

Seeing lives transformed

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

England and Wales

*"For where two or three come together
in my name, there am I with them."*

(Matt 18:20)



Volunteer Fun Day, North West 2010



**Newsletter
Autumn 2010**

Welcome to our Autumn 2010 Newsletter!

At Prison Fellowship, we have been concentrating on raising awareness about our ministry and recruiting more volunteers to be part of God's amazing work in prisons. We have continued to promote Angel Tree and Sycamore Tree and we have also been busy relaunching our Letter Writing scheme. We hope you will enjoy reading this issue; it explains a bit more about these exciting developments and gives further insight into our programmes.

A taster of what you will find inside:

- Find out about our volunteer recruitment campaign that launched in September!
- PF Stamford share their experience of Angel Tree
- Dawn Wallace reflects on her time as a Sycamore Tree Tutor



CEO's reflections Overcoming prejudice

Natalie Cronin

Inspired by her remarkable story of breaking through the barriers of peoples' perceptions and prejudices, I recently visited Baroness Jane Campbell. Jane is the Joint Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Disability Group, she has been a member of the House of Lords Appointments Commission since 2008, and she chaired the Social Care Institute for Excellence before then. Recently appointed as a member of the prestigious Parliamentary Select Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, she has quite a CV under her belt! Jane's success is inspirational, made so by the fact that she has had to constantly push through many constraints, not least having a severe disability, Spinal Muscular Atrophy.

I asked Jane how she thought her own experience of countering discrimination, especially in employment, might help former prisoners who also face barriers due to stereotyping. Jane explained that it is all about getting real stories out there illustrating success, which then provide a role model for people to emulate. She said:

"We need to challenge the stereotype that society holds of certain groups of people. For instance, the myth that disabled people can't work and need to be looked after by carers. I don't need someone to care for me, I need someone to help me take control of my life so that I can get a job and live independently. Similarly, people who have experienced prison are considered a risk to employ, and they have the added barrier that a large percentage of the public feel they should be constantly surveyed. As I have to challenge my stereotype by demonstrating a different story, so do ex-offenders."

Jane then went on to tell me her own amazing story of working with one ex-offender and how it changed her views drastically. This will be the start of many similar stories that we will try and place in the media over the next year. If you have your own to share please let me know, as these stories are the key to unlocking closed minds.

"I was interviewing for a new chauffeur. My disability leaves me heavily reliant on a driver in order to get out and about, so it was important that I found the



Baroness Jane Campbell

right reliable person for the job. I remember that I had been interviewing for two days and no one had yet met my criteria of being un-patronising, comfortable with disability, and having a strong sense of the need to be reliable! However, there was then a knock at the door and things were to dramatically change. The candidate before me was Andy - 6ft tall, visibly fit and absolutely gorgeous! Wow, I thought, is it my birthday?

Looking at him, I felt that there was no way he was going to want this job. So I asked him outright, "Tell me why you want this job, it's not exactly going to pay the rent." This very engaging man smiled and said, "Don't worry, the rent's already paid for. I'm from the open prison just down the road." I must admit I was shocked, this guy looked you straight in the eye and had a presence, likeable but with an inner strength. Being in a wheelchair there is little room for risks in my life, but I thought, feel the fear and do it anyway! Before I made my decision I asked him what he was in for, "I was sent down for twenty one years for armed robbery, I was the get away driver. I have served sixteen years and I am now in my last six months in an open prison." I decided to go with my instincts. I knew that he had to prove himself in his first job if he was ever going to make it in the outside world. I sensed this opportunity would help make him reliable if he really wanted to make a go of it. I was right!

Andy turned out to be a brilliant driver, I finally got to my destinations on time! More importantly, we had many profound conversations during the year he worked for me. He was a remarkable man who was able to put his life together again despite very difficult circumstances. Incidentally, it turned out that he could drive just as well backwards as forwards. His experience, he told me, came from reversing down one-way streets when being chased by police cars. In my book that meant he was perfectly qualified for the job!

As my driver Andy went everywhere with me, including the visits to meet Ministers of State in the Houses of Parliament. Here he passed all security checks because he was with me. He would even come on demonstrations with me, which was quite ironic. There I'd be in the middle of Westminster Bridge, holding up the traffic in protest for human rights and doing my best to get arrested, whilst Andy would be standing on the path doing his utmost to stay out of trouble!"

To find out more about Jane's work, please visit:
<http://www.livingwithdignity.info/>



Visit the Patchwork Quilt at www.prisonfellowship.org.uk to find inspiring stories that show the incredible work God is doing in prisons. If you have a story to share, you can also use this website to send it to us. We would love to read it and it will go towards raising awareness about this important work!

Love Beyond Bars

Restoring faith in prison

This autumn we are running a campaign to spread the word about why Christians should join with Prison Fellowship to see lives transformed. Below is a taster of the message we are putting across:

Want to put your faith into action?

