

PRAYER ALERT...

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Contact Us

Donations

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■ British Isles & Ireland

- [Methodists declare 'we're ready to merge' with Church of England](#)
- [Hope re-launch reveals appetite for mission](#)
- [Church leaders call for 'technology fast'](#)
- [Yarl's Wood detention centre children face 'extreme distress', report reveals](#)
- [Church ready to 'say one for you' - Bishops across the country hit the streets for 'pray day'](#)
- [Government should not stand in way of homosexuals marrying in church, say Tories](#)
- [Put down your megaphones, Williams pleads](#)

■ Europe

- [Freemasons keen to open office in EU capital](#)
- [Netherlands: Church probe decides 'atheist' pastor won't face discipline](#)

■ Worldwide

- [Afghanistan: Avalanches and refugees](#)
 - [Pakistan: Government realise Taliban are too much of a threat](#)
 - [Nigeria: Al-Qaida offers to arm and train Muslims](#)
 - [Laos: Armed officials force Christians from village](#)
 - [Kenya: Push for Islamic courts](#)
 - [Indonesia: Anti-Christian persecution continues](#)
- ## ■ Praise Reports
- [Victory for London Church noise battle settled out of court](#)
 - [France cancels Haiti's debt, earmarks 270 million euros for reconstruction](#)
 - [Hearing God's Word](#)

BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Methodists declare 'we're ready to merge' with Church of England

The Rev David Gamble, president of the Methodist Conference, told the General Synod of the Church of England: 'We are prepared to go out of existence, not because we are declining or failing in mission, but for the sake of mission.' The Church of England and Methodists have discussed reconciliation since their divorce two centuries ago. An attempt in 1972 at full unity failed because Anglo-Catholics were opposed. With only 265,000 members and heading towards extinction within a few generations, Methodists are willing to try again. The Church of England is also facing steady decline, having barely 960,000 monthly worshippers. A condition of unity will be keeping the name Methodist in some form. 'It is more of a coming together rather than any suggestion that it would be the Methodist Church being swallowed up or losing its name'. It would not be an Anglican takeover. Mr Gamble's address to the synod was the first such since 1993.

Pray: that the desire for mission and reconciliation would lead to closer ties and to growth. (Ps.133)

More: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article7023713.ece>

■ Hope re-launch reveals appetite for mission

The re-launch of the Hope movement in March is an indication of the great appetite for mission across UK churches, says former YFC chief Roy Crowne. Mr Crowne will lead the movement, which has its roots in Hope08, the yearlong initiative that saw churches come together to reach out to their communities through mission and social action in 2008. The initiative was a huge success, with an independent report finding that 83 per cent of participating churches had felt it made a tangible difference in their communities. More than a year after its conclusion, many churches are still running activities and community outreach under the banner of Hope08. Evangelical Alliance General Director Steve Clifford will resume his role as Chair of Hope when it re-launches on March 1. The movement is being reformed with the support of the General Secretary of the Baptist Union, Jonathan Edwards, and Church of England mission leaders Bishop Graham Cray and Rev Canon Paul Bayes.

Pray: for the Hope movement asking God to inspire and direct its leaders and that it might be a powerful outreach. (Ps.31:24)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/hope.launch.reveals.appetite.for.mission/25306.htm>

■ Church leaders call for 'technology fast'

Church leaders are urging people to give up iPods rather than chocolate this Lent as part of a 'technology fast' to save the planet as well as our souls. Senior bishops are calling for a cut in personal carbon use for each of the 40 days of Lent. Their list of ways to achieve this includes eating less meat, flushing the toilet less often and cutting vegetables thinner so they cook faster. But one of their tougher challenges is to give up technology such as television, mobiles and iPods for one day.

The 'Carbon Fast', organised every year by development agency Tearfund, even suggests giving up technology for a day every month of the year and giving the money to charity. The Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Rev John Pritchard, said giving up technology would help people to think of others less fortunate than themselves.

