



Seeing lives transformed

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

Rioting and Restorative Justice

Sadly, during the summer months crime has featured highly in our news stories. The impact of the disturbances around the country have rebounded across the world with the inevitable polemic from politicians and others expressing views on why it happened and what should be done to deal with those involved.

Where does that leave us as Christians praying for, and working in, our prisons?

It seems clear that the looters had no respect for others or their property, no regard for the impact of their actions or the aftermath, and no understanding of the effect on those who fell victim or the communities in which the disturbances took place. Encouragingly though, it was those communities who led the way in responding, standing up for the values so missing in those who rioted and looted by organising clear ups, offering support to those badly affected and, in the case of the families of the young men murdered, offering gracious forgiveness to those responsible.



Penny Parker, PF Trustee & ST volunteer

It is therefore encouraging that amongst the outcry and the inevitable call for stiff custodial penalties, there have been many who have recognised that restorative justice offers a real solution to the issues that the rioting and looting raise. A conference or mediation between an offender and a victim can be a powerful way to bring home truths that no court appearance or prison sentence can achieve. Those of us involved in the Sycamore

Tree programme know this. We see it in every course through the generous input of a volunteer victim and in the often powerful responses of the men and women who listen to a real account of the impact of a crime. In many cases for the first time, they fully recognise what they have done.

Our prison population is at an all time high and we know that this has very real and difficult consequences for both offenders and those whose job it is to manage the prisons and the criminal justice system. But rather than despair at that fact, let's respond

with prayer and action. Prayer for appropriate judicial responses, for those on the enquiry team looking into why the violence happened, prayer that communities affected might come together with renewed strength and for the churches taking a lead in that work. Prayer for those whose lives may now take very a different course because of a moment of madness on an August evening, and prayer especially for those suffering as victims of the violence. And to take action, to keep doing what we are doing, to raise greater awareness of the impact and benefit of restorative justice, to look for opportunities to tell others about it and to encourage other Christians to come and join us as we, 'act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God' in our prisons.

Prisons' Week (www.prisonsworld.org) is the perfect time for us to get the message out that Christians need to pray and take action. Following such public crimes and heightened awareness, a week long campaign to encourage churches across the UK to pray for prisons is a great opportunity and we can use this to stir people into joining us as we work to combat the negative effects of crime on society. As a member of PF you are at the heart of this. If you feel you could raise awareness for the work you do for your local prison within your community during Prisons' Week (20th – 26th Nov 2011) please get in touch with the office for resources and advice: 020 7799 2500

Penny

Forgiveness is a powerful thing

Jo became a victim of crime when her brother was murdered by two youths. She now volunteers as a victim of crime on Sycamore Tree and here she tells us her story:

Eight years ago I received a call from my dad asking me to go to their house. I could tell that something was wrong and I thought that he was going to tell me that my nan or grandad had died. I couldn't think of anything else it could be. When I arrived I knew something dreadful had happened and my dad had to tell me that my brother had been murdered. Paul had stepped out of a taxi when two boys approached him. One boy held him while the other stabbed him and he died moments later. The boys had been drinking and using drugs and were carrying weapons. They had caused quite a bit of trouble that night in pubs and through breaking into cars etc. These boys were later arrested and put in prison and Paul's death had a major effect on many lives.

I am a Christian and, a few years before Paul's death, God put something very important



in my heart. Something that at the time I didn't understand. I had watched a video where a widow spoke of how her husband was murdered in church just before a service but that she was at peace and that God was in control. She said at the end of it, 'It is well with my soul.' I had no idea why, but I could not get rid of that sentence out of my head. I thought about nothing else

and wondered if I would be able to say that if I was in that position. This stayed with me for the years leading up to Paul's death.

The morning that my dad told me the heartbreaking news about my brother, the very first thought that came into my head was, 'It is well with my soul.' I felt God very near to me and I knew that He cared so much for me that all those years before he put that on my heart so that I knew it would be okay and that He would get me through it. We were devastated at losing Paul, but I will always know that God prepared me for that day even though I never knew it at the time. I kept that thought with me throughout and still do to this day. I miss Paul every day, that never goes away, but I know God loves us all and I trust him. I forgave the boys that did this to Paul, even though they didn't show any remorse. I don't believe that it is humanly possible to do this without God. Forgiveness is a powerful thing and releases the person forgiving as well as the person who needs to be forgiven.

