

## OFFERING HOPE & A NEW BEGINNING

\* CHRISTMAS \*  
*Hope*  
\* \* \*

**Every Christmas, many churches and organizations help brighten the lives of families through Christmas Hope. Purchasing, packing and delivering hampers and toys to prisoners' families not only conveys a message of our love for them, but also the true meaning of Christmas - the good news of Jesus Christ.**

This year staff and volunteers are busy at the Haven Christian Centre putting together hampers and toy parcels for over 350 families. It's not just about food and gifts, but these families are reminded they are loved by their mum or dad in prison, loved by communities, and more importantly loved by their Heavenly Father.

It also keeps families connected. It benefits those serving a sentence to feel good that they can get something for their mum or dad, or other family members, heals the pain of being separated and helps the children to know they are remembered. By connecting parents to their children, hearts are changed, family ties are strengthened and with keeping families connected, prisoners are less likely to reoffend.

— — — **One request that came in this year simply wants to show appreciation to a sister:** — — —

"I would really appreciate if you could help me with getting my wee niece Christina some gifts. I can't repay my sister enough for what she has done for me over the years and standing by me when no one else would while I've been in prison, so I would be truly grateful if I could get a few things for her daughter this Xmas as I'm stuck in here and have no way of treating my little niece myself. Thank you so much..."

So thank you for helping us keep families connected. We have been overwhelmed once again this year by the kindness of so many who have given. As an expression of their support Probation Board Northern Ireland staff decided to make up and donate a number of hampers. Roisin Muldoon the Assistant Director was "delighted with the generosity and thoughtfulness of the many PBNI staff who contributed. Many of the PBNI service users and their families that we work with will benefit from the Prison Fellowship Christmas Appeal this year. Thank you."



Roisin Muldoon, Assistant Dir PBNI, Robin Scott PF & Janet McClinton Area Manager

# Sycamore Tree



Sycamore Tree gives an opportunity to work with those who find themselves in prison, teaching about Restorative Justice and helping them understand the impact of their crimes. The world judges these men and women because of the wrong they have done. God loves them and desperately desires their lives to be transformed for his glory. Each course I lead I gain friends, because we journey through so much in six weeks.

As part of the coursework, the participants write something about themselves. One woman wrote, "I am 19 years old and I am a heroin addict. I have one son who is 2 but I lost him because of drink and drugs. I am homeless and I have no family who care about me." At the end of the course, we presented this girl with her certificate. She had tears in her eyes and she jumped up and down saying, "this is the first certificate I have ever achieved."

On completion of the course in Maghaberry, one man said to me, "I have done so many courses in this jail that I have lost count. This is the best one I have ever done because you lot all really care about us. It's not us and yous, it's just all of us together. It has really made me think about my life and I am determined to change."

During week three of Sycamore Tree, a victim of crime comes in to tell their story. During the first course I taught in

Maghaberry there was hardly a dry eye when the victim shared the brutal experience of the night their son was cruelly murdered. Afterwards, one of the hardest men I have ever met came up to me with tears in his eyes and said, "Lynne, now I know I have a heart. I didn't care before but I really do now. I can't remember the last time I cried but I definitely cried today."

I love getting alongside the men and women on each course, and showing them that, no matter what they have done there is hope for the future. I love having the opportunity to surprise inmates with genuine care and concern. I love chatting through the steps they can take to change and journeying with them to help reach these goals, even after the course is completed. I believe they all can change. It is my heart's desire to let each of them know there is hope for the future if they make better choices, if they believe in themselves and if others believe in them too.

Sycamore Tree gives us that opportunity to invest in their lives over six weeks and offer life-changing tools to enable them to reach the potential God intends for each one. The work is expanding and we need you. If you can commit to help facilitate one of our courses, please do contact us.

**Lynne**

## What A Privilege

I'd heard the stories about Sycamore Tree, but a few weeks ago I had the opportunity to go into Maghaberry for myself. It was the final week of the course. Photographs, security checks, then escorted to the Prisoner Development Unit and into a room with ten or twelve male prisoners. There was nothing that really surprised me, the joking and camaraderie was what I expected, then Lynne started the programme.

I sat with two guys; we will call them Daryl and Mick. They were to give a presentation on Zac before and after he met Jesus. I watched as they prepared their presentation and listed the items, which had been part of week one but was obviously still clear in their mind. I asked them if I could look at their workbook. I had only one question. Why were these two guys doing time? They told me their story, and then I realised that but for circumstances, I could have so easily been them.

We moved on to the next part, things learned during the course. Up jumped Martin. "I have learned the importance of the "Ripple Effect." "It was only a bit of a lie to me at the time. Nobody would be harmed, but I was wrong and now I'm in here. I will always think about the ripple effect every time I go to say or do something in the future."

Trevor raises his hand. "Can I read this letter I have written to the bloke I harmed?" I was breathless as he stood at the front and read it out. No soft well-written apology to hoodwink a judge, but words right from the heart. "I could say the drugs I had on me at the time meant I didn't really know what I was doing, but that is no excuse for what I did to you and I want you to know I am real sorry."

Walking out with another visitor, he said to me. "That was a real privilege." It certainly was.

**Walter**



# Bringing Hope to Others

Robert trusted Christ in prison, where he was serving a long sentence for paramilitary offences. PF volunteers, Brian and Sue, got to know Robert's wife as they drove her many times in their car from her home to Magilligan. The three became close friends.

On release Robert wanted to help PF. The Prayer Focus needed photocopied. Brian and Sue's church generously made their copier available, and Robert, now working in Belfast, collected the originals and brought the copies back the next day.

