

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 6 February: Hope for marriages - Gen 2:22-24**

Marriage Week UK (7th – 14th Feb) celebrates the diversity and vibrancy of marriage as the basis for family life in the UK. **Pray:** • For couples to see the value of marriage and the stability it can bring for families. • For God to strengthen marriages where there is conflict and breakdown in communication.

More: <http://www.worldprayer.org.uk/resources/friday-focus/>

■ **Marriage not regarded as 'best relationship' by young adults**

Marriage is no longer regarded as the best form of relationship by younger generations, the largest survey of public attitudes in Britain shows. Most young adults do not share the views of their parents' generation on the importance of marrying a long-term partner or the role of women in the household, it found. The annual British Social Attitudes report discovered that fewer than four out of 10 adults aged between 18 and 34 believe that marriage is the best kind of relationship, compared with more than eight out of 10 pensioners. Younger adults are also twice as likely as over-65s to believe that mothers should get a full-time job as soon as their children start school, with few thinking that a home and children are what women really want. Government statisticians suggested that married couples will be in the minority by next year as increasing numbers of people choose to live together out of wedlock.

Pray: that the Christian principle of marriage would once again become the accepted form of partnership. (Gen.2:22-24)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/4360930/Marriage-not-regarded-as-best-relationship-by-young-adults.html>

■ **Computers and TV blamed for teenage violence and casual sex**

Computers and television have pushed a generation of children towards violent behaviour, early sex and mental illness, a large-scale study said yesterday. It cited celebrity culture, advertising and peer pressure among the reasons why girls often have sex as soon as they reach the age of consent. And it blamed computer games, the internet and television for 'the lurch to more and more violence which we know can breed violence and increase mental illness'. The warnings came in the second stage of the Good Childhood report for the Children's Society. The first stage, published at the weekend, blamed family break-up and the lack of a father living at home for the misery of millions of children. Yesterday's analysis also linked the spread of early sex and the growing interest of young people in violence to selfish behaviour by adults. The report warned of the effects of long hours spent watching television, on the internet and playing computer games.'

Pray: for our young people as they face up to the many pressures and distractions from righteous ways. (Ps.119:9)

More: http://www.mediawatchuk.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=380&Itemid=92

■ **Christian Legal Centre supports Christian nurse suspended for prayer offer**

A Christian nurse from Weston-super-Mare has been suspended from her work for offering to pray for an elderly patient. Caroline Petrie, a community nurse and devout Christian, is facing dismissal for an alleged breach of her code of conduct on equality and diversity. Mrs Petrie said she had asked an elderly patient if she would like a prayer said for her after she had put dressings on the patient's legs. The patient declined and Mrs Petrie took the matter no further. She was initially confronted the next day by a nursing sister who said the patient had been taken aback by her question about prayer. Later she received a message on her home phone from the North Somerset Primary Care Trust telling her that disciplinary action against her would be taken. She was then suspended. The National Secular Society accuses Mrs Petrie of being manipulative and using her role as a nurse to push her religion on others. Many commentators say the diversity rules that Mrs Petrie is accused of breaking are driven by a secularist agenda that wants to remove Christianity from public life.

STOP PRESS LATEST:

Following overwhelming public support for Caroline Petrie her employers have caved in and said she could return to her job. The row over her treatment has reached the House of Commons, with Sir Patrick Cormack, the Tory MP for South Staffordshire, claiming that her case had highlighted the 'utter absurdities' of political correctness. Fears have been raised that new rules could lead to the dismissal of any health care worker who tries to talk about their faith to others. A document published by the Department of Health last month gives warning that attempts by doctors or nurses to preach to other staff or patients will be treated as harassment or intimidation under disciplinary procedures. But it does not make clear the limits of acceptable discussion about religion. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/4530384/NHS-staff-face-sack-if-they-discuss-religion.html>

Pray: for Mrs Petrie and the many people who find themselves under attack for their faith. (Ac.1:8)