I now go into prisons through PF to talk with offenders and I have felt so blessed through it. I get as much from it as they do. I go in with my

num as a victim of crime on Week Three of the Sycamore Tree course and go back again to witness their Acts of Restitution on Week Six. I know this will sound strange, but there is such honesty and humility there. There is a visible change in most of the men and I have read lots of letters that they have written to say sorry to their victims and some of the men have also made things to give to our family.

You hear a lot of very sad stories in prison as most prisoners are victims of crime themselves in some way, and some have lost people close to them. There are always lots of tears and words of regret and sorrow, but the biggest thing is the change I can see in them. All the workers and volunteers from PF give so much of themselves and their time, they are very caring and it is obvious that the prisoners see that in them.

I am also involved in the Christmas programme, Angel Tree. This will be our second time of running Angel Tree and we are already busy fundraising. I am so excited to be involved in this and I am expecting great things to come out of it all.

Jo

Letter Writing Training

Bootle - 22nd October, 10am-12pm

Northfield Church, Northfield Road, Bootle, L20 0AF

Swanage – 22nd October, 2pm-4.30pm

Emmanuel Baptist Church, 1 Howard Road, Swanage, BH19 2QJ

Manchester – 23rd November, 2pm – 4pm

St Cuthberts Church, Oldham Road, Manchester, M40 7AQ

London – 25th October & 8th December, 10.30am – 12.30pm

77 Great Peter Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 2EZ

Please RSVP to Nicola Davey if you are interested in attending:

(T) 020 7799 2500 **(E)** nicoladavey@prisonfellowship.org.uk

Christian Letters to Prisoners (www.homepages.tesco.net/christmasletters) are looking for people to translate letters from English into other languages in time for Christmas 2011. If you are able to help please contact:

The Secretary, CLP, 52a Whitehorse Lane, South Norwood, London, SE25 6RE



PF Conference 2012

The 2012 Prison Fellowship conference will take place between **9th - 11th March 2012** at The Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick. Our theme is, 'Be strong and courageous - making extraordinary things happen' and we would love you to join us for a weekend full of inspiring testimonies, encouraging teaching and worship, and a variety of workshops.

The cost of the weekend will be **£125** if booked before **30th November 2011** (£150 thereafter) and this price includes meals and accommodation (Friday afternoon – Sunday lunchtime) and a delegate pack.

If individuals in your PF group are unable to meet the cost of the conference, please

consider sending a representative from your group by splitting the cost amongst your members. It would be fantastic if at least one person from each PF group could attend.

For more information or to book your place please contact:

(T) 020 7799 2500

(E) sashachipperfield@prisonfellowship.org.uk

Confirmed Speakers:

Alexander Mclean
Director of African Prisons Project

Bishop Humphrey Southern
Bishop of Repton

Ian Telfer
Governor of HMP Kingston

Princess Anne visits HMP Bronzefield



On 7th September HRH Princess Anne paid a visit to HMP Bronzefield as part of her role as patron of The Butler Trust, an organisation which supports prison staff. The Princess Royal is also a patron of the Restorative Justice Council and during her walk around the prison she was able to speak with an inmate who had recently completed Sycamore Tree. Our Chief Executive, Natalie Cronin, was there to meet the Princess and this was a great chance to share with her about our work. Later this year Princess Anne will also be visiting two prisons in the Northern region and, once again, we hope to have a representative there to meet her.

Pray for a prison

As it stands there are 18 prisons that are without the prayer support of a local PF group and, as an organisation founded on prayer, we know how important it is for us to support each prison in this way. PF Bedford have come up with a great idea to change this and, as a result, we propose the following challenge. We are asking PF groups in England and Wales to adopt one of these prisons in order to pray that a new PF group will emerge and begin to support that prison.

The list of prisons in need of a PF group can be found at www.prisonfellowship.org.uk/pray-for-a-prison. Please let us know which prison your group has adopted so that we can update this list. This way we can ensure that all prisons are covered in prayer and we can inform you when a new group emerges. Thank you to all the groups who have committed to this so far.

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