow for the safety of Christians as violence increases**

At the end of December Ethiopian troops are due to withdraw from Somalia after two years spent supporting the Western-backed government. It is feared that this change will herald the collapse of the administration. Violence against Christians is expected to increase further as a result, and to prompt more refugees to flee across the border to Kenya. In one area in the south of the country the militant Muslim group al-Shobab has declared an Islamic state, setting up a governor, security official and chief judge. This move is seen as the latest sign of the organisation's steady advance: it has become dominant in much of the war-torn country, and its fighters are even roaming the streets of the capital, Mogadishu. Al-Shobab has already encouraged attacks on Christians in refugee camps. It is reported that in October Salat Sekondo Mberwa of Mogadishu, who was living in the Dadaab camp, was threatened with death by extremists for being an enemy of Islam.

Pray: for Somalia and the need for sound righteous government and pray against the extremist elements that are taking control. (Ps.12:5)

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

■ **India: Now a Maoist faction threatens to kill Christians in Orissa**

After a violence-free Christmas in the eastern state of Orissa, a new, worrisome development has emerged. Some Hindu members of a Maoist (banned, extreme Marxist) group, which was allegedly behind the killing of a Hindu nationalist leader in August that sparked an unprecedented spate of anti-Christian attacks in the state, have reportedly formed a new rival group to target Christians. According to the Indo-Asian News Service (IANS), a breakaway faction of the Communist Party of India-Maoist has put up posters threatening to target Christian members in the state, saying it would kill a Christian on the 23rd of every month - to avenge the assassination of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati, a leader of the Hindu nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council or VHP) on August 23 in Orissa's Kandhamal district. The rival group, known as the Idealize of Democrat Garila (Guerrilla) Army (Maoist) or IDGA-Maoist, will be formally inaugurated on January 3 'at an undisclosed location under the leadership of a guerrilla identified only as M2'.

Pray: that the Christians in Orissa will be protected from this fresh initiative. Lord equip them for the challenge! (Ac.14:22)

More: <http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=3573>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ **First native Bible translation for three million Tanzanians**

Three million people in the highlands of the east African country of Tanzania will receive Scriptures in their own language for the first time by autumn, a Bible translation ministry recently announced. Wycliffe Associates is funding a programme that is simultaneously translating ten languages for the people that live in the rugged western part of the country called Mbeya. Previously, the millions that live in the area were forced to understand the Scripture in Swahili or, with even greater difficulty, in English. Although about 78 per cent of the population in Mbeya is literate, they can only read Swahili at a functional level to survive in society. The Mbeya Cluster project is an ambitious effort that combines ten language translation projects into one. In Mbeya, as in other parts of Tanzania, the various distinct languages have enough characteristics in common that it is possible to translate multiple languages at the same time.

Praise: God for this initiative that will bring His Word to the Mbeya people in their own language. (Is.42:7)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/first.native.bible.translation.for.three.million.tanzanians/22210.htm>

■ **Nigeria: Wife forgives killers of her husband**

The wife of a Christian pastor murdered in the recent wave of violence in the city of Jos says she forgives his killers. Mary Yari told new agency Compass Direct that her husband Joseph was shot as he tried to stop rioters from destroying a Baptist church in the Plateau state capital. 'They were ignorant of the crime they have committed because they do not know Jesus,' she said. Joseph Yari, who led an Evangelical Church of West Africa congregation, was one of six church leaders killed when rioters went on the rampage on November 28-29, attacking Christians and their property. Church leaders told Compass Direct that 40 churches were destroyed and at least 500 people killed in the riots. Four hundred of them were reported to be Muslims killed by security forces ordered to shoot on sight during a 24-hour curfew. Some 25,000 people took refuge in 20 makeshift camps in police barracks and other government-owned facilities. So far about 500 people have been arrested. (See Prayer Alert 4908)

Praise: God for this act of forgiveness and pray that it will be an example to the people of Nigeria. (Col.3:13)

More: <http://www.releaseinternational.org/pages/posts/nigeria-wife-forgives-killers-of-her-husband481.php>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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