

PRAYER ALERT...

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Website

Contact Us

Donations

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■ British Isles & Ireland

- [Christian protest against gay partnership plan](#)
- [Walkout ends Government advisory group on religion](#)
- [CARE: Make the Cross Count 2010](#)
- [BNP: Black churches not welcome in white areas](#)
- [Minister tells churches to 'keep Government focussed on 2012 legacy'](#)
- [UK votes for cluster munitions ban](#)
- [£1m fund to strengthen voice of faith groups](#)

■ Europe

- [Churches launch ACT Alliance major humanitarian body](#)
- [France: Resistance to spiritual climate](#)

■ Worldwide

- [Nigeria: Suspects to be prosecuted](#)
- [Pakistan: Sensitive prayer request](#)
- [Pakistan: Christian burned for his faith](#)
- [Niger: Food shortages could affect millions](#)
- [El Salvador: Anglican Bishop victim of an assassination attempt](#)
- [Palestine: Authority backtracks over Christian channel](#)

■ Praise Reports

- [Kwik Save millionaire's £1bn charity pledge](#)
- [Regulator keeps conscience clause for religious pharmacists](#)
- [India: In the midst of hundreds dead, people still come to Christ](#)

BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Christian protest against gay partnership plan

Traditionalist Christians have appealed to ministers to block plans allowing civil partnership ceremonies to take place in churches. They are worried that new laws, part of the Equality Bill, will mean clergy could be prosecuted if they refuse to carry out the ceremonies. Currently gay partnerships cannot be registered in places of worship. The Government has said the ceremonies are voluntary and no one will be prosecuted for refusing to hold them. However, critics say that the change is another attempt by gay campaigners to elevate civil partnerships to the same status as marriage. Christian groups have presented a petition to the Equalities Minister, Harriet Harman. Andrea Minichiello Williams, from the group Christian Concern for our Nation, said that priests who refused to allow their churches to be used for the ceremonies could find themselves under investigation by the police. She pointed out that Christian registrars have lost their jobs after refusing to register same-sex civil unions. The Government has insisted religious organisations will not be forced to act against their beliefs.

Pray: for clarity and understanding of God's will in this matter and for wisdom for those making the decisions. (Ps.25:5)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8582868.stm>

■ Walkout ends Government advisory group on religion

The Government's main advisory group on religion ('Religion and Belief Consultative Group, RBCG') has collapsed in acrimony after church groups walked out after a dispute between atheists and believers. The Church of England condemned the group as 'not fit for purpose' and complained that each meeting degenerated into an 'impasse' between secularists and the religious. The secularists hit back, accusing Christians of 'triumphalism and bullying'. Muslims had already stopped attending the group, whose remaining few members will meet shortly to decide whether it is worth carrying on. Hindus, Baha'is and secularists are still represented but the Church of England, the Salvation Army, the Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church have all left, jeopardising the group's future. The Church of England's representative on the group, Dr Malcolm Brown, told The Times: 'Problems began when the RBCG moved from being a discussion group about the forthcoming equalities legislation to being a group with which the Equalities and Human Rights Commission consulted on a semi-formal basis'.

Pray: for courage and wisdom for the Church to find ways to overcome attempts to marginalise it. (Mt.16:18)

More: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article7072904.ece?token=null&offset=12&page=2>

■ CARE: Make the Cross Count 2010

The resources and information on this website have been prepared to help us prepare for the forthcoming general election. Many people have become disillusioned with politics. CARE believes passionately that Christians have a role to play in our

democracy and prays that many Christians and individual churches will be actively involved in our nation's political life. The website supports our prayer that churches across the UK will take up the challenge of hosting hustings events and provide an opportunity for local people to put questions to those standing as candidates. As a guide (download from link below), CARE's website provides everything you need to know about organising a hustings event. Its resources include a series of Bible studies for small groups or individuals to help you think through the issues of living out our faith in a modern democracy.

