

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 16th January 2009 - Hope for His Church - Romans 5:1-5**

The Week of prayer for Christian Unity is from 18-25th January.

Pray:

- That God will teach us to encourage and support each other as the Body of Christ.
- For God's grace to lay aside our differences in order to pursue the higher goal of God's Kingdom.

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

■ **Credit crunch is opportunity to rediscover nation's vision - Sentamu**

The Archbishop of York called for Britain to use the credit crunch as a time to reassess its priorities as a country and to rediscover its vision as a nation. Dr John Sentamu said 'the nation had been tempted to put its trust in 'false securities' and 'false gods'. Governments and individuals are both radically reassessing their priorities and values as a result and so are the religious communities. Because of this, I believe it is also a unique opportunity,' he said in a lecture delivered to the Smith Institute in London. 'The reforms which Tawney, Temple and Beveridge achieved in the 1940s represented the apogee of a shared 'big vision' for Britain in the last century,' he said. 'Intellectuals, church leaders and government agreed both on the big vision and on the ways in which it could be delivered. It is a tragedy, to me, that we have increasingly lost this big vision.'

Pray: that the government and people of our nations would rediscover the 'big vision' that would lead to a return to Christian foundations. (Ps.11:3)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/credit.crunch.is.opportunity.to.rediscover.nations.vision.sentamu/22302.htm>

■ **Prisoners convert to Islam for gang protection**

'Inmates at Long Lartin prison said some were 'becoming Muslim' because it is a 'bigger gang'. Similar concerns were raised in an inspection report in to Whitemoor Prison in Cambridgeshire last year, in which prison officers warned extremist Muslim prisoners are ganging up on others in an attempt to radicalise them. Inspectors at Long Lartin, in Worcestershire, were told gang culture is widespread. One inmate said: 'There is a gang culture here which is becoming an issue. A lot of people are becoming Muslim just because it's a bigger gang.' Another said: 'There are issues with Muslim gangs wanting to overpower others.' One added: 'Muslim gangs; if you have a problem with one, you have a problem with them all,' while a fourth said: 'People are converting to Islam for protection.'

Pray: for prison authorities who have the task of ensuring the safety of inmates and for prisoners to resist gang culture of any kind without fear of intimidation. (Ps.4:8)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/lawandorder/4224403/Prisoners-convert-to-Islam-for-gang-protection.html>

■ Church told to speak out against racism

The church has been told it may have to speak out against racism if the recession triggers a wave of racist-based policies and even new race riots across Europe as governments attempt to steer their economies through the economic downturn. With one in five churchgoers in the UK belonging to an ethnic minority, the Jubilee Centre is encouraging the church to challenge policies and philosophies that do not serve to safeguard unity, equality and diversity. 'It is important that Christians are willing to denounce racism and to encourage their leaders to work against racism,' writes London School of Economics lecturer Dr Sujit Sivasundaram in the latest edition of the Jubilee Centre's 'Cambridge Papers'. He asserts that the affirmation of ethnic diversity can give individuals and local communities a sense of cohesion and belonging, and calls on Christians and local churches to denounce racism and encourage their leaders to work against racism.

Pray: for the Christian church to rise to the challenge to give practical and meaningful support to all members of society as economic pressures begin to cause stresses on social boundaries and divisions. (Ps.15:3)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/church.told.to.speak.out.against.racism/22286.htm>

■ Cross hidden from TV soap church wedding

A large cross in a church where a recent Coronation Street wedding scene was filmed had to be disguised with candles because producers were worried about offending viewers. The 14th century church in Cheshire was chosen for the scene 'because the characters wanted a traditional religious church wedding'. But producers were anxious that the large brass cross standing on the altar of the church might offend viewers. The cross was bolted to the altar, so instead of being removed, it had to be disguised with artificial flowers and a candelabra. Revd James Milnes, the church rector, described the decision to obscure the cross as a 'disgrace'. A spokeswoman for Granada, the producers of Coronation Street, said: 'We are looking into how and why this happened. As the Rev Milnes rightly says, we chose the church because the characters wanted a traditional religious church wedding. Covering up the cross was an error and we apologise for any upset.'

