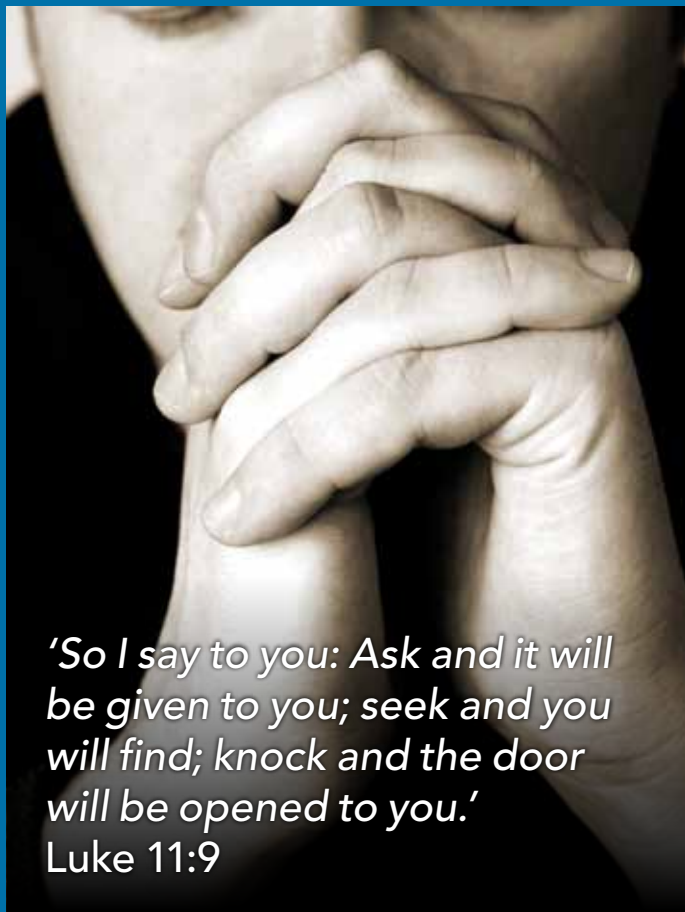


Seeing lives transformed

# PRISON FELLOWSHIP

England and Wales



*'So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.'*  
Luke 11:9



**Newsletter  
Spring 2010**



## Welcome to our Spring 2010 Newsletter!

This issue focuses on the foundation upon which Prison Fellowship England and Wales was built – prayer! Without the prayers of dedicated volunteers and supporters we would not be able to see the lives of prisoners transformed; it is essential to everything we do. Here is a sample of what you will find inside...

- Liz Gardner reflects on the prayer journey of PF Milton Keynes
- Helena Knight, Chaplain and Sycamore Tree Tutor, shares the importance of prayer at HMP Lowdham Grange
- Prayer Labyrinth by Stephen Hawkins (Regional Coordinator for the North West)

### CEO Message: Natalie Cronin



A journalist from a national newspaper just rang me to ask if prayer works in reducing re-offending. I answered that whereas in the US there is plenty of research measuring the power of prayer in clinical trials and various other interventions, in the UK we are more coy about measuring, in a controlled trial, the impact of prayer on people's lives. I explained that I had plenty of anecdotal evidence where I had seen changes in attitude and behaviour in a prisoner's life for whom a group of us were praying, that I could not ascribe to anything other than God hearing our prayers. You will have your own examples, and hopefully the accounts in this newsletter will remind and encourage us that prayer works powerfully. Sometimes we are lucky enough to see its effect dazzlingly clearly and other times we are just hanging on through a fog to the certitude that God loves that prisoner and has a plan for them. It is this faith we share that keeps us on our knees, not a randomised trial.



Sylvia Mary  
Alison

### The Origins of Prayer Groups

Right from the start, prayer was foundational to Prison Fellowship England and Wales. Here's how it all began...

*'As I prayed about it, it seemed that we were to call together men and women of generous hearts, Christians of all denominations already involved in the prisons: probation officers, social workers, prison staff, visitors, magistrates, police, solicitors, ex-prisoners, intercessors, businessmen, housewives... and share with them what God was doing, and then they would offer their gifts and skills to help build the house.'*

*'There would be little cells, twos and threes gathered together in Christ's name, little nuclei to which more people could attach themselves, a group in the end for each of the 123 prisons in the country, a core group to take on the responsibility of being the centre of a far larger group.'*

**Alison, S.M., *God is Building a House* (Hampshire: John Hunt Publishing, 2002), pp.22-23.**

*'There is no other activity in life so important as that of prayer. Every other activity depends upon prayer for its best efficiency.'* M.E. Andross

## Prayer at HMP Lowdham Grange

Prayer! Such a small word, but one that stirs up a vast array of views and interpretations by so many people and religions. To Prison Fellowship, it is the bedrock of all we do in the name of Jesus in prisons up and down the country.

