

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Valentine's Day services to celebrate marriage around the nation

Churches around England are inviting couples to celebrate marriage on Valentine's Day – which this year falls on Sunday. They are using new liturgical resources that have already been downloaded more than 2,130 times from the Church of England website, having been made available in January. The resources are recommended by the Bishop of Wakefield, the Rt Rev Stephen Platten, chair of the Liturgical Commission. He said: 'Valentine's Day falling on a Sunday is an excellent opportunity for churches up and down the country to celebrate marriage. I encourage churches to use the new resources to organise a special service.' This event will also mark the conclusion of Marriage Week UK, currently taking place 8th-14th February 2010.

Pray: for this opportunity for churches to celebrate the importance of marriage. (Heb.13:4)

More: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr2110.html>

■ Church of England is 'living in the past', says BBC's head of religion

The BBC's head of religion has accused the Church of England of 'living in the past' and said that the Corporation should not give Christianity preferential treatment. Aaqil Ahmed, a controversial executive whose appointment last year prompted more than 100 complaints, said: 'I think all the faiths should be treated in the same way. I don't believe in treating any faith differently.' He dismissed claims that the BBC was marginalising religion as overly simplistic and argued that Christianity, in particular, was already covered well on television. The Church of England's General Synod on Wednesday passed a motion expressing its 'deep concern' at the number of hours being given to religious programmes on television. There has been growing concern at top levels of the Church over the corporation's approach to religion, with warnings that it must not ignore its Christian audience. (See also Prayer Alert 0410)

Pray: for the BBC and all our media that it would not marginalise this nation's foundational Christian faith. (1Cor.3:11)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/religion/7174716/Church-of-England-is-living-in-the-past-says-BBCs-head-of-religion.html>

■ Church must tackle diversity says Archbishop of Canterbury

The Archbishop of Canterbury has called on all sides involved in controversies in the Church of England to give consideration to the views of other Christians. Dr Rowan Williams told the CofE's General Synod 'megaphone tones' were being used over issues such as women bishops and gays in the Church. He apologised for views in the West causing harm to Christians elsewhere. Some traditionalists praised the speech for encouraging Christians to take on board diverse views. Dr Williams said: 'Most of us in this chamber hold the ordination of women as bishops as a 'good', something that'll enhance our faithfulness to Christ and our integrity in mission. 'But that good is at the moment jeopardised in two ways by the

potential loss of those who can't see it as a good, and by the equally conscience-driven concern that there are ways of securing that desired good that'll corrupt it or compromise it fatally.'

Pray: for those in Synod that God will grant them wisdom and guidance to resolve these matters. (Ps.111:10)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8506617.stm>

■ **Bishop warns Labour has pushed God from politics**

The Bishop of Durham has criticised the Labour Government for forcing God from political life and warned that the public has been left 'in a sea of amorality'. During an interview with The Times newspaper Dr Tom Wright, the fourth most senior prelate in the Church of England, warned that the Prime Minister has become akin to an 'absolute monarch' with little or no accountability. The Bishop made the comments ahead of a public lecture at the Church of England's General Synod in which he will call for God to be included in political life. The Bishop went on to criticise Labour's track record on issues such as assisted suicide and equality legislation. Dr Wright also criticised recent constitutional reforms by Labour, such as the abolition of the office of Lord Chancellor, claiming that the change had been made 'on a wing and a prayer'.

Pray: for all those who govern and lead that they will recognise the need to involve God in their work. (Heb.13:7)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/bishop-warns-labour-has-pushed-god-from-politics/>

■ **Parliament to vote on restrictions to 'vulture funds'**

The House of Commons is to debate a bill to restrict the activities of 'vulture funds' - investment companies, often based offshore, which buy up poor countries debts cheaply, and then sue for massive profits. The Debt Relief (Developing Countries) Bill is supported by anti-poverty and debt cancellation campaigners, including the Jubilee Debt Campaign. It is a private member's bill but has received the backing of both the government and the Liberal Democrats. Proposed by Andrew Gwynne MP, it will have its crucial second reading on Friday 26 February. The Bill would impede the ability of vulture funds to recover debts through the British courts from countries which have received debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. So far vulture funds have amassed over \$1.2 billion, many of which take funds from countries that have qualified for the HIPC initiative, which provides debt relief for countries with the most poverty.

