

PRAYER ALERT...

An initiative of the Prayer Forum of the British Isles & Ireland
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Issue 04-2011

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Thursday 27 January 2011

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ Tweeting bishops encourage prayer and action this Lent

Christian Aid has teamed up with tweeting bishops to encourage Christians to pray, act and give this Lent. The Bishop of Croydon, the Rt Rev Nick Baines and the Bishop of Huntingdon the Rt Rev David Thomson will launch Count Your Blessings in Twitter on March 9. For the 45 days of Lent they will use the social networking site to share daily reflections and actions. Bishop Baines said: 'The great thing about Twitter is that it allows immediate interaction. Anyone across the world can join in and tweet what they are doing in Lent, so I am encouraging people to follow us, get tweeting and learn through Lent.' The Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, encouraging people to get involved in Count Your Blessings said: 'We should all count our blessings for what God has given us and I hope that everyone will consider taking action to help those in need this Easter.'

Pray: that this idea will reach and encourage a very wide audience. (Ac.9:31)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/tweeting.bishops.encourage.prayer.and.action.this.lent/27412.htm>

■ Christian GP appointed to Govt drugs panel

A Christian doctor who takes a firm line against drug use has been appointed to sit on the Government's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD). Dr Hans-Christian Raabe has said that children should simply be taught to say 'no' to drugs. The move is seen as a change in direction for the panel, which has focussed on a 'harm reduction' approach until now. Dr Raabe has preferred to focus on prevention and made his views clear in a briefing to MPs. 'Harm reduction has its place', the GP said, 'but I'm concerned that it's the only policy being advocated. In schools, for example, where the majority of children don't take drugs, we still need a prevention approach.' Dr Raabe has advocated that strong family life is key to addressing all these matters: 'Marriage is associated with greater happiness, less depression, less alcohol abuse and less smoking'.

Pray: that objections to this appointment will be quietened and that Dr Raabe will be able to bring quality argument to the work of the ACMD. (Ex.23:21)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/christian-gp-appointed-to-govt-drugs-panel/>

■ Anti-Christian bias is OK at the BBC

Peter Sissons has revealed that the BBC has no qualms about insulting Christians. Mr Sissons, whose memoirs are being serialised in the Daily Mail, slammed the BBC for its bias. He said: 'Islam must not be offended at any price, although Christians are fair game because they do nothing about it if they are offended.' His comments are unlikely to surprise many Christians who have become increasingly concerned about a perceived anti-Christian bias at the public broadcaster. The

veteran presenter, who fronted news and current affairs programmes at the BBC, also said that staff damage their careers if they don't follow the BBC's mindset. In 2010 Radio 2 host Simon Mayo warned that religion was 'increasingly driven to the margin' on the BBC. And in 2009 Jeremy Vine, another of the Corporation's radio presenters, said he believed it had become 'almost socially unacceptable to say you believe in God'.

Pray: that the anti-Christian bias in the BBC be halted and the agenda of secular religion be silenced. (Ps.31:18)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/anti-christian-bias-is-ok-at-the-bbc-says-former-presenter/>

■ **Poll: Christian marginalisation on the rise**

The majority of church-goers in the UK feel that Christians are being increasingly marginalised in public life, a new survey has revealed. Conducted by ComRes on behalf of Premier Christian Media, 81 per cent of church-goers think the marginalisation of Christians is happening more and more in the media and press. While 77 per cent thought it was growing in the public realm, two thirds said they believed it was increasing in the workplace and more than half said it was on the rise in Government. Peter Kerridge, Chief Executive of Premier Christian Media, said: '2011 presents a great opportunity for Christians to speak out and tackle the creeping marginalisation occurring in British society'. He added, 'When three out of four Christians have reported an increased risk of discrimination in the UK over the last five years, the message is clear. As a country we need to do more to support Christians living out their faith'.