Pray: against these continued moves to reduce our faith and hide our Christian roots. (Lk.8:16)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/20090114/cross-hidden-from-tv-soap-church-wedding/>

■ Armed Forces and their families face increasing pressures

There are currently about 12,000 personnel serving on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and many more serving on ships or training and also separated from their families. A total of just over 300 personnel have been killed whilst on operations in Iraq or Afghanistan, and 5,000 treated in hospitals for injuries sustained as a result of hostile action, non-battle injuries, or disease, in the 3 years 2006-2008. This puts a tremendous strain on the families left at home. The hardest bit of all is the fear; living in a state of constant heightened awareness, with tears never far away. One padre said 'It's not just the anxiety of losing a husband, or of hearing that he has been quite dreadfully injured, that is out there. For military families there is also the realisation that they could face losing a whole way of life – a double loss if you like – and this is something that is seldom replicated in civilian life, or fully comprehended by our civilian counterparts'. Families often have little idea of the horror of the scenes that have confronted the serviceman in theatre or of the things he has been forced to hear and witness there.

Pray: for relationship counselling to be made free to all our service personnel and the hand of friendship and practical support be extended to service personnel and their families. (1Pe.5:2)

More: <http://www.pray4ourforces.org.uk/>

■ Islington announces gold-plated 'gay rights' charter

Islington Council has launched a new 'gay rights' charter in response to a case involving a Christian registrar who had a religious objection to performing homosexual civil partnerships. Miss Lillian Ladele was disciplined and threatened with the sack after she asked for her religious beliefs to be accommodated at the Council. (See Prayer Alert 4108) She won an initial employment tribunal ruling of religious discrimination but Islington successfully appealed. Miss Ladele is hoping to take the case to the Court of Appeal. In the meantime Islington Council has announced a new gay rights charter, the Sexual Orientation Equalities Scheme, which is expected to be agreed by the Council Executive. The Christian Institute's Mike Judge said: 'No homosexual couple has been denied access to Council services because of Miss Ladele's religious beliefs, but they disciplined her anyway'.

Pray: for this ongoing case as it moves to the Court of Appeal that the rights of Christians will be considered as well as homosexuals. (1Cor.6:9)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/20090114/islington-announces-gold-plated-gay-rights-charter/>

EUROPE

■ Latvia: Anti-government rioting hits Riga

Hundreds of demonstrators have clashed with riot police in Latvia's capital, Riga, after an anti-government protest. Police used mace and truncheons to disperse rioters who smashed shop windows and overturned a police van after failing to storm parliament. The violence followed a peaceful rally in which some 10,000 people accused the government of economic mismanagement and demanded new elections. Latvia's economy is expected to contract by at least 5% this year. Until last year, it was one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. Many Latvians frustrated by rising unemployment and tax hikes blame the centre-right governing coalition of Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis for their country's economic woes. Tuesday's peaceful protest was Latvia's largest since it became independent in 1991. As the crowd swelled, dozens of

protesters tried to storm the parliament building. The rioters gathered again in a neighbouring street in Riga's historic business district.

Pray: for the people and the authorities that they will find peace and a resolution to their differences. (Jas.3:13&18)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7827708.stm>

■ **Germany: Evangelical comfort zone comes to an end**

The comfort zone for Christian believers in Germany is likely to come to an end, according to Hartmut Steeb, general secretary of the German Evangelical Alliance. Indications are that the media are launching more frequent and severe attacks on the evangelical movement. Steeb was speaking at an opening meeting of the annual evangelical week of prayer in Velbert, West Germany, January 11. The period of widespread indifference toward those who take the Bible literally and believe in God, the creator of the universe, seems to have come to an end, said Steeb. He called attention to warnings against the evangelical movement in the liberal newspaper 'taz' and to a discriminating article in the school magazine Q-rage, sponsored by a government agency for political education. Steeb called for evangelical unity in the face of increasing opposition. Approximately 350,000 Christians in Germany are expected to attend the meetings during the Alliance's prayer week, January 11 - 18.