Pray: that Christian ethics and morality will infuse those being elected to govern us. (Mt 7:29)

More: <http://www.makethecrosscount2010.net/get-involved>

■ **BNP: Black churches not welcome in white areas**

Black churches would not be welcome or receive grants from a BNP local or national government if their ministry and place of worship were to be in a 'historically white area', BNP leader Nick Griffin admitted on live TV. The debate took place between him and the leader of the Christian Party and British-born, black pastor Rev George Hargreaves on Revelation and Genesis TV. Both are standing against Labour Minister Margaret Hodge for the Barking constituency in the forthcoming general election. The two were debating the motion: 'That the election of any BNP MP or leader of a Local Authority will be detrimental to Black and ethnic minority Christians in particular and the wider church in general in Britain.' Mr Griffin revealed that his understanding of Christian heritage was one of 'national pride and history'. When asked about his own relationship with God, he stated that it was rather with an ideal of what the Anglican Church as the 'state church' should be.

Pray: against the rise of bigotry in our communities from whatever source. (Pr.10:12)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/black.churches.not.welcome.in.white.areas.says.bnp.leader/25544.htm>

■ **Minister tells churches to 'keep Government focussed on 2012 legacy'**

Over 200 Christians from across the denominations gathered together with members of charities and other NGOs at Westminster Central Hall in London this past week to engage with matters of social justice in the lead up to the 2012 London Games. The meeting was hosted by More Than Gold, the churches' 2012 umbrella charity. The four key areas being addressed are homelessness, human trafficking and prostitution, Fairtrade and climate change. David Willson, CEO of More Than Gold, opened the day by sharing his own experience over the past fourteen years heading up the churches' work alongside Olympic and Paralympic Games. 'The Olympics are an opportunity wherever they occur for dynamic short-term celebration and long-term regeneration for millions of people. However, for some the Games can mean further degradation and misery. It is our duty as Christ's body here on earth to do all we can to prevent this from happening, while serving and encouraging all that is good.'

Pray: for the work of More Than Gold to ensure the Olympic Games and its legacy is a positive one for everyone. (Je.29:11)

More: http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/catholic_church/media_centre/press_releases/press_releases_2010/britain_s_vice_faith_minister_tells_churches_to_keep_government_focussed_on_2012_legacy

■ **UK votes for cluster munitions ban**

Methodist, Baptist and United Reformed Church (URC) leaders have welcomed the passing of the Cluster Munitions (Prohibitions) Act in Parliament yesterday (23 March) which ensures that the UK military cannot use cluster munitions, nor can UK military establishments house cluster bombs for other nations. These churches have been campaigning for this change for the last two years and said that they were pleased to note the all-party support for the Act, which they attribute to strong public support for banning these weapons. Rev John March, Moderator of the General Assembly of the URC stated that 'It is vital that when a war ends, it truly ends. Unexploded bombs must never maim children after armies have stopped fighting'. Cluster munitions contain many bomblets, small objects typically the size of a drinks can, which explode spreading shredded metal around the surrounding area. Sometimes bomblets fail to explode, which means that unexploded bombs are left at the scene of the armed conflict.

Pray: that every nation will denounce use of these devastating devices. (Mic.4:3)

More: <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/11591>

■ **£1m fund to strengthen voice of faith groups**

A new £1m fund has been set up by the Government to help faith groups get their voices heard by government and public bodies. The fund was unveiled before 180 faith leaders today by Communities Secretary John Denham at the Faith and Social Action Conference in London. Faith groups are being invited to bid for a share of the fund to strengthen their voice as well as their 'capacity to challenge and engage Government'. The fund will go towards the work of faith groups in delivering public services and can be used to cover the cost of activities like training in fundraising. The launch of the fund comes at a time when many Christians have been questioning the Government's commitment to religious freedom.

Pray: for the Government to be sincere rather than gesturing in supporting our Christian faith. (2Ki.12:16)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/denham.unveils.1m.fund.to.strengthen.voice.of.faith.groups/25506.htm>

EUROPE

■ **Churches launch ACT Alliance major humanitarian body**

The ACT Alliance, bringing together over 100 church-backed relief and development organizations worldwide, was launched on 24 March with celebrations in Geneva and around the world. The new ACT Alliance is one of the world's

largest humanitarian bodies working in 125 countries. It provides emergency food aid, shelter, water and sanitation facilities, and poverty reduction programmes in the world's poorest countries. The new body is a merger of the disaster relief network ACT International and its sister organization ACT Development. The two bodies coordinated the work of agencies related to the member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Lutheran World Federation in the areas of humanitarian emergencies and poverty reduction respectively. The WCC general secretary said 'the ACT Alliance is a genuine expression of the ecumenical movement, the call to be one so that the world can believe that God is a loving and caring God for all humankind.'