Pray: that as Christians we would speak out boldly about our faith led by the Holy Spirit. (Ac.4:29)

More: http://www.christian.org.uk/news/poll-christian-marginalisation-on-the-rise-say-uk-church-goers/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+christianinstitute+%28The+Christian+Institute%29&utm_content=Twitter

■ **Whole-life discipleship may come at great cost**

Being a whole-life disciple in Britain today may come at great cost to Christians', says Nigel Hopper of the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity. The lecturer in contemporary culture said the recent ruling against Christian B&B owners Peter and Hazelmary Bull raised the question of how Christians are to live out their faith in the context of a society where that faith is not shared by everyone. 'It is a reminder, if one is needed, that it's all too easy to talk up the 'adventure,' or the 'journey' of discipleship, and make no mention of the cost of discipleship,' said Hopper. However, he added that the ruling alluded to the possibility of a greater cost for Christians of giving up their jobs if they cannot reconcile its legal obligations with the obligations they feel to their faith. He encouraged the church to look to the example of the first Christians and their obedience to God rather than people.

Pray: for a greater awareness by the Church of the need to support as well as disciple its members. (Job.4:4)

More: <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20110122/whole-life-discipleship-may-come-at-great-cost-says-uk-christian/>

■ **'Gay lessons' in maths, geography and science**

Children are to be taught about homosexuality in maths, geography and science lessons as part of a Government-backed drive to 'celebrate the gay community'. Lesson plans have been drawn up for pupils as young as four, in a scheme funded with a £35,000 grant from an education quango, the Training and Development Agency for Schools. The initiative will be officially launched next month at the start of 'LGBT History Month', an initiative to encourage teaching about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual issues. The lesson plans, spread across the curriculum, will be offered to all schools, which can choose whether or not to make use of them. Craig Whittaker, Conservative MP for Calder Valley and a member of the Education Select Committee, criticised the scheme as a distraction from teaching 'core' subjects and a poor use of public money.

Pray: for schools to consider carefully how the minority nature of such material is out of proportion to the LGB community. (Jas.4:7)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/8275937/Gay-lessons-in-maths-geography-and-science.html>

■ **Proposal for an English Baccalaureate and RE**

Senior religious-education (RE) professionals are warning that their subject could disappear from the curriculum in community schools if the subject is not included among the humanities that qualify for the planned English Baccalaureate. The new qualification, which is to be introduced to ensure that pupils receive a more rounded education requires good passes in English, maths, science, a foreign language, and either history or geography. Religious studies (RS), currently a popular examination choice, is not included as a humanities option. Brian Lightman, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, which represents secondary school heads, says that his members believe that the proposed Baccalaureate is too narrow: 'Religious studies, in particular, is glaringly absent. In the light of the global political situation, surely the objective study of religious issues should be encouraged,' he said. A recent poll among 18 to 25-year-olds revealed that RE lessons were remembered as valuable for several years after leaving school.

Pray: that Christian teaching remains as a required element of schools' curricula. (Ro.16:17)

More: <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=106920>

EUROPE

■ **Russia: Airport bombing**

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church addressed growing ethnic tensions in Russia after a suicide bomber killed 35 people and injured over 150 at Moscow's busiest Airport. He denounced the attack as 'the horrifying scowl of sin' adding 'actions once condemned even in war are today becoming a form of protest.' No one has claimed responsibility but previous terrorist attacks in Russia originated from separatist movements in the troubled Northern Caucasus region. Chechen leader

Ramzan Kadyrov, backed by the Kremlin, has been accused of human rights abuses and crushing Islamic militants, while supporting his own form of Islamic fundamentalism. Ethnic tensions have grown in Moscow recently, including anger over plans to build a new mosque in a south-eastern district of the city. Muslim migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia have emigrated to the Russian capital, fleeing wars in their home regions since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Pray: for the turmoil in Russia to usher in a timely Christian revival. (Is.14:26-27)

More: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/25/russian-patriarch-denounc_n_814025.html

■ **Belgium: Thousands demand politicians form a government**

Tens of thousands of Belgians took to the streets on Sunday to shame political leaders who have failed to form a government more than seven months after an election and left the country at the mercy of financial markets. Organisers of the 'Shame: no government, great country' protest said up to 50,000 people had joined the march through the capital Brussels. Police put the figure at 34,000. Since the inconclusive June 2010 parliamentary vote, a caretaker administration has run the country while Dutch and French-speaking party leaders have argued over the degree to which powers and tax-raising rights should be transferred to regions of the linguistically divided country. 'We are here because we want to show the political leaders that things must change. It's the politicians who are trying to split the country'.

