

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ **INSIGHT ARTICLE: Seven aids for general election intercession**

For those of us finding it difficult to hear God's still small voice in the orchestra of political sound bites there are a number of valuable websites available to help our intercessions in the final lap of the election race. (1) <http://www.hustings.com/> documents a summary of the local husting meetings held in the past few weeks. (2) The Care General Election Prayer Guide can be downloaded from: http://www.prayerforum.org/uploads/election_prayer_1.pdf (3) Initiatives and suggestions from Christians in Politics can be downloaded at: <http://www.susa.info/> (4) A concise election twelve point prayer plan is on the World Prayer Centre website: <http://worldprayer.org.uk/resources/elections/> (5) 24-7 Prayer offer an election prayer meeting plan that can be downloaded from: <http://www.eauk.org/public-affairs/upload/60m-prayer-meeting-plan.pdf> (6) Information concerning the Christian Peoples Alliance candidates and speeches are at: <http://www.cpaparty.org.uk/?page=speeches> (7) This week's Insight article is a scripture based prayer pointer distributed through the Parliamentary Prayer Fellowship. Click the 'info' button.

Pray: as the Lord leads into areas of government and the election process. (1Ti.2:1-2)

Info: <http://www.prayer-alert.net/info/Election1810.pdf>

■ **Chalke asks next PM to acknowledge contribution of Christians**

Faithworks' founder Steve Chalke is calling upon the next Prime Minister to acknowledge the indispensable contribution to the economy made by the Christian voluntary sector. Chalke said that such recognition from the incoming Prime Minister would be a vote of confidence that would drive Christians to serve their local communities even more. 'The Christian contribution to society is hugely significant,' he said. 'Local churches contribute millions to regional economies across the country and if Westminster more openly acknowledged this, the encouragement it would bring to the unsung army of volunteers and paid staff in churches and other Christian groups would release a tsunami of care which would help compensate for the inevitable forthcoming public spending cuts.' According to the group, an estimated 370,000 Christian volunteers contribute services to the value of around £486 million each year in England alone, donating around 65 million hours of their time.

Pray: for recognition and encouragement of the Christian voluntary sector by the incoming government. (Is.61:9)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/chalke.asks.next.pm.to.acknowledge.contribution.of.christians/25780.htm>

■ **Sexual lyrics lead young girls astray**

Sexually explicit song lyrics are encouraging vulnerable young girls to experiment with sex, according to a psychologist. This latest warning by Dr Jane McCartney is likely to add to concern about the increasing sexualisation of the nation's children. Warning about the dangers of explicit lyrics, Dr McCartney said: 'I think it is making children think this social

behaviour is the norm and the danger is when you have girls listening to girls singing about it.' The psychologist also warned that the suggestive lyrics, used by artists such as Lady Gaga, could give girls the impression that they are in control, when the stark reality is often quite the opposite. Dr McCartney's warning echoes the findings of a previous report, commissioned by the Home Office, which warned that children are being harmed by exposure to violent and sexual images.

Pray: for our young people that, with quality support they will be better able to resist the sexual pressures put on them. (Pr.10:17)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/sexual-lyrics-lead-young-girls-astray/>

■ **Changing face of Scotland will mean major Kirk reforms**

The Church of Scotland announced major plans on how it aims to grapple with the changing face of ministry in Scotland. Reports of the Ministries Council and Panel on Review and Reform, to be considered by commissioners at the General Assembly, affirm that the Church must restructure now if it is going to grow in the future, particularly with the current financial climate. In 2010 the Ministries Council is budgeting for a deficit of £5.7 million – an 'unsustainable' situation. Since ministries receive 87 per cent of ministry and mission funds from congregations, the budgeting deficit poses a problem for the whole Church and not just the Council. The reports warn that if a balanced budget is not achieved in the next few years the Council's resources would be exhausted and unable to sustain ministry across the country.