God's love knows no borders and it is powerfully at work behind bars; freedom knows no boundaries through this effective ministry. Prison Fellowship was set up to transform people's lives. Restoring faith in prisons is a key aim of our extraordinary team of volunteers, and you, too, can be involved.

You can show love beyond bars by:

- Being part of our Sycamore Tree programme in prison
- Working faithfully through prayer
- Making a difference through our Letter Writing scheme
- Bringing joy to a prisoner's family through Angel Tree

Short of time?

You can make a huge difference by supporting our work financially, or through prayer by signing up to our mailing list via our website www.prisonfellowship.org.uk

Churches & Communities

Why not sign up to our mailing list today and receive a free resource to help your church with Prisons Week (21st – 27th November). This guide to prisons week includes prayers, sermon notes and a church magazine article. You can do this by visiting our website www.prisonfellowship.org.uk

Hear from our volunteers about what a difference you can make to the lives of prisoners:

"The thing that excites me so much about volunteering on Sycamore Tree is seeing the men's change in attitude and confidence. They appreciate being treated like human beings. Things that seem small to us, like asking them if they want to be called by their first name, mean so much to them. It's amazing how such a small thing makes such a big difference."
Angela, Sycamore Tree volunteer

Volunteering can change your life as well as those you minister to. One person who visited a Sycamore Tree course recently said:

"I saw the satisfaction and love that came from the volunteers. The dedication that they showed and the good feelings that they got from all of the prisoners over the weeks really rubbed off on me, I found the experience truly rewarding. I would relish the opportunity to go in again."

What to do next:

Visit our website www.prisonfellowship.org.uk to:

- Find out how you can get involved in our programmes
- Sign up to our monthly e-prayer letter and newsletter
- Fill out a volunteer application form
- Sign up to give regularly

Claire Bonham – Volunteers Coordinator

If you would like some flyers to promote this campaign please contact the office 01621 843 232.

A privilege - Sycamore Tree

Prison Fellowship's Sycamore Tree programme is an accredited Restorative Justice course that aims to help offenders realise the impact that their crimes have on their victims, their communities and themselves. Dawn Wallace is a Sycamore Tree Tutor at women's prison HMP Send, and below she shares her experience:

"For the first time since being sentenced, I now take full responsibility for my part in what happened. Until now, I believed I was the main victim in my situation, was absorbed in self pity and failed to consider how others had been hurt by my actions. The Sycamore Tree course has helped me see that I need to take responsibility and address my issues in order to rebuild my life and heal from the past. I hope my victims will see this and be able to rebuild their lives in the knowledge that this will never happen to anyone else." Learner, HMP Send

When we hear learners say things like this it is very encouraging as it makes everything we do worthwhile. The trouble is, once they leave the prison we often don't hear about the amazing fruit that Sycamore Tree brings afterwards. However, we do know that the prison recognises that it is often a turning point for many of the women in dealing with their crime issues. None of the women expect the course to have the impact that it does and many of them say it's the best course they've ever done in the whole time they've been in prison.

I know one prisoner who asked to move wings because she felt some of the women there would encourage her in her old behaviour and, having done Sycamore Tree, she wanted to act differently. Another woman, after listening to a victim who described the impact of having her handbag stolen, was completely stunned. She'd always

thought that this was a petty crime and had done it often herself, she had never considered the impact it had on the victim: not being able to get into her house, worrying for weeks in case anyone tried to get in, paranoid at every phone call and wondering if it was someone phoning to see if she was home, the loss of sentimental items that could never be replaced. We saw an amazing change in this young girl.

The women are always amazingly warm and welcoming to the victims of crime that we bring in. They gravitate towards them and want to make them feel better; many of their Acts of Restitution are directed towards them. Gill, who has come in as a victim three times, said:

"I agreed to go into prison as a victim because I could see how helpful it might be to the offenders. It never occurred



Prayers for Sycamore Tree at the North West Volunteer Fun Day

to me that the process would be part of my own journey of healing!"

It never ceases to amaze us how Sycamore Tree affects lives and attitudes. It is wonderful to see how the programme, together with

the support from volunteers, helps the women to find hope and raises their self esteem. It is so rewarding to be a part of it and we feel that we are contributing a valuable resource to the prison service. It is a privilege to serve God in this way and to see Him at work in the lives of the broken.

Please telephone the office 01621 843 232 to find out how you can get involved.



