

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ **FRIDAY FOCUS: 17 April 2009 - Hope when life is stressful - 1 Peter 5:7**

1 in 4 Britons will suffer from a mental health problem within a given year, with anxiety and depression being the most common combination of mental health disorders in the UK. Between 8 and 12 percent of the population will struggle with depression and the effects on home, career, relationships and personal esteem are enormous. Check out the website: www.overcomedepression.co.uk **Pray:** For someone you know suffering from depression or anxiety and their family and friends and for the many organisations that work with those suffering mental health problems including:- NHS, MIND, Depression Alliance, Christian Counselling Service etc. National Depression Week (20-24 April)

More: http://worldprayer.org.uk/uploads/Friday_Focus_Apr_2009.doc

■ **EU directive could open up faith schools to non-believers**

Plans drawn up by the European Union to combat discrimination would allow non-believers to send their children to faith schools and could pave the way for gay marriage in church. Proposals contained in the EU's draft discrimination directive could lead to churches being sued if they refuse to give communion, baptism or membership to non-Christians trying to get their children into a church school, experts said. The Church of England said last week that it would raise concerns with the Government over the draft directive. It fears that if the proposals are approved in their current form, religious bodies would lose an exemption they enjoy under current UK law to discriminate on grounds of conscience. Religious groups warned that the anti-discrimination measures could also lead to gay marriage and homosexuals demanding wedding services in church. The draft discrimination directive would make it illegal to offer goods and services only to particular sections of society.

Pray: that these draft proposals and the problems they may cause in the present form will be recognised and amended to meet the needs of all concerned. (Dt.32:28-29)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/religion/5140959/EU-directive-could-open-up-faith-schools-to-non-believers.html>

■ **Charity worker suspended for answering questions about his faith**

An employee at a Christian 'homeless' charity has been suspended for answering questions about his faith to a colleague at work. David Booker, a Christian from Southampton, has worked for the English Churches Housing Group for almost four years. On 26 March, whilst working an evening shift, he had conversation with female colleague Fiona Vardy. Ms Vardy asked him about his faith and beliefs. During the conversation he was asked the Church's teaching on homosexuality and same-sex marriages, which Mr Booker explained. The conversation was free-flowing and Mr Booker clearly explained that he had homosexual friends and that he was not homophobic. The following day he was summoned by his employers and

told that he was suspended alleging that: 'On 26 March 09, whilst on shift with Fiona Vardy, he seriously breached ECHG's (English Churches House Group) code of conduct by promoting your religious views which contained discriminatory comments regarding a person's sexual orientation.'

Pray: for those who become unjustly penalised if they speak out their Christian beliefs. (Ps.40:10)

More: <http://www.christianlegalcentre.com/view.php?id=723>

■ What's it like to be young and homeless?

Many homeless people are a long way from the stereotype of someone sitting on the street in a cardboard box, says Samia Meah. When I say the word 'homeless', people normally visualise someone sitting on the street in a cardboard box, looking terrible and perhaps even shouting at traffic. This bothers me as I am friends with many homeless young people who are very far from this stereotype. It bothers me more as I am one of them. We are a group of people in society that people are often unaware of. We are homeless, but we live in temporary accommodation - hostels with a minuscule room or maybe a room shared with strangers. There are people who have suffered with domestic violence, abandonment, immigration, self-harm and sheer neglect. They are, my friends who have overcome these devastating situations and have the will not only to carry on but also excel in what they do. Samia is supported by homeless charity Centrepont.