Pray: for God's guidance for the Church of Scotland so that any reforms may help the Church better to meet the needs of the people of Scotland. (Pr.1:5)

More: <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/11991>

■ **Church cannot afford to ignore children's spirituality**

Ministering to children's spirituality is a core function for the Church rather than a luxury add-on, argues Dr Rebecca Nye in 'Children's Spirituality', a new book from the Church of England's official publishers. Local churches have a crucial role in listening to children's verbal and non-verbal expressions of spiritual searching and wonder, and must be careful in how they use 'teaching' methods to ensure they do not inadvertently stifle long-term spiritual development, she says. Alister McGrath, Head of the Centre for Theology, Religion and Culture at King's College, London, describes the book as 'a powerful reaffirmation and exploration of the importance of childhood spirituality for the ministry and mission of the Church, which will be welcomed by all working in this field.' Dr Nye argues that children's capacity for exploring faith is significant and that churches should be more concerned with nurturing children's ways of 'being with and knowing God', rather than the transmission of religious knowledge.

Pray: for churches to place children at the heart of their ministry nurturing their spiritual growth. (Ep.6:4)

More: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr4010.html>

■ **BREAKING NEWS: Right to appeal refused for Christian counsellor**

Lord Justice Laws today refused permission to Gary McFarlane to have his case heard before the Court of Appeal. Mr McFarlane, a relationships counsellor from Bristol, sacked by the Relate Relationship organisation after he refused to provide sexual counselling to homosexual couples because of his Christian beliefs, asked that his case be heard by different judges to those who ruled against Lillian Ladele in December 2009. Church leaders have been deeply concerned by the ruling by Lord Neuberger, the Master of the Rolls, on behalf of the Court of Appeal, in the case of Lillian Ladele - a registrar who refused to conduct civil partnerships ceremonies because they were against her Christian beliefs - and have argued that the Court of Appeal's decision effectively means that the right to express a strong Christian faith must take second place to the rights of homosexuals under Labour's equality laws. (See also Prayer Alert 1610)

Pray: that despite this refusal ways will be found to reverse this decision. (Ps.7:6)

More: <http://www.christianlegalcentre.com/view.php?id=1062>

■ **The power of positive prayers**

Methodists are being encouraged to speak 'words of blessing' over the Church, its vision, planning, ministry, members and leaders, as part of a new Connexion-wide prayer initiative. Entitled 'The Power of Blessing', this initiative has been launched by Methodist Evangelicals Together (MET) – a movement of British Methodists 'committed to prayer and revival' which is believed to be the biggest independent organisation in the Connexion. With the support of the Connexional Team, MET will be releasing a series of resources during the coming months, designed to stimulate Methodists of all traditions to use prayer to bless the work of the Church, their communities and the nation. 'The Power of Blessing' follows in the footsteps of the Church's 'Year of Prayer Without Ceasing', which promoted a programme of continuous prayer across the Connexion. After this programme ended, in August 2006, the MET executive began to consider new ways of building on the scheme and encouraging more prayer within the life of the Church.

Pray: for the success of this prayer initiative. (Jas. 5:15-17)

More: <http://www.methodistrecorder.co.uk/mrhlines.htm>

EUROPE

■ **Greece: Economy and impact on population**

Greece is close to agreeing to a new set of austerity measures, which will affect both the public and private sectors, that would unlock the emergency loans from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund that the country needs to keep its economy afloat. In the private sector, employers who have more than 200 people in their work force would be able to sack 4 per cent of them at once rather than the 2 percent in place now. There will also be a gradual phasing out of the 13th and 14th monthly salaries that employees receive as Easter, Summer and Christmas bonuses, possibly over the next five years. In the public sector, civil servants will lose their 13th and 14th monthly salaries and their supplementary pay,

which has already been cut by 30 percent, will be reduced by another 5 per cent. This would represent savings of 1.7 billion euros, or 0.6 per cent of Greece's gross domestic product.

Pray: that the spirit of the Greek population will not be broken by these enforced measures. (Pr.10:15)

More: http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_politics_100002_29/04/2010_116768

■ **New Evangelical head says revival is 'essential' for European Church**

The newly appointed General Secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance says revival is essential for Europe's traditional churches. Rev Niek M Tramper was appointed to his new post at the EEA's annual conference in Turkey on April 22. Rev Tramper, of the Netherlands, said there were many challenges facing the Church in Europe, including the need for greater cooperation between new and traditional forms of Church, a growing Muslim population, and tensions between the rich and poor. 'The Church and Christian movements need each other in advancing the Kingdom of God,' said Rev Tramper. 'Traditional churches cannot continue without revival. Profound theology and missionary zeal are complementary. In places with few historic churches, the EEA is of great value for facilitating the replanting of churches in countries like Kosovo, Albania and Turkey, as well as in Central Asia.'