At HMP Lowdham Grange, a Category B adult male prison in Nottingham, the journey started in 1998 when Prison Fellowship were first granted access. Prayer has never failed and it has always been behind each victory won for the Kingdom of God.

In 2001 a new Evangelical Chaplain arrived, enabling Sycamore Tree to begin its work later that year. God was answering prayer! Since then, the work of Prison Fellowship has gathered pace and every year many courses have been held where we have seen lives influenced and changed through our contact with prisoners.

There was a time that PF Lowdham Grange felt drawn to pray for the opportunity to meet for prayer inside the prison walls. The answer came with a new Director who was happy to allow this and even invited us to pray in the boardroom! The focus for our prayer during those meetings became aerial photographs, which were displayed on the boardroom wall, of the whole prison and two house blocks in the form of crosses!

An experience that is probably shared by many PF groups is the leaving of old members and the joining of new ones. There have been times when it seemed as if God was taking us to the brink of faith. Numbers, on occasion, have reduced even to three but Sycamore Tree has kept on going. Then, just as we would consider giving up, the numbers would double overnight with God clearly



Helena Knight

showing us that the work is far from over. One group member said; 'God places people' and He does - for whatever timescale or aspect of the ministry. We

pray the prayers and He delivers the goods in His way and in His time.

Over the years many prayers have been prayed for prisoners who have been part of our prayer journey at Lowdham Grange - the instant transformations, the slow processors, and the ones who leave just as they are starting to make progress. I believe that there will be many answers to prayer and that we will meet face to face in heaven one day. That is something to hold onto when the answers seem in short supply.

Over the last 12 years that Prison Fellowship has had a ministry to Lowdham Grange, much has opened up in answer to prayer. PF members have facilitated Sycamore Tree, Angel Tree, drawn keys and walked the wings. They have seen obstacles to the work of Jesus removed and prison doors thrown open to release God's purposes. Greater things are yet to come in answer to prayers that we are yet to pray.

**Jesus said, 'Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.'** (John 16v24)

By Helena Knight (Chaplain and Sycamore Tree Tutor)

## PF Milton Keynes: Prayer Foundations

The Milton Keynes Prison Fellowship group began praying before the foundations of HMP Woodhill were even laid and, looking back over 18 years, it has been wonderful to reflect on all that has been achieved in God's name through His power and blessing.

In 1992, a lady by the name of Joyce Tilson gathered together a group of people from different churches in order to pray for the new prison planned for Milton Keynes. Annual seminars were held and steadily numbers and interest developed. The prison opened its doors in 1993 and the first meeting was held with the new Chaplain, Rev Peter Green. Prayers had been said for the appointment of the Prison Chaplain and Rev Peter became a very firm supporter of Prison Fellowship's work and a personal friend to many in the group. It is to Rev Peter's credit that, up until his retirement, he regularly attended the group's monthly meetings.

Angel Tree has been, and still is, a project with which PF Milton Keynes has been involved for several years. At one time, my living room became full of boxes and parcels and we used the dining room table for wrapping. We have moved on since then and Angel Tree wrapping sessions now take place at a local church. Angel Tree is a wonderful way for folk to get involved as the gifts are sent out with our love and prayers for the children and families, as well as for their dads. We have always been grateful to God for the involvement of local churches in Angel Tree and it is only until very recently that we have had to look to raise funds to continue with Angel Tree; previously the money arrived through generous donations.

Sycamore Tree, the restorative justice programme, is a testimony to changed lives through the work of the Holy Spirit and the commitment of the many volunteers who work tirelessly to help prisoners achieve their potential during the programme. More volunteers are always in demand but, again, needs are met through faithful prayer. Surrogate victims come forward to tell their story, some coming into prison for the first time to do so, and many can testify that to see prisoners' attitudes, and consequently their lives, changed through the Sycamore Tree programme is both a moving and humbling experience. We so often see God's power at work and our prayers answered.



Iris Keenan, Joan Cooper, Margaret and John Arnold

As well as group activities, many in the group serve in other ways - leading worship at the start of the meeting, chairing

the meeting, looking after finances and, most importantly, serving the refreshments! Yet others are involved more directly with prisoners, either through correspondence or, in some instances, visiting. Again, through faithful prayer and committed friendship men have grown in trust towards the outside world. To be part of this change in a man's life, maybe resulting in coming to faith and baptism, is a privilege and all the glory goes to our Heavenly Father.