Pray: that this bill will receive overwhelming support in Parliament. (Dt.15:1)

More: <http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/11224>

■ **British troops to take part in a huge military offensive against the Taliban**

It has been announced that a strike force, composed of British, US and Afghan troops and police, is planning to storm into some of the most dangerous areas of central Helmand province a series of daring raids as part of Operation Moshtarak (meaning 'together'). NATO troops, supported by special forces, will simultaneously attack several Taliban enclaves within the notorious 'Green Zone'. Allied commanders had hoped that the Taliban would have abandoned these areas but intelligence reports suggest that they have laid hundreds of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and are preparing to stand and fight. Once cleared of enemy fighters, Afghan security forces will attempt to bring security and stability to civilians who have spent the past few years living under Taliban rule. Villagers in the path of the fighting view the impending assault with apprehension and hope that once free of the Taliban there will be peace at last.

Pray: for the safety of all troops and minimal loss of life on all sides; for pilots flying the troops into the operation and those defusing IEDs; safety of local population and Afghani troops and police to bring security and stability to Afghanistan. (Ps.140:6-8)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/onthefrontline/7177157/Afghanistan-4000-British-troops-set-for-biggest-battle-with-Taliban.html>

■ **The best is always yet to come, says bishop**

Whenever we find ourselves having to move on in life, we must believe that the best is always yet to come, says the Bishop of Stafford. Writing to churches in the Diocese of Lichfield this month, the Rt Rev Gordon Mursell challenged people to think about what matters most in life and what they can let go of. 'What illusions about myself, what status symbols, what dark resentments, what accumulated clutter, need releasing if I am to travel on in faith?' he questioned 'We keep kidding ourselves that we can go on through life simply adding more and more to our spiritual luggage, without ever having to let anything go. Yet Jesus told his disciples to leave home and step out in faith with no spare bag or tunic.' The Bishop admitted travelling light was 'desperately hard in a consumer society. However hard it is to believe, the best is always yet to come.'

Pray: for our church leaders to be renewed and refreshed and respond when the Holy Spirit brings about revival. (Mt.10:10)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/the.best.is.always.yet.to.come.says.bishop/25256.htm>

EUROPE

■ **Greece and 2020 strategy set to dominate EU summit**

EU leaders are met in Brussels for an informal summit on Thursday (11 February) with a number of weighty topics adorning the agenda. The morning's work session was centred round the bloc's attempts to write a new economic 10-year plan, with the aim of boosting competitiveness and creating jobs for the growing number of unemployed. Over lunch leaders discussed the current market turmoil that has racked weaker Eurozone members in recent weeks and in particular debate potential emergency plans for Greece. News on Tuesday suggests France, Germany and other Eurozone members were hatching plans to bail out the embattled Aegean state, with investors keenly anticipating an announcement on this topic after the meeting. An EU source with an intimate knowledge of President Herman Van Rompuy's current thinking told journalists on Wednesday: 'It wouldn't surprise me if there was a communication on this subject.'

Pray: for the EU leaders that the decisions made will lead to an effective solution to the current problems and a clear vision for the future.

More: <http://euobserver.com/9/29447>

■ **EU votes in new Commission after long delay**

The European Parliament has given the green light to the new European Commission, ending an eight month's hiatus in the governance of the union at the height of the economic crisis. European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso and his 26-member college received 488 votes in favour, 137 against while 72 MEPs abstained. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP), the largest group in the EU Parliament, and the Liberal group pledged their support for Mr Barroso and his team ahead of the ballot. The Socialists, after some internal debate, also said they would vote in favour. The Greens and the far left voted against while the anti-federalist ECR - citing democracy grounds - abstained. The Commission's main goals for the next five years will be: to help EU countries to put the economic crisis behind them, to take the global lead on climate change and to make Europe more energy efficient, said Mr Barroso.