Pray: that the government would listen to the people and work through their differences together. (Ep.4:2-4)

More: <http://www.france24.com/en/20110123-thousands-rally-call-formation-government-belgium-french-dutch-brussels-political-deadlock>

WORLDWIDE

■ **Middle East: Democratisation**

Larbi Sadiki, senior lecturer in Middle East Politics at University of Exeter made the following comments: Regions in N Africa have been preparing to fight radical Islam and were caught unawares by the millions of educated youth who make up a large portion of the region's population. The policing, equipment, funding, expertise and anti-terror philosophy being fed to Algeria, Libya, Morocco, etc were geared towards fighting the radical Islamists. But from Tunisia and Algeria in the Maghreb to Jordan and Egypt in Arab east, the real terror consuming self-worth, sabotaging community and marriages is the terror of socio-economic marginalisation. When oppression becomes too heavy and politically costly for a government, bargains begin, including promises of jobs and policy, reversals of food price increase and even scapegoats in the form of ministerial dismissals. This is where Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt are today. But dissidents have not infiltrated governments or built political power bases to enable a 'velvet revolution in the Arab world. Ben Ali is weak and has now fled to Saudi Arabia and the party and army that protected him is withdrawing loyalty as the crisis deepens.

Pray: for the birth of a democratic system to grow out of the current chaos. (Is.14:32)

More: <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/01/201111413424337867.html>

■ **Egypt: Rioting impact on Christians**

It's unclear what impact recent demonstrations will have on Christians in Egypt who complain that the government has not done enough to protect them. In one of the latest attacks an off-duty policeman boarded a train and went from car to car shooting those he identified as Christians, killing at least one man and injuring four women. A Christian leader said, 'We wonder if Christians will continue to be safe riding trains or walking in the streets, but we are happy that God has placed us here and we believe He will use this time to bring many souls to Him'. Egyptian Christians are also praying for appropriate, swift justice for crimes against them. Last Saturday a man responsible for killing six Christians a year ago was sentenced to death for first degree murder an 'intimidating citizens' and it is hoped the severity of that sentence will encourage judges to appropriately address violence against Christians. Last week Egypt's President said, 'slow justice' breeds bitterness.

Pray: that the bereaved, wounded and traumatised will know God's comfort and healing and the justice system would apply appropriate investigations. (Mic.6:8)

More: <http://www.bosnewslife.com/15162-breaking-news-egypt-christians-concerned-amid-demonstrations-against-presidents-rule>

■ **Eritrea: Major crackdown on Christians**

Over 100 Christians have been detained since December 30th in raids on churches in or near Asmara, and the town of Nakfa. In one case the entire congregation was taken in for questioning. The director of Release Eritrea, predicted an escalation in persecution in November and her fears are being realised. The church was further shaken by news of Seble Hagos Mebrahtu dying in custody because she was refused medical treatment for malaria. She was tortured for reading a Bible at her home. Open Doors reports an entire congregation of 41 were arrested and beaten on December 31, and 35 believers, including two elderly men in poor health, were arrested on January 9 while worshipping at a private address. It is not yet known whether these believers have been released. Also 27 Christians belonging to various churches were arrested and are still being held by police. President Isaias Afewerki said 'religious groups sought to 'distract from the unity of the Eritrean people and distort the true meaning of religion.'

Pray: for God to set Eritrea free from deception and to be released into faith in Jesus Christ. (Lk.4:18)

More: <http://www.releaseinternational.org/pages/posts/eritrea-scores-of-christians-arrested-in-major-crackdown-794.php>

■ **Iran: 33 Christians still in Prison**

Elam Ministries have compiled an accurate report detailing the known cases of persecution over the last six months and ask us to use this to intercede and also to help spread the news of the increasing persecution in Iran to generate more prayer and awareness. It is certain that at least 202 Christians have been arbitrarily arrested in 24 cities in Iran since June 2010.

