

**St. Paul's Church
Prayer Points February 2026**

1) The Christian Institute reports that abortions are at their highest ever level in England and Wales.

Government figures show that in 2023 - the latest figures available - abortions increased by 11% on the previous year.

This took the total to an estimated 278,740, which was 26,618 higher than in 2022, and a rise of 36% (73,445) in just five years.

The report also stated that more than 3,200 abortions were carried out in 2023 because the unborn child was deemed to have a disability, including 735 following a diagnosis of Down's syndrome.

While the abortion limit stands at 24 weeks for most reasons, disability remains a legal ground for abortion up to birth, and 300 such abortions took place after the usual 24-week limit, with ten of those being for children with Down's syndrome.

Most abortions (nine in ten) took place before ten weeks, with the majority of women taking abortion pills at home, unsupervised. However, the number of surgical abortions grew for the second consecutive year.

Over 80% of abortions were performed by 'independent providers' such as MSI Reproductive Choices UK and the British Pregnancy Advisory Services (BPAS), rather than the NHS.

The providers claimed the dramatic rise could be explained by the cost of living crisis, suggesting women were having abortions for financial reasons - although this is not a legal ground under the Abortion Act.

Katie Saxton, Chief Strategic Communications Officer for abortion giant BPAS, said "No woman should have to end a pregnancy she would have otherwise have continued, purely for financial reason. Equally, no woman should become pregnant because she is unable to access the contraception she wants, when she needs it".

She added "There is no right number of abortions, but there is much more that the government can do to ensure women are able to make the choice that is right for themselves and for their families".

Dr Alison Wright, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists said "This new data highlights how access to high-quality abortion care is essential for women's health and reproductive autonomy".

The Christian Institute's Head of Communications Angus Paul said the figures were "absolutely harrowing".

"Everyone who values life in England and Wales must surely be grieved at this dramatic increase in abortions. These are not simply statistics. Each one was a unique human life, created in the image of God; and that life was snatched away before they could even take a breath.

"This suggestion that "There is no right number of abortions" demonstrates that abortion providers will never be satisfied, no matter how many unborn children are killed. The right number of abortions is none".

"We desperately need to change the way society views children in the womb, so that we turn away from the culture of death and instead celebrate life".

2) The Christian Institute informs us that Open Doors reports a global rise in Christian persecution.

The number of Christians across the world suffering high levels of persecution and discrimination has reached unprecedented levels.

Speaking at the Parliamentary launch of Open Door's World Watch List 2026, charity CEO Henrietta Blyth reported that 388 million Christians globally are suffering for their faith, 8 million more than last year.

Highlighting trends from the latest report, Blyth also described sub-Saharan Africa as "a death-trap for Christians". She noted that fourteen countries in the region feature in the World Watch List this year, including Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burkina Faso.

She attributed Syria's rise - the nation has jumped twelve places up to sixth in the top 50 - to "security vacuums, fragmented governance and local extremist groups", all of which, she explained, "increases the vulnerability of Christians".

She continued: "Elsewhere, the increasing smash and squeeze continues to drive the church underground. And the tighter the squeeze, the more difficult it becomes to get word to the outside world about what's really happening".

In a pre-recorded video shown at the event, Pastor Barnabas from Nigeria said: "People should keep talking about the Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, because every day we are attacked".

UK Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief David Smith told the gathering which included 110 MP's, "We have to be that voice that speaks on these horrendous stories. No one should live in fear because of their faith or belief. The minimum we can do is speak up and I urge you to do that".

Jim Shannon MP called for "fervant and frequent prayer" for the suffering Church. He added, "Faith can move mountains".

Open Doors World Watch List 2026 (these are the top 15 countries in the list, where persecution is classed as Extreme).

- 1 North Korea
- 2 Somalia
- 3 Yemen
- 4 Sudan

- 5 Eritrea
- 6 Syria
- 7 Nigeria
- 8 Pakistan
- 9 Libya
- 10 Iran
- 11 Afghanistan
- 12 India
- 13 Saudi Arabia
- 14 Myanmar
- 15 Mali

3) The Christian Institute reports that babies are still being born addicted to drugs in Scotland.

The number of babies in Scotland to have started out life addicted to alcohol and drugs continues to raise concerns.

Freedom of information requests revealed that at least 1,633 babies were born with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) between 2017 and 2025.

The syndrome, which can result in uncontrollable trembling and hyperactivity, is caused by exposure to addictive drugs in the womb.

Drugs and alcohol policy minister Maree Todd said: "No newborn baby should be born dependent on substances, and mothers should be able to get the help they need, free from judgement and stigma". She committed to "continue to work hard to improve services".

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Alex Cole-Hamilton said: "It is difficult to imagine a worse start in life than a new born suffering from drug dependency".

"These figures are a devastating, but important reminder of the dreadful harms caused by Scotland's drugs emergency". He then went on to hail his party's plans to introduce more 'safe consumption rooms' to allow addicts to take drugs without fear of arrest.

He continued, " The Government should be prioritising giving mothers support to end their addiction, not facilitating it. No illegal drug addiction is safe for a baby".