Liz Gardner, PF Milton Keynes

**We pray that other groups will join with us in giving all praise and thanks to God as we work together to achieve His purposes.**

## Angel Tree 2009

The Angel Tree programme in 2009 looks to have been a huge success. I would like to say an enormous "thank you" to all those involved in this incredible ministry.

Last year we had a number of new groups supporting the programme, as well as a number of new prisons participating. **We already have 3 more prisons wanting to run Angel Tree in 2010.**

Several groups took on more than one prison and I find myself constantly humbled by the commitment of our Angel Tree Coordinators around the country. This is clearly a ministry that has touched the hearts of many people. From the feedback I am gathering from our groups it is plain to see that this programme is extremely well supported by churches and communities everywhere. The amount of money raised and the number of gifts that have been donated are amazing.

A full report including the number of gifts sent and various other facts and figures will be published in March.

Several innovations and changes to the resources available were made in 2009

with the able help of the Angel Tree Steering Group, which is comprised predominantly of volunteers. This group was supported by another set of volunteers who agreed to join an e-mail consultation group to further expand the field of experience from which we can draw expertise.

I want to reiterate our enormous gratitude for all your efforts in supporting Angel Tree.

Best wishes Dave Walker

*'Angel Tree has reinforced my faith in humanity which had been lost long ago.'*  
Prisoner from HMP Lowdham Grange

*'Isn't it amazing that someone who doesn't know us should worry about us!'*  
Partner of Prisoner in HMP Hewell



## Prayer Opportunites

Prayer is vital to Prison Fellowship, for that reason we want to create opportunities for Christians to pray for those in prison, even if they are not volunteers. One way might be to invite prayer during a service, or to enable visitors to access our website to sign up to support us in prayer. We would send out prayer points and include accounts and testimonies of where we have seen prayer make a real difference to the lives of prisoners and their families. This could also be a first step towards becoming a volunteer, and then part of a prayer group.

Please let us know if you have any ideas about how this might look, and send in any examples you have of the power of prayer in the lives of prisoners and in your prayer groups. We hope, with your input, to fully develop this idea soon, so watch this space!

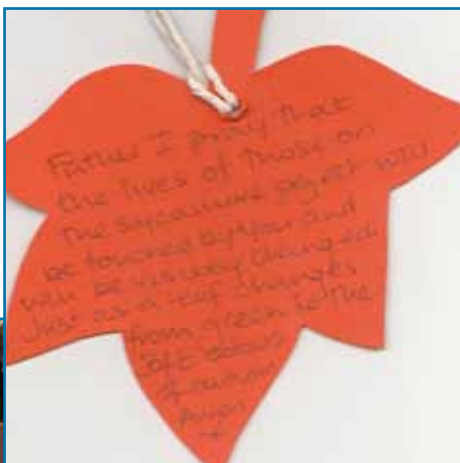
### Prayer Labyrinth

2009 was dedicated to a year of continuous prayer for churches around Liverpool. This was organised by the publication *Together for the Harvest* and it worked by each church praying during a chosen week, using its own style and means. There was a range of engagements in this, 24/7 prayer in some places and daily morning prayer in others. There were so many ways of doing this!

#### The goals for prayer were:

- To pray for a fundamental change in our society and nation - covering current issues appropriate to the time when the church would be praying.
- To pray for the Mersey region - both for transformation of society and for growth in the churches.
- To pray for local issues, churches, people and for the spheres of life in the community.

At Northfield Church, our week fell on the 23rd November. We decided to do a Prayer Labyrinth where we would create a walk through our church with individual prayer stations along the way. One such station was for Prison Fellowship and we had a tree where participants could write a prayer for either Angel Tree or Sycamore Tree, using an angel or a leaf, and then hang it on the tree. By asking people to get involved in praying for prisoners and the work of Prison Fellowship, we were successful in raising awareness for the needs of prisoners and their families.



**All week we had a great response to our Prayer Labyrinth - especially the Prison Fellowship station!**

By Stephen Hawkins (Regional Coordinator for North West)

### 'Let your light shine' Conference 2010

As March is fast approaching, we are getting increasingly excited about our conference which is to be held at The Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire. We are looking forward to a great programme packed with inspirational speakers, and the opportunity to meet together – staff, volunteers, trustees and other supporters/partners – and share about the work God is doing.

So join us in spending the weekend getting to know other volunteers and enjoying great worship and talks. Take part in sharing the latest news from PF England and Wales and PF International; and leave feeling encouraged, equipped and a valued and vital member of the Prison Fellowship family.