Over their many years of service Brian and Sue produced thousands of copies of the Prayer Focus. We asked them what it involved...

**How many years have you both been helping to get the PF Prayer diary ready and out to all PF's supporters?** We started in the late 80's up at No 39, when it went out once a month. The copier, which was so slow was inclined to overheat, therefore the diaries were literally 'hot of the press'!

**Why did you volunteer?** The work of PF was increasing, in particular administration, so we offered our time to do the Prayer Diary

**What did it involve and where was it done?** We commandeered a table in the small back room and when our church got a set to work. After copying, we folded, licked stamps, labelled and 'stuffed envelopes'. When our church got

a riograph, we printed them there and worked from home, adding posting to see the job completed.

**Did you ever have a 'funny moment' or a story to tell?** Many. Let's just say, the licking of the envelopes and stamps did have its effects, but our lasting memories will be listening to Pat's funny stories when she also came in to help.

**Did the job change over the years?** Yes, Sue 'retired' and a good friend Stinson helped me to complete the job at church every Thursday afternoon. We would like to say a big "thank you" to First Bangor Presbyterian for making our work easier.

**What would you say to someone thinking of volunteering for PF?** It is a privilege to serve your Lord, so when He prompts -just do it. You will be blessed more than you give, for you are part of the work in bringing 'hope for tomorrow.'

For 25+ years Brian & Sue have faithfully served PF. Although it may seem a mundane kind of ministry, it has ensured essential intercession for the work of PF as well as saving us huge amounts of time and money. We are profoundly grateful to 1st Bangor Presbyterian Church, and thank God every time we think of Brian and Sue.



Jenny

worship, hospitality and outreach. Our vision is to be a place where people, who don't "fit in" to society and conventional church, can find friendship and come into relationship with God. Therefore, I was excited when I saw this role with Prison Fellowship advertised as it fitted perfectly with my heart, to bring truth and hope to people marginalised and forgotten by society.

My role with Prison Fellowship is to befriend and support families with loved ones in prison. Over the past six months, I've had the joy of befriending mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters. I'm inspired by their resilience and strength, even when they don't recognize it in themselves and life feels unbearably hard for them. I'm learning how they are the forgotten victims, carrying the load whilst their loved one serves their sentence.

I would value your prayers that God would introduce me to the families who need support the most, that He would empower me to do my job well, and honour Him as I serve these families.

Meet ...  
Laura



My name is Laura and I am the new Family Worker with Prison Fellowship, covering the South West of Northern Ireland, a role that I feel privileged to have been entrusted with.

I am fairly new to Family support, having worked in office management and finance in the charitable/community sector for the last eleven years. For the past six years I have also led a Christian Community, also known as a Boiler Room, through 24-7 Prayer. We are a group of people who intentionally live and share our lives together around rhythms of prayer,

# Celebrating God's Faithfulness

Last month we marked Prison Fellowship's 35th anniversary with an "open house." Friends, prayer partners, volunteers and those whom we minister to, dropped into the centre throughout the day for coffee/cake, had opportunity to meet one another and chat with staff. A prayer room was set up where folks could take time to remember the various aspects of the work. We were so encouraged that around 40 came.

During the cutting of the cake, Gillian Spence reminded us of the faithfulness of God in the provision of No. 39 Originally it was a driving centre, owned by Christians who were supportive of the work and were about to put the property on the market. When they learned that Prison Fellowship was trying to find bigger premises, they offered them the opportunity to buy it. The owners could have sold it for much more on the open market but were keen for PF to have it so that the work would be extended. It was a huge step of faith.

Those who gathered outside the building late that evening on 31st December 1985 gave thanks for God's marvellous provision

and prayed that this centre would become "an oasis in the barren desert of life and a sanctuary for many struggling souls."



## Christmas Dinner

What an amazing week we've had at the PF centre. Over 90 Christmas dinners were served over two days to families, men and women by staff, volunteers and friends.

To accommodate the number of people this year we removed the sofas to a local church for storage for a week. Potatoes, carrots, shortbread, desserts, decorations were donated by friends of PF. Some of our men helped with setting up and decorating the tables, cooking and clearing up after each meal.

Each man or woman who came left with a gift as a reminder that we care about them, but most importantly that God has a deep Love for each one. It was a busy time, and we wondered how everything would turn out? Was it worth it?



## Was It Worth It?

**Adeste, fideles, Laeti triumphantes; Venite, venite in Thirty Nine** was the invitation received by the members of PF in November, to which most responded by turning up on 1 December for the Men's 2016 Christmas lunch.

The PF staff had obviously been praying for inspiration and received a miracle: they were able to cram six tables and 40 seats into what is essentially the front room of a terrace house in University Street! Not only that, a whole army of helpers squeezed into the tiny kitchen and produced a magnificent festive feast for both guests and volunteers. What a performance! Well done everyone!

Marty Gray, Assistant Minister, from Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church, Bangor, gave an inspired address on why Jesus came into our world at Christmas. He used the analogy of his first ever lunch visit with his girlfriend's parents – on a boat – from Bangor to Carrickfergus, where he slipped between the boat and the mooring. He clung fearfully onto the side of the boat calling for help. He needed a rescuer.



He had been trying to act cool, to impress his future in-laws. He could have held her father's arm to disembark, but he tried it on his own – and fell. He needed her father's arm to pull him up again.

God is reaching out to us all the time, but we so often turn away to do things on our own. That's when we fall. Yet, every time we fall, God is there for us, to rescue us, and lead us back to safety. That's the message of Christmas. The message, the excellent food, the camaraderie and warmth of the fellowship lifted all of us to new heights. A perfect end to a great year. Thank you PF. What's the date for next year?

**Ernie**