More: <http://www.christianlegalcentre.com/view.php?id=680>

■ **Radio presenter sacked for supporting Christianity on air**

Rev Mahboob Masih, a Church minister from East Kilbride, is taking legal action after being dismissed from hosting his radio programme for the manner in which Christianity was defended on air which allegedly offended Muslims. He is being supported by the Christian Legal Centre and has instructed religious liberties barrister Paul Diamond. He is claiming unfair dismissal and discrimination on the grounds of religion. He had been host of a regular Saturday morning show on Awaz FM, a community radio show in Glasgow, for six years before the row with the station's management ended in his dismissal. In the talk show on 26th July 2008, questions were asked by listeners on a recent talk given by a prominent Muslim speaker and critic of Christianity. On the radio programme Rev Masih and co-presenter Afzal Umeed sought to allow a response from the Christian perspective. The radio station management, worried that the debate had offended Muslim listeners accused the Rev Masih of not being balanced enough on air.

Pray: for all those who have opportunities to speak publicly that God will equip them for the task. (1Cor.2:13)

More: <http://www.christianlegalcentre.com/view.php?id=671>

■ **Christian thinkers in England urge return to basic banking practice**

Calls for a return to basic banking and an economy propelled by values rather than greed have been made in London, one of the world's financial capitals, at a conference of Christian thinkers examining the current economic crisis. 'We face today a choice between a political economy based on greed and consumption and a way of life which is based on a sustainable and just relationship with our neighbour,' the Rev. Bob Fyffe, general secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, declared. John Ellis, treasurer of the United Reformed Church who previously worked for the Bank of England, pointed to one major bank's relative success in weathering the current storm. 'It is fairly safe to assert that HSBC has been the most robust during the recent economic troubles. It is also safe to assert that the chairman of HSBC is an Anglican priest. Is that a coincidence?' he asked.

Pray: for Christians in the banking industry that their faith in God and professional integrity would help towards a more sustainable economy. (Pr.28:5)

More: <http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=2661>

■ **Is this the end of Gunchester?**

Manchester is on the brink of shedding its 'Gunchester' image for good after the astonishing success of a crackdown on the city's gangs. Only three shots were fired by gangsters between Valentine's Day in February and December 31 last year compared to more than 10 times as many in 2007. It is the first time since the height of Manchester's bloody street warfare in the early 1990s that entire months have passed in places like Moss Side without the sound of gunfire. Home Secretary Jacqui Smith hailed the city's progress as an example to the rest of Britain - and pledged extra cash so the work can continue. It comes exactly a year since the last fatal gang-related shooting in Greater Manchester - which prompted police to launch the crackdown, called Operation Cougar. The total number of gunshots in the Metropolitan and Trafford divisions - the heart of gangland - fell from 62 in Feb-Dec 2007 to 19 in Feb-Dec 2008. The number that were gang-related dropped from 38 to three.

Pray: There is much to give thanks for, but pray that this trend continues and we will see this roll-out across the country. (Hab2:12)

More: http://www.citylinks.org.uk/Articles/139431/CityLinks/Redeeming_our_Communities/2008_National_Prayer/Is_this_the.aspx

EUROPE

■ Russia: New Patriarch Kirill I pledges to keep church unified

Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who was enthroned in Moscow as Kirill I, the 16th patriarch in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church has stressed it is his task to ensure unity within the church to preserve the faith, but he is also seen as being a more 'political leader' than his predecessor by some analysts. Hundreds of gold-vested hierarchs, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin attended the three-and-a-half-hour service on 1 February along with a Vatican delegation led by Cardinal Walter Kasper. The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Samuel Kobia, was also present. In his first sermon as patriarch, after he was vested in his robes, cowl and mitre, Kirill stressed the importance of church unity, which has been threatened by calls in Ukraine to break with Moscow and dissent within Russia about the church's links with others.