Pray: that the Lord directs Rev Tramper's energy and vision in ways that promote Christ's kingdom. (2Ti.3:9-11)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/new.evangelical.head.says.revival.is.essential.for.european.church/25794.htm>

WORLDWIDE

■ **Thailand: Army ready to use live fire against red-shirts**

Pro-government 'yellow shirt' protesters in Thailand have called on the Prime Minister to take concrete measures against thousands of The National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship protestors - commonly known as the Red Shirts who have occupied the streets of Bangkok for over six weeks. The red shirts are calling for the Prime Minister to step down claiming he came to power illegally. About 1,000 yellow shirts are demanding the army take harsh measures against their rivals. An army spokesman previously told a news briefing the troops would use live ammunition against red shirts if necessary. On Wednesday Thai troops and hundreds of red shirts clashed as the protestors attended a rally. Many observers believe Thailand is at a critical crossroads. Differences could be healed or far worse bloodletting could occur depending upon how the government reacts. Thailand is one of the few countries never colonized by a European power. The word 'Thai' means freedom.

Pray: for the Prime Minister to have wisdom as he responds to the groups and for the security forces to maintain order through protecting rather than assaulting citizens. (Pr.1:7)

More: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia-pacific/2010/04/201042955128388187.html>

■ **Iran: Christians suffering uncertain future**

Nineteen year old Daniel was arrested during a raid on his home by security agents acting on the orders of the revolutionary court and then released on bail. He is accused of blasphemy and spreading Christian propaganda and faces possible further court proceedings. His personal electronic items and books were confiscated in the raid. Daniel had been present at the arrest on 28th February of Hamid and Reyhaneh, who remain detained. Also Maryam and Marzieh were summoned to their court hearing to face charges of propagating Christianity and apostasy, but were told more time was needed to consider their case and they were sent home. Both women are frail after being held for eight months in Evin Prison, notorious for treating women badly. These and similar ordeals are a grave test for the endurance of our Iranian brothers' and sisters' endurance.

Pray: for God to give Daniel, Maryam, Marzieh, Reyhaneh and Hamid a sense of His presence and peace in their minds and hearts; and for officials involved to love mercy and act justly. (Ps.54:7)

More: http://www.givengain.com/cgi-bin/giga.cgi?cmd=cause_dir_news_item&cause_id=1489&news_id=86114

■ **America: Challenging Afghanistan negotiations**

A war in which the general doesn't know his enemy is a war lost. The manner in which the Barack Obama administration is handling its negotiations with Afghan President Hamid Karzai suggests the Afghan president is the US president's enemy number one in the Hindu Kush, alongside the insurgents. The number of dogfights between US special representative Richard Holbrooke and the Afghan government is now legion. The tussles are watched in regional capitals as Mr Holbrooke tirelessly wages his war with President Karzai's leadership. Mr Holbrooke announced in Washington soon after his visit to Kabul that the Jirga, or Peace Council, President Karzai was planning to hold on May 2-4 now stands postponed until after the Afghan leader's visit to Washington on May 10-14. (See Prayer Alert 1710). Holbrooke then went on to announce that the Jirga would be held on May 20. By all indications, the Afghan government is seething with resentment over Washington's announcement.

Pray: that President Obama fulfils his 2008 pledge to bring the 'war on terror' to an end; for the Taliban to be broken and the leaders at the Peace Jirga to stand in unity against war lords. (Pr.14:8 & 22)

More: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LD24Df03.html

■ **Uzbekistan: Christians punished for peaceful activities**

Two Protestant Christian churches in and near Tashkent were subjected to raids within two days of each other in mid-April. The first raid targeted a youth conference and the second - where the police were accompanied by television journalists - targeted a feeding programme for the homeless. In addition an 'anti-terror' raid in Tashkent targeted ten Protestant women gathering for a birthday party in a private home, eight of them pensioners. They were all given massive fines. No officials in Tashkent have been prepared to explain why peaceful religious believers should face such punishments. Protestants in north-western Uzbekistan have complained of mounting raids, threats, fines, literature confiscations and court-ordered

destruction of religious literature. State-imposed restrictions on all faiths are tight and the latest raids, fines, threats and literature confiscations come as religious believers of a variety of faiths face criminal trials for peaceful activity. This news source is from Forum 18 News Service.