Pray: for the European Commission as it begins its role and to work well together for the good of all people. (Eph.4:1-3)

More: <http://euobserver.com/9/29436>

WORLDWIDE

■ **INSIGHT ARTICLE: Canadian Christians mobilise for Olympics**

Metro Vancouver's 1,300 Christian congregations are greeting the Olympic games on February 12-28 and March 12-21 with radical hospitality like: reaching out to the disadvantaged, opening their doors to overseas visitors with free coffee, Internet access, quiet places to meditate and offering travellers free places to stay. Some will hold demonstrations and workshops raising the profile of Vancouver's homeless and drawing attention to sex-trade victims of human trafficking. See: <http://www.vancouver.sun.com/life/Christians+plan+both+enjoy+Olympics+protest/2466800/story.html>

The Intercrossors of Vancouver have been preparing for this event since August '08 with a working group called 'More Than Gold' organising monthly prayer walks around the Olympic sites. For an encouraging report on the work of More than Gold in Canada click the info button below.

Pray: for snow and for an outpouring of heaven's blessings over Canada and the visiting nations. (Deut.28:12)

More: <http://www.prayer-alert.net/info/0710Canadaolympics.pdf>

■ **Morocco: Christian Bible study raid**

Approximately 60 officers from the Moroccan security services raided a Bible study group in Amizmiz last Thursday afternoon. 18 Moroccans were arrested and one U.S. citizen was deported. The meeting in the home of a Christian hosted visitors from across Morocco in a mainly Berber municipality of 10,000 people. Five of the 18 people held and interrogated for 14 hours were children. The Christian leader said, 'It's the first time in our current Moroccan church history that the government used this many people to attack a small Christian meeting. They said it was ordered personally by the new Moroccan Justice Minister and the highest level General of the Gendarmerie.' State-run news agency reported a 'foreign missionary' had been arrested for trying to 'spread evangelical creed in the Kingdom and locate new Moroccan nationals for recruitment which would shake Muslim's faith and undermine the Kingdom's religious values.'

Pray: for God to protect His people giving them insights into His way forward as Morocco is reached for Christ. (Deut.5:32,33)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/morocco/15087/>

■ **Guinea: Religious tension ignites**

Clashes between Christians and Muslims in Eastern Guinea, West Africa, left one person dead, two missing and 29 injured on Friday and Saturday. The fighting started after Muslims gathered to open a mosque which had been closed by authorities because of tensions between the religious communities. Nzerekore town is a Christian enclave in a mainly Muslim country. It is reported the latest insurrection started with a row between a Christian woman and a group of Muslim men. On Friday Christian youths took revenge by driving motorbikes near a mosque to disturb prayers. Police ordered a curfew from 7:30pm to 5am after groups of Christians and Muslims had been attacking each other with stones and clubs. Calm had been restored by Saturday evening, although sporadic gunfire was still heard in the city. Christians are eight per cent of the population in the West African nation.

Pray: for the Christian community to be united by love and given God's wisdom to uphold and advance reconciliation in the community. (1Th.1:4)

More: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2010/02/20102623830776287.html>

■ **Nigeria: Vice President assumes full powers**

Goodluck Jonathan the Nigerian vice-president chaired his first cabinet meeting as acting head of state in the absence of the country's ailing president. Despite having government support the move is not backed by the constitution and may not ease political uncertainty. Some have described the vote as illegal. One of Jonathan's first tasks may be answering claims that some of his police force were involved in extra-judicial killings. (The video at the end of this article shows the murder of people without trial and may disturb or upset). Part of the political battle in Nigeria is the delicate regional balancing act. The President is from the Muslim north and Jonathan from the Christian South, the presidency traditionally switches between the two sides every election. <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2010/02/20102914296875376.html>

Pray: for God's values to influence this political variance and for the region to move towards peace. (Le.26:6)

More: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2010/02/2010210143154556952.html>