Angel Tree – Give a smile this Christmas

“This is something very special because it is the only way I have to send presents to my kids. I will use it again and again because the presents give my kids a lot of happiness.” Prisoner, Angel Tree 2009

Angel Tree works to maintain family bonds by providing Christmas presents to prisoners’ children, who might otherwise receive nothing from their imprisoned parent. The programme is now well underway for the year and prayer groups across the country are preparing to send out hundreds of gifts. PF Stamford is such a group, and below they share their experience of running this vital programme:

An amazing scheme - PF Stamford Angel Tree

Last Christmas, our Angel Tree group expected to send about 100 presents to the children of inmates from our

local prison, HMP Stocken. In the end we bought, wrapped and dispatched 185! All this wrapping was done in one day by a group of seventeen volunteers from different churches in the area. Our wrapping day is a wonderful Christmas party because it really is all about Jesus, and the hard work is always broken up at midday by a well deserved fellowship lunch.

Fortunately, we were able to fund these extra gifts from the money we had already raised and by dipping into our small reserve. Over the years we have relied on direct giving from churches and we have found that by putting an appeal article in church newsletters in November and by making appeals at services, the money has always come in. Smaller churches have also sent us cheques from P.C.C. funds and last year we had a warm response from a church near to the prison as a number of their congregation are staff at HMP Stocken.



Our wrapping day is a wonderful Christmas party

As the prison has expanded this year we are expecting to send an even larger number of presents this coming Christmas and, as a result, we will need more money. Looking back over the early days we found it relatively easy to raise money, but now it is getting harder as churches have other worthy causes. However, the Lord has always met our needs so we have no reason to doubt that He will not do so again this year. I have already sent out an appeal letter and one church was grateful for this as I was able to speak at their church meeting; they now intend to have a collection at Christmas.

It is always good to receive feedback about the presents we send, and last year we had an unexpected response. A prison volunteer came to one of our prayer meetings and she explained how she had spoken to a prisoner and his family shortly after Christmas. They had

all told her how much they liked what we had sent - the little girl had received a dressing gown and the boy pyjamas. The volunteer, who was not familiar with Angel Tree at the time, was surprised and delighted by the scheme and this encouraged us all.

So we really have found that Angel Tree is an amazing scheme. It is a little extra work for the Chaplaincy, but it provides a Christian outreach for them and it helps the men at HMP Stocken to maintain relationships with their children while their families receive prayer support.

For us as a group, Angel Tree gives natural openings for us to talk to many more people about prison ministry, and being involved each year is so worthwhile.

Sonia Adkin – Angel Tree Stamford Treasurer

Bringing some joy – PF Featherstone

Brian Bishop is Prayer Group Leader for PF Featherstone along with his wife Wendy. Their group run Angel Tree in HMP Featherstone, coordinated by Diane Cutler, and has been doing so for the past eight years – although they started raising money a year earlier in 2001.

In the past, PF Featherstone has raised money for Angel Tree by holding a stall at a church mini-market once a year and through receiving voluntary donations. This year, however, Brian thought of another opportunity to fundraise for the children of prisoners.

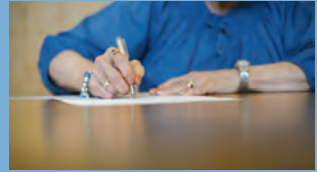
In July, Brian celebrated his 70th birthday alongside twenty one years of prison visiting. To mark the occasion, Brian held a barn dance for fifty of his friends and he used this event to raise awareness for Angel Tree. By suggesting that donations to the programme would be welcome instead of gifts, a wonderful £260 was raised towards bringing some joy to the children of prisoners this Christmas.



Brian welcoming a friend

All donations made in response to this Newsletter will be used for Angel Tree 2010

Recently relaunched, the Prison Fellowship Letter Writing scheme works to provide prisoners with a vital link to the outside world through the support of a Christian Letter Writer. Hazel Heaton is a regular Letter Writer and below she shares the wonders that God can work through a letter:



I've been writing to one prisoner for many years now. It is usually one letter every two weeks but, depending on what is happening in his life, sometimes even one a week. By writing regularly over this time, we have built a good trusting relationship and he often shares his worries with me. Through Letter Writing I feel I am really helping him and it is good to know that, despite being unable to get into a prison due to my age and health, I can still make a difference through this scheme.

When we first started writing he told me that he was a Buddhist and explained what he believed. I never disputed what he said, but I did tell him about my own faith in Jesus. After some time he began telling me about a reoccurring dream where Jesus would come to take him to heaven, holding his hand and saying, 'Don't worry.' He was very scared. I didn't judge him, I just listened and comforted him and, over time, he gave his life to the Lord. It took a while, but it is very satisfying to know that he has found salvation. He continues to have the dream and he wonders what the Lord wants him to do with it. He has been out of prison to attend a church and would like to go again in order to share what God has shown him. He also attends the Chapel in prison but hasn't yet had the opportunity to tell them about his experience. It's just amazing what God can do and what Prison Fellowship is doing through this scheme is wonderful, we are really getting through to them!

If you would like to become involved in this vital ministry, please contact the office for more information: 01621 843 232

Thank you to everybody who kindly donates to the work of the Prison Fellowship England and Wales. Your generosity is vital to the continuing work of transforming the lives of prisoners and their families.

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

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