

OFFERING HOPE & A NEW BEGINNING

Just Enough

In their wilderness wanderings the Israelites grumbled because they couldn't see how their needs were going to be met. There was nothing they could do to provide for themselves. But God graciously provided in ways they never expected, and just enough for each day. For us at Prison Fellowship there have been times during the past year when we couldn't see how God was going to provide; we have had our faith and dependence on God tested, often waiting to the very day when bills are due to be paid for necessary funds to arrive. Being in a place of "just enough" has been challenging, but we have learned afresh that He is able to supply what is required, when it's required and He often does it in ways we least expect. Just recently, along with 211 charities, we received a donation at St Anne's Cathedral, from the proceeds of the 41st Black Santa Sit-out in 2017.

Prison Fellowship depends on the generosity of donors, and we are grateful to the Lord for His continued provision for the work, through committed individuals, churches, companies and trusts.

In the year up to the 31 January £210,949 was received, with £197,620 spent. The diagrams (see back page) illustrate where the money came from and how it was spent. This spend allowed us to conduct 4,733 prison visits, 503 aftercare visits, 1,500 visits to our centre as well as 335 family visits. With your help we distributed 412 hampers and 480 parcels of toys through Christmas

Hope, delivered six Sycamore Tree programmes, Bible studies in each of our prisons, fellowship meetings and a monthly coffee morning in the Female prison.

A clear demonstration of God's provision came through a one off donation from a local church. We had been in need of a Fieldworker post at Maghaberry prison, but due to funding shortage we had been unable to fill this for over eighteen months. This generous gift allowed us to appoint Dean on a temporary, part time basis, believing God would meet the on-going need. During the past year the work has developed and grown under his leading, and we are greatly encouraged as we see God's timing in this appointment. As a result of having a person in post, we have been able to establish a regular Bible study with a group of eight men, and another group of men asking for a Bible study to be setup in another 'house'. Dean has also recently delivered a very successful Sycamore Tree course with eleven men attending. We want to continue to keep this position. As we see it as a vital part of the work, would you help us to raise the necessary resources to continue to fund this post?



A Ministry of Reconciliation

It always seems we have more ministry work to do than people to do it! That's why we rely heavily on the support of volunteers, dedicated men and women who invest time and energy working alongside staff, serving people within the prison system, among families, released prisoners and at the centre. They come from different backgrounds, churches, life experiences and each bring something unique to Prison Fellowship NI. One of those was Anne Wilson who, along with husband Alvin, recently relocated to England. For ten years she served in the office in a ministry of reconciliation, but it was more than that of figures!

Anne was having to "picnic" inside her house for some time while her kitchen and other rooms were being extended and refurbished. Christine Thompson, our previous administrator asked if she would like to come to the PF office with her, "to get her head showered." Ann said she would, but she wanted to be useful rather than just sit, so she went to work on the bank reconciliations.

This developed into regular volunteer work, taking on Gift Aid preparation as well. Later she and Alvin got involved with delivering hampers for Christmas Hope and faithfully did that for several years. Last year, Ann did a significant amount of work when there were so many changes to the accounting system. She regularly came into the office checking figures, reconciling statements, updating records and making sure we balanced!



But she did much more than that - her presence, lovely smile, quiet godly nature, prayers for the work of PF blessed and encouraged us as staff. Often she sat down around the table with us, and a bunch of the guys who dropped into the centre for lunch, and genuinely took an interest in people's lives. Often she would share little nuggets of spiritual truths, ask about the needs of the work, and we always knew Anne would pray. Thank you Anne and Alvin, and every blessing in your new home.

Important: read the square brackets

Little children (believers, dear ones),
let us not love [merely in theory] with word
or with tongue [giving lip service to compassion],
but in action and in truth [in practice and in
sincerity, because practical acts of love are
more than words]. 1 John 3:18 AMP

The ministry of Aftercare at Prison Fellowship NI is a very diverse one. I once described it as the "extreme sport" of ministry – like cliff diving or base jumping. Taking a leap of faith into the unknown can be frightening – but what I do know is that I am not alone. Each step, each journey, each minute spent with a man is covered in prayer from our supporters and blessed by God – the work wouldn't happen without this. But it is also very important to carry out this prayerful ministry with actions – read the square brackets.

These practical acts of love are carried out on a daily basis through the work of Aftercare – a coat purchased for a homeless man, a family meal provided for those who are alone, a lift for someone who finds it hard to get around, a phone call for a person who has run out of credit, a soap bag

for someone in hospital, a bit of gardening for someone less able, the list goes on. It is by your practical act of giving that we are able to provide the practical acts of love. Many of the men who receive help through Aftercare return and give back [because practical acts of love are more than words]. Thank you for your generosity [love]. I pass it on every day [action].