■ Lebanon: Prime Minister warns of Israeli threat

Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri talked about escalating threats to the Middle East from Israel, 'We hear a lot of Israeli threats day in and day out. During the past two months Israeli war planes entered Lebanese airspace daily - this is escalating and is really dangerous.' He fears the prospect of another war with Israel and accused Israel of making a huge mistake by allegedly threatening both Lebanon and neighbouring Syria. Such rhetoric is not new but there is concern it could lead to more serious confrontation. He also said Lebanon would stand by Hezbollah. His comments come days after the foreign ministers of Syria and Israel exchanged aggressive accusations fuelling both media speculation and public fear about what many in the region describe as the 'imminent next war'

Pray: for God to strengthen Israel's fragile borders and repress the serious war of words. (Ps.32:7)

More: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8507482.stm

■ Iran: Underground actions fuelling protests

Iranians supporting democracy, freedom and the restoration of civil and human rights are continuing to protest even though they expect to be met with more force and violence than the original election protests. Iranian university students have been challenging the government. See: <http://www.statepress.com/node/10773> A protester since June in the streets of Tehran said, 'On Thursday the protests resume and the underground machinery is preparing for another showdown. A network of blogs, Facebook posts, and word of mouth that started in June is bringing thousands of old and young to the streets. The Government blocks websites in Iran but computer students are one step ahead of the government technologically.

Pray: for God to appoint and anoint a strong leader and leadership team to lead Iran out of its present situation. (Da.5:31)

More: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-02-10/the-revolt-about-to-rock-iran/?cid=hp:justposted1>

■ Pakistan: Blasphemy law

Dr. Nazir Bhatti President of Pakistan Christian Congress (PCC) said that Shahbaz Bhatti the Federal Minister for Minorities was not elected by voters. In Seminars and Press Conferences of Christian Liberation Front Shahbaz Bhatti claimed to repeal blasphemy laws in Pakistan, but as Federal Minister he talks of revising not repealing the controversial law. Twenty million Pakistani Christians have always demanded no revision or amendment to the law but demand it be abolished because it is misused by Muslim groups in Pakistan against Christians. It is on record that Shahbaz Bhatti in his meetings with Voice of Martyrs, Christian Solidarity Worldwide and other religious organizations in EU and USA said he supported the abolition of the blasphemy law.

Pray: that Dr. Nazir would honour his promise to repeal the blasphemy law in Pakistan in 2010 (Mt.5:37)

More: <http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/viewnews.php?newsid=1574>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Canada: Olympic Christians give their testimony

In light of the 2010 Olympic Games in Canada, BeyondTheUltimate.org has released Christian testimonies from athletes and coaches of current and past competing Olympic Games. Katya Antonuk a cross country skier from Russia is one of the Christians who gave her testimony. 'There are great pressures – having spent so many years of effort just to get there. The expectations of your team and country and your own expectations, the coach is under pressure and passes that pressure on the athlete. If your race does not go well everything seems to collapse and you don't know how to deal with it. As a Christian if I knew I had done all the preparation I could then I was able just to leave the rest to God'. For the rest of her testimony and that of other competitors click the 'More' button. Also see this weeks INSIGHT ARTICLE above.

Praise: and thank God for the many who will prayerfully stand on guard for Canada. (Neh.11:19)

More: <http://www.beyondtheultimate.org/athletes/Katya-Antonuk.aspx>

■ Vietnam: I will die for Christ

'Lord, if you exist please heal me. I offer my life to you and will serve you,' Trung prayed as he knelt in his room and remembered hearing about Jesus miraculously healing the sick. Trung had malaria, medicine had no effect, his health deteriorated and he expected to die. Childhood memories of stories about Jesus resurfaced and he prayed for healing lay down and went to sleep. At about midnight he heard the Lord call his name. He was startled and as he sat up in bed he felt God's peace come over him. 'It seemed to bring healing and in the morning I felt well. The Lord answered my prayer and I have remained malaria-free to this day.' Trung evangelised and preached freely following his conversion, was arrested for his faith, beaten, released, and continues to serve God in Vietnam in spite of the pain in his chest due to the beatings he received in prison.

Praise: and thank God for His outpouring of visions and revelations in these days. (Ac. 2:17)

More: <http://www.persecution.com.au/>

PRAYER FORUM OF THE BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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