Pray: for God to turn this situation around and for the Christians in Uzbekistan to be treated fairly. (Ps.9:13-14)

More: <http://www.forum18.org/>

■ Nigeria: Journalists are latest victims

Plateau State has been racked with violence since January 18, when 200 Muslim youths attacked church-goers in the Nassarawa Gwong area of Jos. Two journalists working for a Church of Christ in Nigeria have become the latest casualties. Their bodies were found in the mortuary of the Jos University Teaching Hospital on the 25 April, a day after they left their office to interview a local politician. Church leaders continue to advocate non-retaliation and Rev Dr Pandat Yamsat has appealed to church members to remain calm despite the security lapses, and to cry out to God and allow Him to take vengeance. Christian Solidarity Worldwide called on local authorities to make every effort to track down the perpetrators of acts of violence adding, 'a comprehensive review must be undertaken as a matter of urgency. This is a vital prerequisite for the restoration of peace to the area.'

Pray: for God's Spirit powerfully to protect the minds of all living in the Jos area. (Pr.14:33)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2010/s10040180.htm>

■ Bangladesh: Buddhist extremists capture Christians

Buddhist members of an armed rebel group and their sympathizers have been holding three tribal Christians captive in a pagoda since April 16th. They were severely beaten to try to force them to return to Buddhism. Pastor Shushil Jibon Talukder aged 55 was bludgeoned nearly to death; Bimol Kanti Chakma aged 50; and Laksmi Bilas Chakma aged 40 were also severely beaten and all three are to be kept in a pagoda for 15 to 20 days as punishment for having left the Buddhist religion a Christian source said. Local Buddhists are considered powerful as they have ties with the United Peoples Democratic Front, an armed group in the hill districts. After taking the men captive the following day the armed extremists seized all blankets, Bibles and song books from the Maddha Lemuchari Baptist Church and then forced the congregation to demolish the Church building with their own hands.

Pray: for the captives to receive a powerful touch of the Holy Spirit with comfort and inner strength and for the congregation to also experience God's embrace at this time. (Is.66:24)

More: <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/bangladesh/17879/>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Crime drops after Street Pastor patrols

Violent assaults in Northampton have dropped by around two-thirds after church volunteers took to the streets. The volunteers, known as Street Pastors, have been working in conjunction with local police officers since 2008, and in the twelve months to March this year there were only 38 violent incidents recorded. This is a significant drop from the previous year when there were 110 recorded violent incidents. Rev Mark Lees, the local architect of the national scheme, said: 'I think it is reassuring for people to see somebody else there that's obviously involved and cares.' Earlier this year it was revealed that prayer and the work of the Street Pastors was helping Devon and Cornwall police tackle crime. Churchgoers in the Barnstaple area were asked to pray that crime detection rates, which were then at 26 per cent, would increase. And in February it was revealed that the detection rates had risen to 40 per cent, one of the highest in the country. (See also Prayer Alert 0910)

Praise: God for the way He uses His people in prayer and practical action to make changes that transform the community. (1Ch.29:10-11)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/crime-drops-after-street-pastor-patrols/>

■ Filipino pastors' family soap industry helps poor parishioners

A Filipino couple who are both pastors have become accidental entrepreneurs after their daughter's search for body care products for her allergy-sensitive skin led to the creation of a home-based industry, which the family sees as its ministry. 'With this evolving business, poor parishioners can earn extra income, which can sustain their local churches,' Pastor Robinson Ayupan told Ecumenical News International. 'With more income, parishioners can give tithes, support their pastor, and sustain their ministries.' Ayupan's wife, Lorna Jane, says many of the 100 dealers, who retail the family's bath soap and other body care products, are poor parishioners, some of whom are students working their way through college, others unemployed housewives. The Ayupans belong to the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, but the two pastors also minister to other Protestant and evangelical groups, where they tell people they can combine their 'Christian faith with enterprising ventures'.

Praise: God for this initiative and pray that our God-given gifts will be developed to bless and encourage those in need. (Ps.22:26-27)

More: <http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=4014>

PRAYER FORUM OF THE BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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