Pray: for all those fasting in Lent in whatever way they choose that they may be encouraged and strengthened in faith. (Mt.6:16-18)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/7245308/Church-leaders-call-for-technology-fast.html>

■ **Yarl's Wood detention centre children face 'extreme distress', report reveals**

The Children's commissioner highlights concerns over a failure to assess psychological wellbeing of the 1,000 children held in the Yarl's Wood centre each year. Children held at an immigration detention centre face 'extremely distressing' arrest and transportation procedures, and are subjected to prolonged and sometimes repeated periods of detention, according to a damning report by the Children's Commissioner. In a report that prompted an angry response from the UK Border Agency (UKBA), Sir Al Aynsley-Green highlighted concerns over 'significant areas' of healthcare for the 1,000 children held in the Yarl's Wood centre every year. They include a failure to assess 'even at an elementary level' the general psychological wellbeing of a child on arrival and a failure to recognise psychological harm when faced with dramatic changes in a child's behaviour.

Pray: for the children who find themselves in such situations and that the authorities will treat them with love and care. (Lk.18:16)

More: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/feb/17/yarls-wood-children-extreme-distress>

■ **Church ready to 'say one for you' - Bishops across the country hit the streets for 'pray day'**

A new web-based service from the Church of England, launched today to mark the beginning of Lent, lets people across the country confidentially share their hopes and concerns anonymously in the form of a prayer – and also have those thoughts offered to God by a bishop. Prayers received via www.SayOneForMe.org over the next 40 days will be displayed on the site and shared with a number of Church of England bishops, who have agreed to remember the submissions in their own prayers over the season. The website invites visitors to type in their prayers – and then click 'Amen' to post them. The Rt Revd David Walker, Bishop of Dudley, says: 'Priests are well used to having people shout at us 'say one for me'. Whatever the initial intention of that yell in the street, underlying it is the fact that people feel a need to pray – especially during difficult times.

Pray: for all those who seek prayer and for the bishops who are doing the praying. (Jas.5:16)

More: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr2410.html>

■ **Government should not stand in way of homosexuals marrying in church, say Tories**

Since 2005, same sex couples have been able to enter into civil partnerships, which give them the same legal rights as married people. Nick Herbert, the front bencher and first homosexual man to be selected to become a Tory MP, said that the Conservatives were sympathetic to churches, such as the Quakers, who wanted to offer homosexual couples religious wedding ceremonies but were currently barred by law from doing so. In words which may alarm some traditionalists, Mr Herbert, who took part in a civil partnership ceremony with his long-term boyfriend last year, also said that while he understood why some religious groups opposed homosexual unions, there was no reason why marriage and adoption rights should not be extended to same sex couples. He called on communities to support fidelity and family values among homosexual people as a way of tackling high levels of promiscuity among gay men.

Pray: for the moral and legal distinctions of 'marriage' from 'civil partnership' to be clarified so that the state of 'marriage' is strengthened, rather than weakened, by our political leaders. (Dt. 23:2)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/politics/7257710/Government-should-not-stand-in-way-of-homosexuals-marrying-in-church-say-Tories.html>

■ **Put down your megaphones, Williams pleads**

Christian relationships must not be reduced to 'vicious polemic and stony-faced litigation', the Archbishop of Canterbury urged when he took both sides of the Communion debate to task. 'Trust one another for your own good.' Ways had to be found to decide contested issues. Dr Williams drew parallels with national and international debates on the Equality Bill and the question of assisted dying. The basic conflict in the former was 'not between a systematic assault on Christian values by a godless government on the one side and a demand for licensed bigotry on the other'. Otherwise people faced the prospect of being separated in the 'self-congratulatory mode that some seem to be content with', and the 'anxious, self-protective image that is so much in danger of entrenching itself in the popular mind as the typical Christian position'. The freedom of government to settle debated moral questions for the diverse communities of civil society was not something that should be endorsed too rapidly.

Pray: for those in authority to lead us wisely and open our minds and hearts. (1Ki. 3:28)

More: <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=89200>

EUROPE

■ **Freemasons keen to open office in EU capital**

A French freemason has said that part of the movement is keen to open a bureau in Brussels to lobby against the rising influence of religious organisations in the EU institutions. 'The masonic orders should practice politics in the positive sense of the term: So that despite their own partisan divisions, they speak out on the side of secularism and voice their disagreement with this or that governmental or European decision.' He said that masonic lodges in Europe remain divided on the subject. 'I think we will one day manage to create a general masonic delegation. It's possible politically, but we have

infinitely smaller resources than the churches,' Mr Quillardet explained. 'It is necessary to impose the universal idea of the Enlightenment, which consists of the notion that people are citizens and European citizens before being Jewish, black, Maghreb, homosexual, heterosexual.'

