

March 2011
www.prisonfellowship.org.uk

VOICES



Seeing lives transformed

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

Looking Forward

Natalie Cronin, CEO:

For the last few months I have been working with colleagues to write Prison Fellowship's strategy based on the vision set out at our conference in March 2010. This has now been agreed by Trustees who are excited by our plans to become a volunteer-driven organisation that speaks out on behalf of prisoners. Our aims include providing Sycamore Tree to every prison, as well as recruiting more volunteers (see Howard's article on pages 2/3). We want to share that excitement and to shape your part in our plans, so we will be organising roadshows around the country to meet with you and discuss how we make it a reality in your area.

This is also an opportunity to look at getting the best stewardship of our vital resources, including the structure to ensure we are best placed to meet our objectives.

As an organisation with national reach, it is vital that we are based in a central, easily accessible location. As we extend our influence over policy and legislation in these challenging times, this will help us from both a practical perspective and in enhancing the perception of Prison Fellowship as an organisation located at



the heart of decision making. After much searching and prayer, I am delighted to report we have secured office space in London, at the Bible Society offices in Westminster, at a lower cost than that of the Maldon office. This means that we can actually reduce operating costs. We are proposing to relocate all centrally based posts to London as from July this year. This will mean change over the next few months, until we can welcome you to a fully functioning office in London.

As we promote our work with prisons, we want to present a fresh and vibrant image of Prison Fellowship. We hope this will also help recruit new volunteers and

reflect the next phase of Prison Fellowship's growth. We have been looking at how we can refresh our visual materials so they have a more contemporary feel. I am pleased to report that Prison Fellowship have been given some free advice from a creative agency, *Brothers and Sisters*, to do this, so in the next issue we'll be asking for your views on a proposed new format for Voices and our materials.

We have an ambitious plan, and growing Prison Fellowship's work and reach will be exciting. It will require us to do things differently, try new ways of working, and engage with volunteers in a whole new way.

I look forward to working with you over the next year, so that we approach the Prison Fellowship conference in 2012 as a strong organisation made up of paid and unpaid people who are passionate about serving God in prisons, and who together share a clear plan of action.

It will mean some changes, but it is normal that as we reach beyond ourselves we have to let go of what is familiar. I am absolutely certain that the prize we are reaching for, of more prisoners' lives touched, is every bit worth it.

Natalie

Howard Dodd, Chair of Trustees:

Paul writes in Hebrews 11: *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"*. He then provides powerful examples of the faith of people in the past Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah. He goes on: *"People... show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one."*

I was reminded of this passage as we prayed and discussed updating the strategy for Prison Fellowship. It's very much a strategy built on faith. There's the apparent impossibility of the ever-growing needs of prisoners and those affected by crime against resources trimmed and cut. More importantly though we yearn for a better



society, for lives restored, for individuals freed from the tyrannies within their lives - we seek another country – a heavenly one. We seek it, work hard to achieve it, and critically we believe in it.

Natalie, the regional and central teams, together with the Trustees have been mapping out how Prison Fellowship will develop over the next few years. It's been a really exciting time and we believe we have a draft blueprint to enable us to grow our work and to make it more effective. The strategy envisages a growing and strong Prison Fellowship with exciting new areas of ministry in support of prison Chaplaincies, prisoners and their families, updated training resources for volunteers, a renewed emphasis on prayer and a voice for prisoners and Christians who work in prisons in local and national arenas that is clear and heard.

Prison Fellowship's strength is its volunteers but after celebrating our 30th birthday last year the time has come when we need to change some of the way we do things so we are better placed to help others. We face some particular challenges amongst many others – we are thinly spread in places, we need strong cohesive, accountable local groups and as every year passes, with us all getting a year older, there's an urgent need to bring in new colleagues to continue our work into the future. We want to be a truly country-wide team; an exciting, growing and deepening community that's easy to join and which fully enables individuals to pursue the ministry God has given them.

The strategy work now moves to the important next stage where we discuss and test the ideas with the wider Prison Fellowship community. After this we will be able to set it out more fully. We will be organising events and meetings over the forthcoming months; I would encourage

you to get involved and be heard. I would also love to invite a small group of people to support in prayer the strategy and its implementation. This is a vital element of the strategy if we are to get this right. Please get in touch with me via the office if you would like to support the strategy in this way.

Sylvia Mary's book about the creation of Prison Fellowship talks of building a house. Well, this next year we've got the builders in to make a few extensions and changes. Inevitably, to continue the metaphor, it will be messy and stressful at times but over the next 12 months, culminating with our next national conference at Swanwick, we hope it will be Prison Fellowship's year of stepping forward in faith as we roll out many of the elements in the strategy.

So may I conclude by wishing you a happy and exciting new (PF) year – together we're building a better country – a heavenly one!

Howard

PF Exeter shares how Angel Tree 2010 was a great success in Exeter Prison

Each time we run Angel Tree the experience is different. Christmas 2010 was the seventh year that we have run Angel Tree in Exeter and one of the surprises this year was the very wide variety of people, places and situations that our little flyer reached! It was very humbling to receive donations from people quite unknown to us whose hearts and pockets have been touched by the compassion of God which Angel Tree embodies. We also received generous local support from churches. For the past two years the local Methodist Church have



held a Christmas Tree Festival with about 30 trees displayed provided by local businesses, churches, individuals and, of

course, by Prison Fellowship. The folk in the church put in a great deal of hard work organising the event and it was very much enjoyed by the many visitors who came from the village and beyond. The festival helped to raise awareness of the plight of prisoners' families and over £350 was given to Angel Tree which, together with other gifts, enabled us to send presents to 88 children this year.

We feel that Angel Tree is an effective means of keeping families in touch. The real value for the children is not necessarily in the gift itself, but in knowing that Dad has not forgotten them and still loves them. The

prisoners are often surprised that people who don't know them should show such kindness. We always try to encourage them that there are people on the 'outside' who genuinely want the best for them and their families – such a contrast to the negative lifestyles that so many of them have experienced. The response is frequently, *"Please say thank you to them for me"*.

Exeter Prison Fellowship is involved in other activities in the Chaplaincy department throughout the year and we meet monthly to pray for the work in the prison. We welcome anyone who is interested to join us.

PF Exeter

Volunteers Week takes place from 1-7th June 2011 and we will be running a campaign alongside this to celebrate the wonderful work of our volunteers and encourage more people to get involved. Be sure to make a note of the date and look out for materials and events nearer the time!

As part of refreshing our Prison Fellowship materials, we are currently looking at a possible new design and content focus for the Newsletter and Voices. As a result, the Spring Newsletter will now be published in May/June. In the next issue of Voices we will be asking for your views on a proposed new format.

Prayer Points

- Give thanks that Restorative Justice continues to be a subject of interest within the media and pray that the response will continue to be positive and that people will respond to the Green Paper.
- Give thanks that Angel Tree has touched so many lives this year and pray for the families who have been blessed by the programme.
- Pray for God's guidance as we engage with the wider Prison Fellowship community regarding the implementation of the strategy.

Prison Fellowship England & Wales, PO Box 945, Maldon, Essex, CM9 4EW
Tel: **01621 843232** www.prisonfellowship.org.uk