Neil



No Ordinary Joe

Last year at No.39 we welcomed 1,500 people who called in for help and support, and it's great to see them 'giving back' in practical ways. Joe is one of those who helps Neil in the Aftercare meeting on Thursday evenings.

"I am almost 71 years old, have a simple faith that Jesus Christ died for me, and prefer to demonstrate my Christianity, rather than just say words that people want to hear. My introduction to Prison Fellowship came from an invitation from a friend to help with Hope Works. Each week, I help plan a menu for about a dozen men, and go shopping with Neil on Wednesday mornings to buy the food. We normally have a few coffees along the way! I come in early to the centre on Thursday to help prepare and cook the food. After the meeting I do the washing up, or at least encourage others to do it instead! Last year I was amazed to find out I helped make over 590 meals!



When I first meet people at Hope Works who are lost and find life difficult, abandoned and hopeless, I watch as they become sincere and genuinely sorry for the mistakes they have made and start again with a will to do better. They begin to seek God and ask questions. I'm amazed, and the effect on me is powerful and encouraging. To me it's strange to find myself caring for people, but I see PF do this day in and day out with their hearts truly in the right place. How they put up with me I don't know? I am mouthy, loud and at times overbearing. I just know that God has me in his mercy, and in His love and grace I will stay.

Joe

A place to feel safe

PF hosts a monthly support group for female family members at our centre. This is an invaluable time for the women, as often it is the only chance they have to connect with others in similar circumstances. We come together and talk about what each is going through. We encourage each other with words of practical advice, empathy, and understanding. Every month we look at ways to draw close to God and spend time praying for each other. We eat lunch together, and this simple act of sharing a meal creates space for friendships to form.

One lady who has attended the group is Jean. Her daughter is a repeat offender who has struggled with drugs for most of her life, leading to crime. Jean raised her alone and continues to be her sole support, as the rest of her family have broken contact. Unfortunately when her daughter is on drugs she becomes violent towards her mum and her home, and so Jean is often afraid and has become very isolated. Although Jean doesn't have a strong personal faith herself, she loves coming to our group. It is a place for her to relax and feel safe.



She is able to form friendships with women in the same position, and over the months has begun to open up about how tough life is, knowing she won't be judged. Although life continues to be difficult for Jean, our support group has become a lifeline for her. Whether she needs to sit quietly or share her struggles, she knows she will be listened to, loved and prayed for.

Laura

From Spreadsheets to Statistics!

One of the most important people in PF is the Treasurer, and we've been blessed by God sending key people to fill this vital role. We are thankful to Walter who served on the Board and in this capacity, also for his commitment, insight and prayerful support for the work. We will miss his spreadsheets, but we're delighted that he continues to help Robin and Ronnie with the strategic review of the work.

Recently Avril McGrath has taken on the role of treasurer and she is no stranger to PF....

How did you get involved in Prison Fellowship?

Over twenty years ago my brother-in-law Tommy Kernoghan was on the Board of Prison Fellowship. At that time he said that they were looking for someone to help with the year-end accounts and would I be willing to do it? That started my contact with PF. As the years have gone by I became more involved in providing advice and support to Robin and Anne.

Tell us a bit about yourself

I'm originally from Killeel but moved to Lisburn when I was quite young. I had a godly grandfather who encouraged my sister and I to go with him to church and Sunday school. I also attended a weekly Bible club and through these, I came to know my need of a Saviour and became a Christian at the age of 9. Bible Club Movement (now known as BCM International NI) had a big influence on me through my teenage years, grounding me in God's Word and giving me opportunities to be a leader in a Bible club and at their summer camps. I did a degree in Engineering (don't ask me why) and then swiftly moved into an accountancy firm to become a Chartered Accountant. I am self-employed and love the flexibility that gives me to do charity work. I'm married to David and have two wonderful children (biased of course) Andrew (24) and Rachel (22).



What do you do in PF?

My role within PF has changed within the past six months. In October, I was appointed Treasurer, which involves a much more hands on role in safeguarding the organisation's finances. It includes maintaining the company accounting records, presenting regular reports to the Board, preparing the accounts for the external accountants, presenting the accounts to the Annual General Meeting and giving financial advice where needed. I'm usually in once a month, but coming up to Christmas it was twice a month. I think Christine and Robin thought I had taken up residence! I really enjoy using the talents and abilities that God has given me to be of help to an organisation that I have great admiration for.

Financial Update from 1st March 2017 – 31st January 2018