Speakers include **Ron Nikkel** from Prison Fellowship International, **Dr Krish Kandiah** (Executive Director of Churches in Mission for the Evangelical Alliance), and our own Chief Executive, **Natalie Cronin**. There will also be seminars on a variety of issues including Angel Tree and Sycamore Tree best practice, community chaplaincy and the work of Caring for Ex-Offenders.

Saturday night will be a 30th birthday celebration for Prison Fellowship England and Wales. We will have the chance to celebrate the great work that our volunteers and staff have done over the last 30 years, and look forward to the future of Prison Fellowship. We will also be launching the Patchwork Quilt, to which many of you have contributed.



Swanwick Conference Centre

The conference is open to everyone - whether you have been volunteering for many years or if you are totally new to Prison Fellowship, so come and be inspired, equipped and encouraged. You, our supporters, ARE Prison Fellowship – you make the organisation what it is; so why not come and share your stories with us and let us learn from you! It would be great to have a representative or two from every prayer group there.



Krish Kandiah

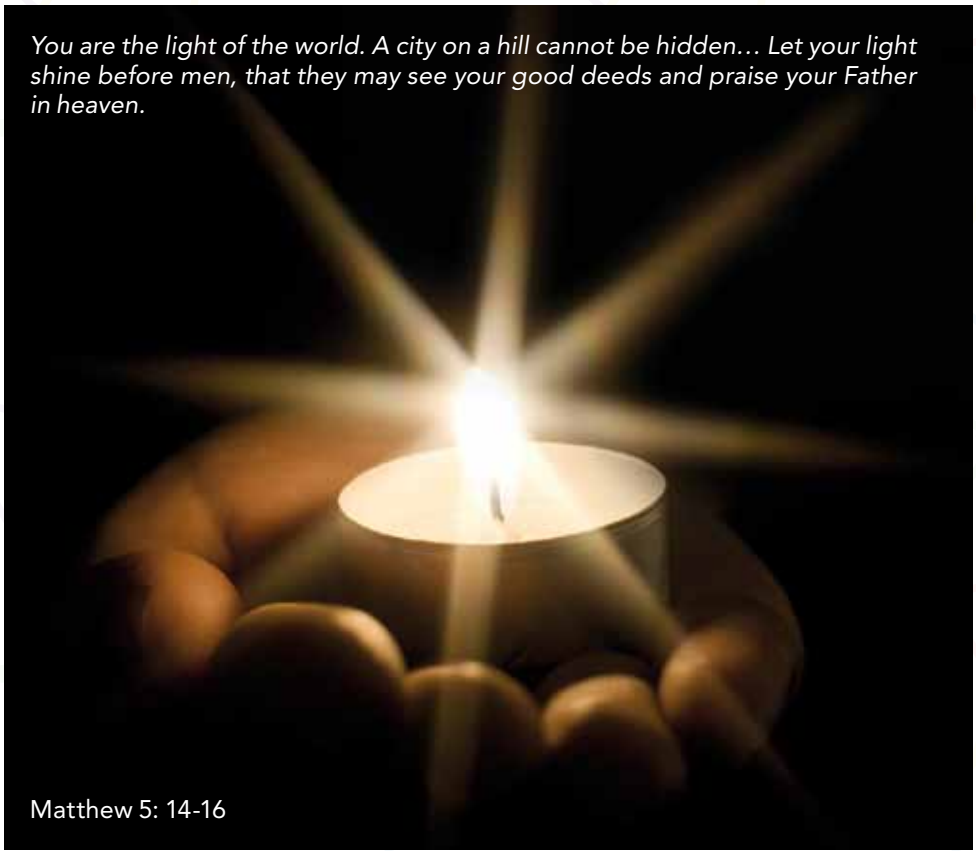


Ron Nikkel

**Bookings are still open so make sure you get your place!**

*'Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.'* St Augustine

*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*



Matthew 5: 14-16



If you would like extra copies of this newsletter please call us on 01621 843232

Thank you for reading our Spring 2010 Newsletter. If you have any queries or require any other information please do not hesitate to contact us at the office.

**Editors:** Claire Bonham, Sasha Chipperfield, Tim Diaper

**Contributors:** Claire Bonham, Natalie Cronin, Liz Gardner, Helena Knight, Stephen Hawkins, Dave Walker

**Office contact details**

**Prison Fellowship  
England and Wales**

**PO Box 945 Maldon  
Essex CM9 4EW**

**info@prisonfellowship.org.uk  
www.pfew.org.uk**

**01621 843232**



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