Pray: for the unity of the church in all its diversity that Christ will make us one. (Rom.12:5)

More: <http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=2692>

WORLDWIDE

■ Zimbabwe: Anglican Primates express horror at plight of Zimbabweans

Anglican Primates meeting in Alexandria, Egypt, have spoken of their 'horror' after hearing firsthand reports of the suffering in Zimbabwe. The Primates, meeting this week to discuss unity and other issues affecting the Anglican Communion, noted the 'appalling difficulties' of people living under President Robert Mugabe's regime. 'We give thanks to God for the faithful witness of the Christians of Zimbabwe during this time of pain and suffering, especially those who are being denied access to their churches,' they said in a statement. The Primates went on to condemn Mr Mugabe for holding on to power illegitimately after being defeated in last March's democratic elections and warned that the power sharing deal brokered by the South African Development Community may only further entrench his regime. Member churches of the 70 million-strong Anglican Communion are being invited to join the Anglican Church of Southern Africa in observing a day of prayer and solidarity with Zimbabweans on 25 February, Ash Wednesday.

Pray: that the people will be stirred to join in the day of prayer and solidarity for the people of Zimbabwe. (Is.64:9)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/anglican.primates.express.horror.at.plight.of.zimbabweans/22449.htm>

■ Zimbabwe: Aid conditional, says US

The US says it will only consider easing sanctions against Zimbabwe when it sees evidence of real power-sharing between the rival parties. A state department spokesman said new aid for Harare was dependant on inclusive and effective governance. The statement comes a day after a similar announcement by the UK. Meanwhile, parliament has delayed a debate on changes to the constitution to allow opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai to become prime minister. The session was postponed until negotiators from President Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF party and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) return from South Africa, where they have been trying to reach an agreement on details of a power-sharing deal. The MDC agreed last Friday to join a national unity government with Zanu-PF after months of bitter wrangling. US state department spokesman Robert Wood said 'the success or failure of such a government will depend on credible and inclusive power sharing by Robert Mugabe and his Zanu-PF party'.

Pray: for the success of this latest move to bring together the politicians in unity that would lead to aid reaching this needy nation. (Pr.25:5)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7869071.stm>

■ China: Daughter pleads for help for father suffering seventh year in prison

As Christian democracy activist Wang Bingzhang endures his seventh year in prison in solitary confinement, his family reports he is deteriorating physically and mentally. His daughter, Ti-Anna Wang, wrote a letter to ChinaAid appealing to the international community to speak out on her father's behalf. Her father gave up a promising career in medicine to devote his life to Chinese pro-democracy activism. Wang Bingzhang spent the next 20 years organizing and promoting pro-democracy activities in North America and around the world. The Chinese Communist Party's concern about Wang Bingzhang's activities eventually led to his arrest, his daughter said. In June 2002, while travelling in Vietnam with fellow activists, he was kidnapped and brought to China. He was subsequently arrested and falsely charged with espionage and terrorism, Ti-Anna Wang said. In a trial that lasted a day in which no evidence or witnesses were presented, Wang Bingzhang was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in solitary confinement.

Pray: for Wang, his physical well being, his family and that God would use him to speak into the lives of his jailers and open the doors for his release. (Heb.13:3)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2009/s09020013.htm>

■ Saudi Arabia: Pastor flees death threats

A prominent foreign pastor in Saudi Arabia has fled Riyadh after a member of the mutawwa'in, or religious police, and others threatened him three times in one week. On Wednesday (Jan. 28), Yemane Gebriel escaped to an undisclosed city in Saudi Arabia. A father of eight who has lived and worked in Saudi Arabia for 25 years, On Jan. 10 he found an unsigned note on his vehicle threatening to kill him if he did not leave the country on Jan. 13, he said, mutawwa'in member Abdul Aziz and others forced him from his van and told him to leave the country. Three days after that, [Aziz] said, 'You're still working here, why don't you go out of the country?' Two days later, four masked men – apparently Saudis – in a small car

cut off the van he was driving. They said, 'We will kill you if you don't go away from this place – you must leave here or we will kill you,' he said. (See Prayer Alert 0509)

Pray: for the church in Saudi Arabia that God would strengthen and protect them against these threats. (Ps.64:1)

More: <http://mychristianblood.blogspot.com/archive/2009/02/03/saudi-arabia-pastor-flees-death-threats.html#more>