Pray: for the Lord to guide our leaders in rejecting anti-Christian siren voices. (Ro.8:38:39)

More: <http://euobserver.com/9/29500>

■ **Netherlands: Church probe decides 'atheist' pastor won't face discipline**

A self-proclaimed atheist can continue to serve as a local pastor of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and no longer faces disciplinary action because of his controversial position on how to describe God. A special assembly of Zierikzee, a regional church body tasked with investigating the theological statements of Pastor Klaas Hendrikse, has said its work is 'completed'. The 3 February decision to allow Hendrikse to continue working as a pastor followed the advice of a regional supervisory panel that the statements by Hendrikse, 'are not of sufficient weight to damage the foundations of the church. The ideas of Hendrikse are theologically not new, and are in keeping with the liberal tradition that is an integral part of our church,' the special panel concluded.

Pray: for the Church in Holland as it continues to follow 'liberal' ideas and accept people such as Hendrikse as a pastor, that God would convict them of the truth. (Jn.5:24)

More: <http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=3787>

WORLDWIDE

■ **Afghanistan: Avalanches and refugees**

At least 165 people were killed in a series of avalanches on Afghanistan's important North South Nato supply route used by convoys trying to avoid attacks in the Khyber Pass. Villagers, rescue workers and soldiers used bulldozers and shovels to free 2,600 trapped in the country's worst natural disaster in recent years. We are asked to pray for the small hospital taking care of survivors, for families and friends grieving the loss of loved ones and for the Lord to minister to those who are still trapped. Elsewhere hundreds of innocent families have fled their villages after being warned in advance of the military operation against the Taliban. Pray for their protection as they travel. Pray also for the pregnant women and small children away from home in the cold weather and for them to be able to safely return home very soon.

Pray: for God to touch the lives of those coping with man-made and natural disasters in Afghanistan and for His purposes for the unreached people to emerge. (Ps.102:19-20)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/7207356/Afghan-avalanches-kill-165.html>

■ **Pakistan: Government realise Taliban are too much of a threat**

The capture of Afghan Taliban's No. 2 leader raises hopes Pakistan will deny Taliban leaders safe haven. The arrest may also push other insurgent leaders sheltering in Pakistan toward talks with the Afghan government. There is speculation he was either handed over by Pakistani intelligence officials in a trade off over the future of Afghanistan. or members of the Taliban could have betrayed him. Pakistani Christians ask us to pray into the following - Eight to ten people are fighting for leadership of the Taliban in Pakistan. A lack of central control often makes extremist organizations more dangerous and difficult to nail down. In this society when people are not chosen as the leader they each start their own organization. To establish leadership they try to perform bigger attacks than their neighbour. Our desire is not just defeat the militants but see them come to Christ. Many Pakistani Muslims today are seeing visions of Christ.

Pray: that Christ reveals Himself more and more to militants and will give Christian's boldness to interpret those dreams and share God's love. (Act.26:18)

More: http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/A/AFGHANISTAN_TALIBAN?SITE=PAYOK&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

■ **Nigeria: Al-Qaida offers to arm and train Muslims**

North Africa's Al-Qaida leader has offered training and weapons to Nigeria's Muslims to fight Christians following an outbreak of sectarian violence. He has accused Nigerian Christians of killing hundreds of Muslims in a 'Crusader war' and urges Nigerians to 'Push your sons into the fields of Jihad to become the fighting vanguard in defence of the Muslims' blood and honour. The only way to end massacres and restore your rights is to prepare yourselves for a holy war using the example of your brothers in Somalia who have confronted the Ethiopian Crusaders.' Violence between Christians and Muslims in central Nigeria left 326 people dead late last month (See Prayer Alert 0410 & 0510) Sectarian violence has left thousands dead over the past decade. The Nigerian government's efforts to quell religious extremism have failed. Al-Qaeda operates mainly in Algeria but spreads across the Sahara carrying out operations in Mali, Mauritania and elsewhere.

Pray: for Christians not to retaliate, but be strengthened in their faith and filled with God's love for their neighbours. (Mt.5:43-44)

More: http://ausprayernet.org.au/newsletter/DisplayNewsletter.php?e_id=0000001889#st4

■ **Laos: Armed officials force Christians from village**

Approximately 100 local officials police and villagers forced Christians out of Sunday morning worship and their homes at gunpoint in Katin village in Laos last month. The officials then confiscated all personal belongings from 11 Christian homes and destroyed six homes and a pig (equal to six weeks' salary to the villagers.) Unable to cajole them into renouncing Christ they forced them to walk six kilometres with guns pointing to their heads and then left them on the side of the road. They are now living in a field and armed officials refuse them re-entry into their village until they renounce Christ. Laos is run by communist ideologues committed to maintaining an atheist state. Although relaxing opposition to Buddhist and animist

traditions, Christianity is considered a Western import to be eradicated. In the past Christians were forced to drink blood, practice animist rituals and speak to spirits to prove renunciation of Christianity.