Pray: for the success of this new alliance that through its work God would be glorified. (Jn.17:23)

More: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/churches-launch-major-hum.html>

■ **France: Resistance to spiritual climate**

Less than two percent of Europeans consider themselves to be Biblical Christians. In France, the number plummets to under one percent. 'There's not only great indifference but even resistance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in France,' says Karen Langstraat of Greater Europe Mission. 'Ministry is hard there, and we just really want to encourage that local body of believers.' In order to do so, Greater Europe Mission is sending two teams from seven churches in Des Moines, Iowa to northern France in May. They will spend the majority of their time in a suburb of Lille. The only evangelical church in the suburb as of now is still in the planting stages. The teams will work with this budding church to encourage them and to help them with a few practical things. They will, for instance, help with renovations of the building they have leased.

Pray: for the teams as they spread the Good News and that many would be added to the Church. (Is.52:7)

More: <http://www.mnnonline.org/article/14021>

WORLDWIDE

■ **Nigeria: Suspects to be prosecuted**

Two hundred Muslim suspects have been arrested over the recent slaughter of five hundred Christians in the Jos area of Nigeria and are scheduled for early prosecution. Forty nine Fulani herdsmen will be charged with homicide and terrorism in connection with the March 7 violence. Another seven will face similar charges over a second wave of killings. Others face charges of unlawful possession of firearms, rioting, arson and causing grievous bodily hurt. Persecution watchdogs have called for security for Christians in the West African country. Open Doors says the atmosphere in the Christian villages remains tense and Christians in northern Nigeria face discrimination, humiliation and attacks on almost a daily basis. The youth of the village attacked on March 7 are livid and when a pastor encouraged them to forgive, they were extremely offended.

Pray: for swift justice to make it possible for communities to move towards forgiveness, healing and hope for the future. (Ps.3:8)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/nigeria.to.prosecute.hundreds.of.suspects.in.christian.slaughter/25549.htm>

■ **Pakistan: Sensitive prayer request**

We are asked to pray for a Christian NGO programme recently underway to train and equip 60 people over the coming months to serve as leaders in areas of health, law, education, politics, media, and business. Please pray that these people will complete the full training programme; for close relationships to develop between the Christian trainers and the students and for opportunities for the trainers to share the Good News during this time. Also ask God to use these and other Christian NGO's in the country to have a positive input in the areas where they have influence on the future of Pakistan.

Pray: for an open heaven above this project, for the trainers protection and the trainees salvation. (Ps.128:2)

■ **Pakistan: Christian burned for his faith**

Hundreds of people attended the funeral Wednesday of a young Christian man burned by Muslim extremists and police officers for refusing to convert to Islam. His wife was raped by possibly three police officers in the police station where the couple had been held for questioning. Their children ranging in ages from 7 to 12 were allegedly forced to watch the attacks. The police officers were suspended pending an investigation into their involvement in the burning and rape incidents. Local Christians and human rights investigators said the attacks were instigated by the couple's employer, Muslim businessman Sheikh Mohammad Sultan. The burned man had been working as a driver and his wife as a maid for the businessman, and Sultan threatened them with dire consequences earlier this year if they did not convert to Islam.

Pray: for God to powerfully comfort and strengthen the Christian community in their faith. (Ps.23:4)

More: <http://www.bosnewslife.com/12191-pakistan-funeral-for-burned-christian>

■ **Niger: Food shortages could affect millions**

An assessment by the Niger government finds more than half of the country's 15 million people are facing food shortages due to irregular and poor rainfalls and is expected to face a serious food security emergency this year. Half of the rural households in Niger, more than two million people, have already finished their grain reserves and five million more people will soon deplete their food stocks. The number of malnourished children being admitted to feeding centres was 60 percent greater than at the same time last year. People are reducing the size and the daily number of meals or moving on for days without a meal. Begging has intensified and some people have gone into debt in order to buy food.