Pray: for the homeless, that they may have a fair chance of a permanent place to live. (1Co.4:11-12)

More: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/apr/15/homeless-young-people>

■ Death of the traditional family

Women are more likely to give birth before they turn 25 than get married, according to official statistics that illustrate how British family life has been transformed in a generation. More people are living alone, more children are being raised by single parents and more grown-up children are living with their parents than ever before, according to the Office for National Statistics. One expert said that the in-depth annual study was final confirmation that the nuclear family had become 'a museum piece'. The Social Trends report made clear, however, that the most radical changes had been to child-rearing and marriage. Its figures showed that 30 per cent of women under 30 had given birth by the age of 25, while 24 per cent had married: the first time that having children had become the first major milestone of adult life, ahead of marriage. This was in sharp contrast to their parents' generation. In 1971 three-quarters of women were married by 25, and half had given birth. (See also Prayer Alert 1409)

Pray: against this trend in our society and that God's plans for family will once more be accepted. (Eph.3:14-16)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/5160857/Death-of-the-traditional-family.html>

■ We need spirituality, not a spending spree, Archbishop argues.

Dr Rowan Williams has challenged Gordon Brown's plans for Britain to spend its way out of the recession and instead called on consumers to curb their appetites. He used his Easter sermon to advocate a return to the spiritual values embraced by monastic communities - poverty, chastity and obedience. His message was echoed by Church leaders around the country, putting them on a collision course with the Government and its solution to the economic crisis, which is to persuade shoppers to start buying again. By contrast, Church leaders want the Easter message of victory through defeat and suffering to be applied to the world's financial difficulties, so that even the most serious trials are turned eventually to spiritual success.

Pray: for a resurgence of spiritual values in the wider community as people recognise that the consumer society does not provide the answers. (Rom.12:1-3)

More: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article6081678.ece>

■ Chaplains of the Armed Forces

Uniformed Service Chaplains are attached to ships and units of all 3 Armed Services. There are a total of roughly 300 chaplains and they are stationed around the world ministering to Service personnel and their families. They also deploy with their ships or units to operational theatres such as Iraq and Afghanistan. They offer spiritual help and guidance to all and live in the same conditions and share the same dangers as the sailors, soldiers and airmen. They spend time with people wherever they may be - on patrol, in guard posts, in the welfare areas, in canteens and so on. They visit the sick and injured and spend time with those who may have been involved in a variety of traumatic incidents. They have the privilege to pray with people and to lead acts of worship in a variety of different locations.

Pray: for Chaplains in what can be a demanding and lonely role. For spiritual wisdom, guidance, encouragement and that the Holy Spirit would continue to refresh and replenish them. (Col.4:2-6)

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

EUROPE

■ Turkey: International Day of Prayer

Association of Protestant Churches: 'Greetings from Turkey - the land of Noah, of Abraham, of Paul, of Antioch, of Acts, of the Seven Churches of Revelation, of Nicea. We would like to invite you to join us in a commitment that we as the current churches of Turkey have made: as from this year, 2009, to set aside every year, the day of April 18 as the 'International Day of Prayer for Turkey'. Why April 18? Various dates were being proposed, when, as you will sadly recall, three of our brothers were brutally murdered, martyred, in the city of Malatya in 2007. On 18 April 2007, Necati Aydin, Tillman Geske and Ugur Yüksel were murdered for no other reason than actively living and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Mingling their memory in deep prayer for the country they and we all love, will honour their sacrifice.' The initiative has received the backing of the European Evangelical Alliance and World Evangelical Alliance.

Pray: that Turkey's tiny Christian community can be strengthened in the Holy Spirit to live for the glory of God and that the people of Turkey will open their hearts and eyes to the Kingdom of God. (Col.2:6-8)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/church.group.announces.day.of.prayer.for.turkey/23052.htm>

■ **Germany: Iraqi Christian refugees arrive**

Around 120 Christian refugees from Iraq arrived in Germany in search of a better and safer future away from the turmoil of their home country. Many of the refugees who arrived at Hanover airport were single mothers and their children as well as a number of sick people. One child was quickly taken away to receive medical attention, reports the International Herald Tribune. The EU has pledged to take in around 10,000 refugees from Iraq, many of whom are Christians or from other religious minorities. Germany is expected to take in 2,500 people. The UK, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have also pledged to accept refugees. Christians in Iraq have faced severe persecution following the invasion of Iraq six years ago. They are often targeted by Islamic militants or criminals who regard them as being in league with occupation forces.