Thirty-three remain in prison today. This has happened against the background of government officials publicly speaking out against Christians. Elam have translated some of these statements and included them in a report. Please click the more button below and share this report with people you know who can intercede and spread the word. Following the wave of arrests and repressive measures against new Christians last month in Tehran, see Prayer Alert 02-2011 and 03-2011, further news indicates that the security police in Isfahan have arrested four new Christians.

Pray: that the persecution of Iranian Christians will no longer be hidden and that a wave of intercession will rise on behalf of Iran. (Ps.89:21-23)

More: <http://www.elam.com/Editor/assets/Recent%20arrests%20in%20Iran%20-%20briefing%20document%20final.pdf>

■ Sudan: Sudanese in Nairobi

Rev James Baak Nhial reports, 'The Southern Sudanese living in Kenya voted for independence, and it was the first time for many Southern Sudanese to exercise their democratic right since they were born. We felt, at last, after years of suffering and deaths, the World has recognised our existence on this planet and gave us a chance to determine our destiny as a people! Behind the scenes, we recognised the power of the Almighty God who said to Pharaoh in Egypt 'Let my people go' has now said 'Let my people of Southern Sudan go' and no human power on this Earth can prevent that from happening! We thank God, Christian Community, Southern Sudan friends and international community for their support during this long walk to freedom and post-referendum period.' We are asked to continue to pray – all to recognise the results, peace to prevail, reconciliation, trauma healing, peaceful co-existence among tribes, rehabilitation and resettlement of returnees from North Sudan and East Africa.'

Pray: for God's guidance for challenges that will face a new nation of South Sudan and utilization of resources. (Job 12:22-23)

■ South Africa: February/March Evangelical outreach

A team of evangelical Christians write, 'The year has started with outreaches to those who live in 'darkness' in V. We will be working with a local congregation from 4-11 February 2011 leaving Pretoria on 28 January. From 12-15 February we shall be in the area of E. and from there to Botswana in the B and M areas from 16 February-5 March. The people in these areas are superstitious and worship forefather spirits as their traditional religion. It is difficult for them to change to Christianity. We know that they are living under Satan's yoke and we have the command in Mathew 28 from Jesus to go out and tell them the truth. Can I ask that you will cover this outreach in your prayers please? For Protection, Wisdom, Opportunities, Favour, Open minds, Understanding God's ways, Conversions, Changed lives and the WORKING of the Holy Spirit in these areas, as well as thorough follow-up by the local churches. Thank you.'

Pray: for God to enrich and enable the teams with a double portion of faith and wisdom. (Ex.18:11)

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Christianity in China

According to China Aid, a Texas-based human rights group, the number of Christians in China has increased 100-fold since 1949. Current estimates range from 80 million to 130 million active members. And one startling estimate from a Chinese Christian businessman has that number doubled or even tripled in the next generation. Christianity could become one of the macro forces shaping Chinese culture, say experts like Dr. David Aikman, author of 'Jesus in Beijing'. 'If the Chinese become Christianised; which doesn't mean you have a majority of people who are Christians, but it means about 25 to 30 percent of people in positions of influence, in politics, in culture, in the media. If you have that component of a major power that accepts Christianity enthusiastically as a guide to life, that is going to change the world view of the leaders of China.'

Praise: God for this amazing growth of His Church in China. (Dt.1:10-11)

More: <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/01/20/christianity-china/>

■ Smith Wigglesworth Church set to be resurrected

Bowland Street Mission, in Manningham, in Northern England, is where the extraordinary 'people's preacher' Smith Wigglesworth had his base. The site is set to be restored to its former glory - and turned into a centre of healing, a museum and coffee shop. Brian Holland, with his wife Kathryn, and international preacher and broadcaster Terry Quinn are founding members of the Smith Wigglesworth Foundation which has agreed a long-term lease on the building. Brian said:

'Wigglesworth was a catalyst for the charismatic revival of the church and one of the fathers of the Pentecostal church. The plan is to restore the building back to its original 1889-1919 design, the heyday of Smith and his wife Polly's ministry in Bradford'. The group plans to open at the end of April 2011 with the original purposes: to show God knows and loves people through a healing touch alongside preaching from the Bible.

Praise: God for Wigglesworth's heritage and pray that many more would be blessed in the years to come. (Ps.84:11-12)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2011/s11010129.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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