Pray: for relief organisations to be able to move in Niger proactively. (Ps.4:12)

More: <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Millions-of-Hungry-People-in-Niger-Need-Help-88998992.html>

■ El Salvador: Anglican Bishop victim of an assassination attempt

The Episcopal Church of El Salvador has denounced the murder attempt that Bishop Barahona and two of his closest collaborators have suffered. On Wednesday (17th), Bishop Barahona, along with these two other men were victims of the violence that has held El Salvador imprisoned. Without speaking, an unknown man, shot at them. The bullets hit the bishop's driver, Francis Martínez, who is now hospitalized, however the Bishop was unharmed. The bishop is a pastor whose principal function is to accompany spiritually the faithful who seek his advice and solace. The Episcopal Church laments profoundly this fact, as do many Salvadorans, who are victims of violence and impunity. We ask everyone's prayers that hope in a different El Salvador is not lost and that this event is not a sign of persecution of the Church.

Pray: for the Church in El Salvador that God will protect His servants. (Ps.5:11)

More: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2010/3/24/ACNS4693>

■ Palestine: Authority backtracks over Christian channel

The Palestinian Authority (PA) appears to have backtracked on its decision to close down 10 TV stations, including a private Christian channel. The PA had taken the stations off the air, claiming they did not have proper licenses, but announced Wednesday that the networks would be given one month to sort out the issue. Nevertheless, the owner of the Christian station said he would not reopen the channel until the PA apologizes. Samir Qumsieh, owner and director of Al-Mahed (Nativity) TV, which was founded in Beit Sahur, near Bethlehem 14 years ago, condemned the closure, particularly since it coincided with the Easter Holiday season. He accused the PA of cracking down on freedom of expression. Qumsieh said PA security officials who raided his station last week told him that the decision to close it down had been made because of the licensing issues.

Pray: that the authorities would reconsider and enable Nativity TV to broadcast again. (Job.6:29)

More: <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=171669>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Kwik Save millionaire's £1bn charity pledge

The multi-millionaire founder of Kwik Save is to fulfil a 'pact with God' he made as a struggling young man and donate half his fortune to the Church. Manx-based Albert Gubay, 82, a life-long Roman Catholic who was born in Wales, has placed his business empire, valued at £600m, into a trust. The money will be passed into a charitable foundation on his death. Mr Gubay, originally from Rhyl, Denbighshire, is ranked 107th on The Sunday Times Rich List in 2009, with a £480m estate. Half of his money will go to causes identified by the Roman Catholic Church, with the other half to go to good causes selected at the discretion of the trustees. Mr Gubay said: 'my whole focus in the next few years is to work as hard as I can to meet my target of a £1bn charity.'

Praise: God for the faith of Mr Gubay and pray that the Lord will continue to bless him abundantly. (2Sa.7:29)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/8582008.stm>

■ Regulator keeps conscience clause for religious pharmacists

The General Pharmaceutical Council has decided to uphold the right of pharmacists in the UK to refuse to dispense treatments that conflict with their religious beliefs. The new pharmacy regulator said it would retain an existing code of ethics when it replaces the Royal Pharmaceutical Society as the regulator of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians later this year. The code of ethics contains a conscience clause that allows pharmacies to opt out of providing items such as the morning after pill if doing so goes against their religious beliefs. The council said, however, that consultation on the issue would continue and that in the future pharmacies may have to tell patients of other providers. Pharmacies may also be compelled to display notices telling patients of the services they are unable to provide because of their religious convictions.

Praise: God for this decision in upholding Christian principles. (Col.2:8)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/regulator.keeps.conscience.clause.for.religious.pharmacists/25559.htm>

■ India: In the midst of hundreds dead, people still come to Christ

For the past two years, Orissa has been a deadly land for Christians, as hundreds have been murdered in anti-Christian acts. For those who have survived, much of their freedoms have been restricted, and thousands of homes have been burned, totally destroying their livelihoods. Yet people are still coming to Christ, according to Gospel for Asia. In fact, in one district, 40 individuals recently came to Christ. GFA said this was due to three college students who did their internships in that area. As it says in 1 Timothy 4:12, these youths did not let anyone look down on them because of their age but 'set an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.' Because they obeyed the Great Commission, GFA said, 'God not only protected them, but He also blessed their ministry with fruit they couldn't have imagined.'

Praise: God that out of persecution comes blessings. (1Tim.4:12)

More: <http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue9197.html>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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