■ **India: Government shuts down Orissa relief camps**

After facing months of violent persecution last autumn, believers are now being turned out of government refugee camps in Orissa. Tens of thousands of people are being evicted from relief camps with only 50 kg of rice and 10,000 rupees (appr. \$200 US). Mission India is providing emergency relief kits containing basic supplies for believers in Orissa. Many Christian homes have not been rebuilt, and many fear further attacks outside the relief camps. Persecution continued within relief camps, where Christians were threatened with violence. Local Hindus often refuse to hire Christians and it's unlikely that believers will be able to secure employment. With no access to basic supplies after they leave the camps, there is an urgent need to provide for these believers' physical needs. Despite the closing of government relief camps, those run by local churches will remain open. Mission India staff is working with its local ministry partners to distribute emergency materials in relief camps where the needs are most urgent. (See Prayer Alert 4508)

Pray: that the Lord will provide for the needs of the believers in Orissa and protect them from persecution. (Pr. 31:9)

More: <http://www.mnnonline.org/article/12251>

■ **North Korea: The worst place on earth to be a Christian**

The oppressive, isolated country of North Korea under the leadership of dictator Kim Jong Il retains its position as the worst persecutor of Christians in the world. According to the Open Doors 2008 World Watch List released today, North Korea is ranked No. 1 for the seventh year in a row. Christians are persecuted constantly under the communist government, which denies human rights to its citizens. The Wahhabi kingdom of Saudi Arabia is No. 2 and Iran is No. 3. Both countries are ruled by sharia law. Afghanistan, Somalia and the Maldives take the fourth, fifth and sixth positions, respectively. Afghanistan moved up three spots on the list this year as a result of increased pressure from the Taliban movement during 2008. Yemen is No. 7, Laos No. 8, Eritrea No. 9 and Uzbekistan No. 10. Somalia and Eritrea are new countries to the top 10 list. Islam is the majority religion in seven of the top 10 countries.

Pray: for the worldwide church as it faces up to persecution especially in those nations listed. (2Th.3:2-3)

More: <http://www.mnnonline.org/article/12254>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ **Canada: Prayer meeting could be largest ever held in Canada**

On February 21st, Canadians from all across Canada will gather in St. John's, Newfoundland, for TheCRY, a grass roots interdenominational and intergenerational initiative emphasizing prayer, worship and fasting for the spiritual welfare of Canada. A press release from TheCRY organizers said that indications from the attendance of CRY rallies of the past ten months - Edmonton, Ottawa/Gatineau, Iqaluit and Toronto with a total on site turnout of over 10,000 - point to the St. John's rally possibly being the largest prayer meeting in Canadian history. TheCRY organizers expressed their concern that Canada and the world are at a pivotal point in history: 'Canada is in a very significant time of history where our prayer and actions will affect the nation for generations to come. A new, and significant, element is being added to TheCRY St. John's,' TheCRY press release adds, with 'mass television media, GOD TV, which has a potential audience of half a billion, broadcasting TheCRY live throughout many nations of the earth.'

Praise: God for this opportunity for the people to gather in prayer seeking God for the spiritual welfare of Canada. (Ps.70:4)

More: http://ausprayernet.org.au/newsletter/DisplayNewsletter.php?e_id=0000001659#st5

■ **UK: Christian students counter 'no God' adverts with Gospel giveaway**

Christian students are taking part in a massive Gospel giveaway in response to the 'no God' adverts placed on buses across the country. Christian Unions in universities across the UK are giving away 400,000 copies of a special student edition of St Mark's Gospel to get students thinking about God. The giveaway follows the launch of a high profile atheist ad campaign launched by the British Humanist Association on 800 buses around the country last month. (See Prayer Alert 0309) Richard Dawkins is to be thanked for once again, raising the profile of God. His book 'The God Delusion' was a brilliant platform for CUs to host events where the claims about God and Jesus Christ could be openly discussed, and through that, people have become Christians. Now his bus adverts clearly proclaim that atheists cannot be sure. This is evidently not a good basis to stop worrying!

Praise: God for the students who see this as an opportunity to share the gospel. (Ac.5:42)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christian.students.counter.no.god.adverts.with.gospel.giveaway/22435.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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