Pray: for these nations that have opened their doors to those who are persecuted for their faith. (Mt.5:12)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/iraqi.christian.refugees.arrive.in.germany/22831.htm>

WORLDWIDE

■ **South Africa: Bishops support for Zimbabweans unwelcome**

Bishop Paul Verryn of Johannesburg's Central Methodist Church has received death threats for sheltering Zimbabwean refugees and has been under police guard. More than 2,600 'official' refugees await relocation from Verryn's refuge and estimates say the same number live on the streets around the church. His ministry that stretches over several provinces with an open-door policy towards refugees has angered local businesses. The church has become a focal point for anti-Mugabe activities and Verryn is an outspoken critic of Mugabe's regime. In 2008 he was accused of 'betraying the liberation struggle' and brought before a South African parliamentary committee. Earlier this year more officials condemned Verryn for sheltering refugees. Many ANC politicians support Mugabe as a liberation struggle icon and favour his land-grab policies saying the likes of Verryn are sabotaging their efforts to 'transform' southern Africa.

Pray: that the Zimbabwean people would be cared for by their neighbours and more people will do the things that Jesus would have done in similar circumstances. (Ps.72:11-13)

More: <http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=2906>

■ **United Nations: Anti-racism summit**

A UN conference in Geneva from 20th to 24th April hopes to support the fight against discrimination, victims of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. The first draft document for the conference caused controversy as Canada, Italy, Israel, America and others believed the wording could be used to foster anti-Semitic hate through aggressive expressions. An Italian spokesman said, 'The phrases in the draft declaration were 'totally unacceptable' and would have to be removed before Italy considered participating in the summit.' America voiced international concern about the Israel/Iranian, Israel/Palestinian struggle being too glaring to ignore. A press release from OHCHR's New York Office now states the revised text 'does not mention any particular countries and it expects to adopt the framework of existing international law to address issue of religious hate speech.' It is unclear who will or will not participate in next weeks conference.

Pray: that this conference will not be hijacked into demonizing Israel and ignoring pressing global issues of racism, debt relief, AIDS and equitable trade pacts. (Ps.12:3-5)

More: <http://un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30402>

■ **India: Four weeks of elections**

A BJP politician has been charged with 'promoting hostility between communities' after making an anti-Christian hate speech at Orissa. The BJP is India's main opposition party to the Indian National Congress and has been criticised for inflaming divisions ahead of the general election which started Thursday and will continue throughout the provinces over the next four weeks. Voting was marred by Maoist insurgents attacking, burning and looting polling booths and taking four police rifles in Orissa. Killing two security personnel and wounding two female voters in Bihar. Officials say that 264 booths, in areas where Maoists are active, will close two hours ahead of time for security reasons. The rebels also blocked roads in the district after felling trees. The BBC reported the attacks as being isolated incidents in remote rural areas but still disruptive and designed to prevent people voting.

Pray: for the authorities to protect the minority groups across India as they vote on the 16, 23, 30 April and 7, 13 May. (Ro.13:2)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/elections.prompt.prayer.campaign.for.christians.in.india/23081.htm>

■ **Nigeria: Churches burn in Nigeria**

Three churches were burnt and several Christians injured in two cities of Nigeria's northern state of Niger where suspected Muslim fanatics turned on Christians during Easter celebration on Monday. In Gwada three churches were burnt and 26 worshippers injured. The churches were stormed by fanatics angered by celebrating Christian youths from the churches marching round the town, drumming and dancing in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the capital city of Minna only the determination of Christian youth prevented the Niger Baptist Church from being razed, but vehicles were

damaged and worshippers were injured. Police reported 88 Muslims arrested in Gwada and 20 in Minna. In predominantly Muslim states in Northern Nigeria religious and sectarian violence are common and cause thousands of deaths.