Glasgow is currently piloting Scotland's first drug consumption room, The Thistle, a Scottish Government-funded 'shooting gallery'. It is open seven days a week and has effectively been declared a 'prosecution-free drug zone' by the Lord Advocate.

What we believe:

Drugs.

The Bible bluntly teaches that drunkenness is wrong: "Do not get drunk on wine" (Ephesians 5:18). Intoxication and loss of control are intrinsic to taking drugs.

Christians want people to find the answer to their problems and pain in the good news of Lord Jesus Christ, rather than seeking to escape from them through intoxication.

Down the ages Christians have been at the forefront of battling against the epidemic of public drunkenness and the personal tragedy of alcoholism. Now Christians must take a stand as it becomes ever more fashionable to argue for the legalisation of all drugs.

4) The Christian Institute reports that a church that was banned from a university's freshers event has successfully defended its right to book a stall there, following an intervention from the Christian Institute.

Grace Church Greenwich has been attempting to reserve a place at Goldsmiths University's Freshers' Fair, but were told by Native - the external company responsible for the booking process - that "due to a recent update in our company policy, we are no longer able to facilitate bookings for religious groups at these events".

Good News for Everyone, formerly GideonsUK, reportedly experienced similar problems at multiple universities around the UK.

The church has paid for a stall at local freshers' fairs for several years, with the aim of connecting with Christians and interested unbelievers alike as they start university offering them free coffee and speaking about Jesus.

Minister Andrew Sachs said: "Some of these campuses have no Christian Union, so stalls like ours are the only gospel witness to the thousands of students who attend".

Following the rejected booking, Sach responded to Native, explaining that the policy could constitute unlawful discrimination, but the company maintained its position.

It said religiously-affiliated groups working on secular initiatives would be permitted, but that it could not support "campaigns that explicitly promote specific religious teachings".

Speaking to Evangelicals Now, Sach commented: "So it's ok to be there as a Christian organisation so long as we don't do or say Christian things?".

Grace Church contacted the Christian Institute for assistance, and the CI's In-house Solicitor Sam Webster, sent Native a formal letter which argued that its actions constituted "direct discrimination on grounds of religion or belief contrary to sections 13 and 29 of the Equality Act 2010".

He argued that both Grace Church and Good News for Everyone "have grounds for a claim under the Act", but that legal action could be avoided if Native agrees to allow all future bookings from Grace Church and other religious groups.

Following the letter, the company suspended its policy of restricting bookings from religious organisations with immediate effect, but did not make any admission of liability.

As a result, both Grace Church and Good News for Everyone are now in the process of booking their Freshers' Fair stall for September 2026.

Sach said he was sharing the church's story, "to encourage other churches to stand up for the religious freedoms that we currently enjoy under UK law if you find yourself denied a platform on similar grounds".

He also hoped the outcome would "draw attention to the excellent work of the Christian Institute, to whom we are full of gratitude", and would prompt people "to give praise to God for keeping the door open for the message of the gospel. We pray that next autumn many freshers would hear of Jesus".

5) The Christian Institute reports that the Health Secretary has been challenged over "ideologically driven" puberty blocker trial.

The planned puberty blocker trial legitimises transgender ideology and should be abandoned, concerned parents have warned.

Genspect, a group which helps families whose children struggle with gender confusion, told Wes Streeting MP that the clinical trial rests on an "activist-crafted diagnoses" that has no basis in Scientific fact.

King's College London has been given £10.7 million in Government funding for the Pathways project, which includes the controversial trial. Puberty-blocking drugs will be given to children with "gender incongruence", who will be monitored for two years with brain scans and tests.

In an open letter to Streeting, the support group wrote: "Our main concern is that the clinical trial you defend rests on a diagnostic concept - gender congruence - whose origins are political rather than scientific, rendering it an inappropriate basis for medical intervention in young people".

It describes the definition as "the product of a decades-long depsychopathologization campaign by activists and advocacy organisations, whose explicit goal was to remove psychiatric framing and guardrails around hormonal and surgical interventions.

Genspect continued: "The activist influence is clear in the language itself. 'Experienced gender' is an unfalsifiable inner claim, not a measurable clinical marker. 'Assigned sex' is not a scientific term: it is activist language designed to obscure the reality that sex is determined at conception, observed before, or during birth, and plainly immutable".

While the support group agreed with the Health Secretary's stated view that "unregulated self-medication is dangerous, and that some young people are in profound distress", it challenged the notion that "testing a highly invasive medical

treatment on healthy adolescents given an activist crafted diagnosis is the only or best response".

Last month, a poll on behalf of Transgender Trend found that 63% of the British public agree that the NHS puberty blocker trial should be stopped, with opposition being particularly strong amongst parents of under-18's.

Stephanie Davies-Arai, Director of Transgender Trend, called the results "a clear mandate from the British people to stop the trial".

She explained: " The British public instinctively knows that medically experimenting on children is wrong. Most understand that children are too young to make medical decisions that will affect them for the rest of their lives".

"It's not a party political issue but common sense. The government now needs to listen and do what's right".

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn into the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

Joel 2:12,13