Pray: that evangelical believers will not lose heart but be strengthened in their resolve to hold to the Word of God. (Heb.12:2-3)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2009/s09010090.htm>

WORLDWIDE

■ **Gaza: Optimism builds as 10-day cease-fire proposal emerges**

Egypt and Hamas were negotiating a proposal for a 10-day cease-fire in Gaza, officials said Wednesday, as the Palestinian death toll in the war passed 1,000 and smoke from Israeli air strikes rose over Gaza City's devastated streets. Egyptian and Palestinian officials said they hoped to seal Hamas' agreement on a temporary halt in fighting, which would be presented to Israel for approval. Key uncertainties remained for a longer-term deal under which Gaza's borders would be open and Israeli troops would withdraw. The officials provided details of the deal on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the Egypt-Hamas talks. But Egyptian officials also expressed public optimism that momentum toward a deal was growing. 'We're working with Hamas and we're working with the Israeli side. We hope to reach an outcome soon,' Hossam Zaki, a spokesman for Egypt's Foreign Ministry, told the BBC.

Pray: for the proposed ceasefire that it will lead to a breakthrough and a cessation of hostilities. (1Tim.2:1-4)

More: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,479914,00.html>

■ **Israel: Israeli aid groups call for urgent action in Gaza**

Nine Israeli human rights and aid organisations have released their findings on the situation in Gaza and called on the Israeli government to take urgent action to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation there. At a press conference in Jerusalem on 14 January, they said Gaza's entire population was in extreme humanitarian distress, caught in the midst of a massive Israeli land incursion and aerial bombardment. The NGOs called the level of harm to civilians 'unprecedented' and accused the Israeli armed forces of 'making wanton use of lethal force which has to date caused the deaths of hundreds of uninvolved civilians and destroyed infrastructure and property on an enormous scale'. Their findings and allegations are based on testimonies collected from residents in the Gaza Strip, including medical teams and experts. Among the NGOs' findings were six instances of the Israeli army shooting at medical teams. The army had killed 12 and injured 17 medical personnel.

Pray: for the desperate needs of the people in Gaza that speedy solutions would be achieved. Pray for those who have been injured or lost loved ones on both sides of this conflict. (Is.9:6)

More: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82369>

■ **Gaza: Bin Laden tape calls for jihad**

Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, is reported to have issued a video recording calling on Muslims to wage jihad against Israel over its offensive in Gaza. The recording, which was dated to the current month in the Islamic calendar and entitled 'A Call for Jihad to Stop the Aggression against Gaza', was posted on websites on Wednesday. 'God has bestowed us with the patience to continue the path of jihad for another seven years, and seven and seven years,' the voice on the tape, purported to be that of bin Laden, said. 'The question is, can America continue its war with us for several more decades to come? Reports and evidence would suggest otherwise.' It was not possible to identify independently the voice on the tape. The 22-minute audio statement said jihad was necessary to restore 'Jerusalem and Palestine'. It criticised the way Arab governments have handled the war Israel has been waging in Gaza for 19 days.

Pray: that the evil rhetoric of this man and his organisation will be ignored and not radicalise the Moslem world. (Job12:24-25)

More: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/01/2009114121419436207.html>

■ **Darfur: Sudan admits rebel bombing**

Sudan's military has admitted carrying out a wave of bombings in the Darfur region on Tuesday. An army spokesman said they had targeted rebels who had failed to back the ceasefire announced in November. The BBC's Sudan correspondent says it is highly unusual for the military to admit aerial attacks in Darfur. It comes amid renewed tension over whether the International Criminal Court will charge Sudan President Omar al-Bashir for war crimes in Darfur. Sudan's government has always rejected charges that it armed the Janjaweed militias accused of widespread atrocities against civilians in the region.