Pray: for God to protect, encourage and provide for the Christian outcasts in Laos. (Mt.5:11)

More: <http://www.persecution.org/suffering/pressdetail.php?presscode=373&PHPSESSID=8e09cc9b519746cd90d17d1afcf64e5f>

■ Kenya: Push for Islamic courts

A constitutional battle to expand the scope of Islamic courts in Kenya threatens to ignite religious tensions at a time when authorities are on high alert against Muslim extremists with ties to Somalia. Constitutional provisions for Islamic courts have existed in Kenya since 1963 in Kenya's Coast Province but in a hotly debated draft constitution their jurisdiction would expand across the nation and their scope would increase. The proposed constitution has gathered enough momentum that 23 leaders of churches and Christian organizations released a statement on Feb. 1 asserting their opposition to any inclusion of such religious courts.

Pray: for God to prevent the Muslim community from creating for itself an Islamic state within a state. (Ps.2:8)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/kenya/15118/>

■ Indonesia: Anti-Christian persecution continues

A crowd of 200 Muslims has launched intimidating messages at the faithful and prohibiting the use of a local church for Sunday services. The attackers claim to be residents of the area but the pastor denies this saying they are definitely strangers. From 2009 to now at least 17 Christian churches have been targeted. The desire to erect a Christian place of worship goes back 19 years and there has always been opposition to the birth of churches in the area. 200 signatures of people supporting the building of a church have been collected, but ignored by authorities.

Pray: for the release of essential building permits that are needed for any structure in the country. (Job.22:27-28)

More: <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=17563>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Victory for London Church noise battle settled out of court

For the second time in as many months, a London Council who had served a Noise Abatement Notice against a Church has had to reverse its decision. In May 2009, Waltham Forest Borough Council issued Immanuel International Christian Ministries with a 'noise abatement notice' ordering them to worship 'more quietly' or be prosecuted following repeated complaints from just one neighbour—a Muslim man who lives in the Church's former manse. On appeal the Church was successful in amending the Notice. The new Notice will enable them to worship without a constant fear of being fined and prosecuted. This case has established an important principle that local authorities must have substantive evidence of excessive noise, rather than act subjectively on a few complaints. (See Prayer Alert 0310 & 4209)

Praise: God for this further answer to prayer over attacks against Church celebrations. (Ps.118:15)

More: <http://www.christianlegalcentre.com/view.php?id=982>

■ France cancels Haiti's debt, earmarks 270 million euros for reconstruction

France will provide 270 million euros over two years to Haiti to help the Caribbean nation's economy recover from the devastating earthquake, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said on Wednesday. Announcing the assistance at a news conference with Haitian President, Sarkozy said France had already decided to forgive its 56 million euros of debt to his country in the wake of the quake. Sarkozy spoke after arriving in the capital Port-au-Prince on the first visit by a French head of state to the former French Caribbean colony. (See Prayer Alert 0510)

Praise: God for this generous offer from France and pray that many more nations will follow. (Is.49:10)

More: <http://www.france24.com/en/20100217-france-haiti-nicolas-sarkozy-visit-cancels-debt-aid-reconstruction-earthquake>

■ Hearing God's Word

The South America Quechua people didn't believe God understood their language and only spoke Spanish. Ricardo, the local witchcraft healer's son, heard about Christianity in Spanish his second language. The local culture required him to take over his father's practice but after listening to the Bible in his own language he found another way to live. He discovered witchcraft was a sin, 'What it says in the Acts of the Apostles changed my life. It was like a dagger to all my sinful ways.' Ricardo now a father and husband of three has taken over his father's business and when people come to him for healing he preaches the Gospel to them. With the support of his pastor Ricardo started a second listening to the Bible group in a neighbouring village.

Praise: God for fresh expressions of evangelism and pray that God would release more initiatives to reach the lost. (Is.42:16)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2010/s10020091.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF THE BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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