Pray: for God to give the Nigerian church strength and tenacity in the face of opposition. (Lk. 21:17-19)

More: <http://mychristianblood.blogspot.com/archive/2009/04/15/nigeria-suspected-muslim-fanatics-burn-churches-in-nigeria.html#more>

■ Iran: Journalist on spying charges

Roxana Saberi is a dual American-Iranian citizen who was arrested late January and initially accused of working without press credentials and illegally buying alcohol. Then the Iranian judge made another serious allegation of spying for the United States. On Tuesday she appeared before a closed door court in the first session of her trial when she was given an opportunity to speak and present her defence to the court. It is expected the verdict will be given within a couple of weeks. Saberi is said to have infiltrated certain government circles under cover as a reporter and without a permit. Then proceeded to gather information and documents to transfer to American intelligence services. U.S. officials say the charges are 'baseless' and have repeatedly called for her release. Petitioning for Saberi's release has been the Lutheran Reverend Mark Hanson and Hilary Clinton.

Pray: for an early fair and just verdict. (Ja.2:9)

More: <http://www.christianpost.com/Intl/Overseas/2009/04/iran-puts-u-s-journalist-on-trial-for-spying-charges-15/index.html>

■ Iran: Two Christian women imprisoned

Amnesty International appealed for urgent action last week for two Iranian Christian women held with no legal counsel for over a month suffering high fever and infections with no medical care in a crowded cell of 27 other women. The authorities have made accusations against them of 'taking part in illegal gatherings' but they have not filed official charges. The women were enthusiastic in church activities and distributing Bibles and were arrested on March 5 and held in Evin Prison, a facility that has drawn criticism for its human rights violations and executions in recent years. Amnesty's appeal urges Iranian officials to ensure the women are not tortured as they 'may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely on account of their religious beliefs.'

Pray: for the immediate strengthening of all who are unfairly imprisoned and for justice in an unjust system. (Ps.31:1,2)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=5877&backpage=summaries&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Most Britons 'believe in heaven'

The majority of Britons believe in heaven and life after death, new research suggests. The survey of 2,060 people showed 55% believe in heaven, while 53% believe in life after death and 70% believe in the human soul. The study was carried out between October and November last year for the public theology think tank Theos. It also suggested that nearly four in 10 people, 39%, believe in ghosts and 27% believe in reincarnation. A further 22% believe in astrology or horoscopes and 15% believe in fortune telling or Tarot. In 1951 only 10% of the public told Gallup that they believed in ghosts and just 2% thought they had seen one. 7% of people said they believed in predicting the future by cards and 6% by stars. This latest research shows an increase in scepticism about certain aspects of the supernatural, the organisation said.

Praise: God for all those who expressed their belief in heaven and life after death. Pray that they will have a revelation and a clear understanding of God himself. (Ep.1:17)

More: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7996187.stm>

■ Pakistan: Christians will be able to celebrate Good Friday holiday from next year

The Pakistan Minister for Minorities, Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti, has said that Christians will be able to enjoy a holiday on Good Fridays from next year. He made this statement while talking to ANS on Easter Sunday (March 12). The Minister pledged in a Christmas ceremony last year that all religious festivals of Pakistani minorities would be celebrated officially. He also said that prayer rooms for non-Muslim inmates would be constructed in Pakistani jails. Mr. Bhatti said he would continue mounting efforts towards the 'creation of a society based on peaceful coexistence, social justice, harmony and human dignity.' He added: 'Easter reminds us of the sacrifice Jesus Christ gave for our redemption. We should join hands to defeat forces of extremism and terrorism and to promote unity and social harmony.'

Praise: God for Mr Bhatti and his promises and pray that they will be fulfilled and that extremism will be held back. (1Pe.3:8)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2009/s09040079.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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