The UN estimates that up to 2.7 million people have been forced from their homes in Darfur and some 300,000 have died during nearly six years of conflict. So far only half of the 26,000 troops authorised for the joint United Nations and African Union peace force have been sent to the remote region, the size of France.

Pray: for a lasting peace for this area to enable the peoples to live together in harmony. (1Pt.3:8)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7828803.stm>

■ India: Blocks 'preaching' bishop

The Bishop of Gloucester was refused entry to India because he was unable to promise not to preach. The Right Reverend Michael Perham had wanted to visit the city's partner dioceses in Dornakal and Karnataka Central. He had a tourist visa, which the Indian High Commission said was insufficient for 'work' purposes. A commission spokesman in London said: 'On a tourist visa he should not and must not preach.' The bishop's chaplain, Aiden Platten, said they had previously travelled on tourist visas to India without problems. He said: 'The visas were tourist visas - that is what we applied for previously and we have been to India lots of times.' Mr Kaushik, a visa attaché from the Indian High Commission, said: 'If the bishop wants to go to India to visit churches or organisations to work with them we need a letter from the churches he was visiting and the approval of the government of India. Then we would look at what visa is appropriate.'

Pray: for those who spread the Word that God will grant them access and open the doors. (Is.45:1-3)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/gloucestershire/7826591.stm>

■ Zimbabwe: Cholera surges as neighbours report rising cases

Zimbabwe's cholera outbreak had killed more than 2,100 people by Wednesday, as neighbouring countries sounded the alarm over rising infections of the treatable, water-borne disease. Latest figures from the World Health Organisation show that the death toll in Zimbabwe has now reached 2,106 since August while 1,642 new cases were added in a single day. The total number of people infected has surged past 40,000. Aid agencies have long warned of the threat of a regional spill-over from Zimbabwe - scores of people migrate daily to neighbouring countries. Northern neighbour Zambia has recorded 28 cholera deaths, government spokesman Canisius Banda told AFP. 'Since September, we have seen 2,108 cholera patients and we lost 28 of them,' he said. Still, Zimbabwe's impoverished northern neighbour has sent 404,000 dollars (307,910 euros) to Harare to support efforts to fight the epidemic there, he added. In South Africa, the death toll climbed to 15 on Wednesday, with more than 2,100 cases recorded. (See Prayer Alert 0209, 4708)

Pray: that God would have mercy on this land and the suffering people. (1Kg.8:28)

More: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5inUrjOec8guxoAGDFfCrqafxyMQ>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Christian youth prepare for cyber-missions trip around the globe

Dozens of churches around the world are planning to participate in a special mission's trip that involves bringing Christ and His message to a huge community where the Gospel is not the most popular subject. So far nearly 2,000 teens have signed up for the 'Online Missions Trip' to bombard popular social networking sites with stories about God. 'This is a two-week opportunity for all of us to bombard Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, whatever social places you go to online, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ,' explains the organizer of the missions trip, Tim Schomoyer. From February 1-14, students from the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Bermuda and elsewhere will use the power of the internet to share Christ with people not only on the other side of the world but across the street and with friends in their school. During the outreach, participants will upload videos and photos, post links, and use status updates to share what God is doing in their lives.

Praise: God for this opportunity to share His good news and pray that many will find Jesus through the testimony of these young believers. (Dt.4:29)

More: http://domain1239156.sites.fasthosts.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1049&Itemid=1

■ UK: Confirmed atheist says Africa needs God

A few weeks ago Times Online published a quite surprising article that relates to Africa's ongoing crises. The headline is arresting: 'As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God'. Although a confirmed atheist, writer Matthew Parris, raised in Africa, recently became convinced of the enormous contribution Christian evangelism made in Africa, distinct from secular aid efforts. 'Education and training alone will not do,' Parris states. 'In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation.' Christianity, he claims, smashes straight through crushing tribal groupthink. Aid and know-how alone won't make the change. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete, he warned.'

Praise: God for this man's revelation and his testimony and pray that the truth will set many more free. (Jn.8:32)

More: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/matthew_parris/article5400568.ece

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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