

\* Winter \*  
2020/21

## OFFERING HOPE & A NEW BEGINNING

### God Has A Plan

Scripture assures us of that, for at just the right moment, in keeping with a plan He had formed before the foundation of the world, a Saviour was born. His plans are always good, right, and give us a hope and future.

We have plans too. Yet we cannot see the future and as a result our plans often change or need to be scrapped completely. With that in mind, read on to discover how some of PFNI's staff and chaplains had their plans turned upside down throughout 2020.

### A New Opportunity

My journey with Prison Fellowship has had many twists and turns but also great opportunities to share the love of Jesus.

I first began as a volunteer serving among the women in Hydebank then joined the staff in 2013 as a Family Worker. Three years later I started coordinating the Sycamore Tree course. Then, following my son's birth, I went back to continue the work among the women in prison and those released.

One of the things that has sustained me over the years has been prayer. I've been blessed with amazing 'prayer pals', a group of three friends who started praying for me through my first Sycamore Tree course. One asked if I ever saw myself moving on from PF. My answer was a resounding no! Yet God's plans are higher than ours...

Back in May, I learned about a new Masters' degree at Queen's University called MSc Professional Nursing



(Children & Young People). At each stage of the application, God kept the door open for me to go through. I was finally accepted and now I'm in the middle of my first clinical placement which I'm really enjoying. During my first week I asked if a patient could be released. The reply was, 'In this hospital, patients are discharged, not released!'

I am so thankful to be given the opportunity to remain on the PFNI team with reduced hours working with women released from prison.

As I step into this new opportunity, I'm reminded of Matthew 25:37-40 : *'Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

May each of us love Him more and serve Him harder. 'The harvest is plentiful'. Thank you so much for your continued prayer and support, it means so much.

- Lynne

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## From Paraguay to Prison Fellowship

My name is **Claire Holmes** and I'm the new Family Worker for Prison Fellowship in the North West. I am delighted to join the team and I'm excited about what God has planned.

I taught in several primary schools in London and Paraguay until God called me into family work. I followed this path for two years in a church in Co. Armagh and seventeen years in Paraguay where I served with the *South American Mission Society (SAMS)*. I have also worked with *Early Years* as a Toybox Project Worker with traveller families and part-time with the Quakers in Maghaberry Prison.

God loves families and in Jeremiah 31 He says to them, '*I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.*' The Bible tells us how Jesus drew alongside those who are hurt. He cared, taught, transformed, and pointed them towards the one true hope that they could have in Him. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to do the same with families through PFNI.

Having worked in Maghaberry and visited prisons in South America and supported their families, I heard about the work of Prison Fellowship. PFNI is a ministry that has a



special place in my heart. When I saw the Family Worker job advertised, I prayed if that was what God wanted for me. I am so glad that it is.

Thank you to everyone who prays for the work. It makes a massive difference. When talking to the families I see loneliness and isolation caused by Covid on top of the other challenges they face. Please pray for these families during this difficult time and especially as Christmas approaches. Pray for me as I draw alongside them, that I will be able to build up good relationships and be guided and used by God to show His compassion and love.



## Not my will, but His

It was never *my* plan to become a prison chaplain. In fact, it was never part of *my* plan to work in a Church! Growing up with my dad as a minister, I was often asked if I would follow in my dad's footsteps into full-time ministry. I was sure that would never be the case. However, God's plan was very different from mine.

I'll not go into the many ways in which God has directed my life but in May 2018 I had the privilege of becoming the Church of Ireland chaplain in HMP Maghaberry and Hydebank Wood College. I've loved working as part of the chaplaincy team in both sites and having the opportunity to draw alongside people on their journey. I am very aware that inmates have often caused hurt to others by their actions, but my job is not to judge. Rather, we as chaplains are there to help in small practical ways, to listen and spend time with people, and to point them towards Jesus as the way forward.

COVID-19 has had a big impact on our work as chaplains and on all who work and reside in prison. Staff have been stretched and had to adapt. Prisoners have lost face-to-face visits along with many activities and programmes.

As chaplains, we have lost Church services and suffer restricted movement at times. This affects us speaking to the guys, which I really miss.

As always, when challenges arise, there have also been new opportunities.

One highlight during lockdown was being able to lead prayers and a thought on a Bible passage with another chaplain in Hydebank. We did this every Sunday morning for 15 consecutive weeks. This was over the tannoy system across the whole site so everyone could hear.

It was great to remind and reassure people that although times are uncertain, God is always present, always loving, and always faithful.

- David Jardine

## Faith in the Time of Covid

'Chaplaincy in Maghaberry', says **Graham Stockdale**, 'has had to adapt to the changes in our working practice due to the virus.'

One of the key areas in our ministry is to the committals i.e. those prisoners who have come into custody over the last 24 hours. We can only spend a short time with them as there might be up to 20 prisoners to visit. After introductions, we ask two simple questions: "How are you today?" and "Is there anything I can help with?" That opportunity has changed dramatically as prisoners must isolate for two weeks. We can only visit on request and visits must take place behind a mask, gloves, and apron.

Another big change has been to our religious services.

From March onwards, like the rest of the country, there were no services in the prison. Unlike the outside we don't have the benefit of modern technology, but we were able to keep in touch with the guys through a weekly service sheet. When the services resumed in September it was in a different way. As only two houses could come together at any one time it meant the number of services we needed to provide tripled in number.



But the biggest change has been in what we might call the 'bread and butter' ministry of Chaplaincy; the everyday contact with prisoners.

Previously this was through contact on the committal interview or if the prisoner registered themselves as Presbyterian. I would have followed-up that initial contact with a chat about how they were fitting into prison life. Or maybe an introductory line of "I'm the Presbyterian chaplain, just called to see how you are..." which usually led to a good time of sharing. Presently we are only able to do essential visits for those men with a specific need.

As I write this in early December, when the natural world is barren and lifeless, I feel in many ways that this matches where Chaplaincy is currently at. But our hope is in a God who still has a plan and has new opportunities awaiting us'.



## Congratulations!

Congratulations to Phil and Grace on the birth of a new member in their family! Caleb was born on 8th November at 5.39am weighing 8lb 9oz. They are blessed by his arrival and are so pleased he has adjusted well. His big sister absolutely adores (and tortures) him!

Give thanks that Caleb was known in God's heart before he was born and for the special plans and purposes He has for him. From all of the PF Family, we wish them many precious moments with their beautiful new baby.

'God has a plan for my life and you are no different. Things might seem like they're falling apart, when really they are actually falling into place. Yes, that's for everyone who believes.'

There are loads of times, I've failed the test...  
Though staying down, won't bring the best...  
I'm now about, to start a rest...  
My insight is revealed, as I go...  
I AM a warrior, because I'm told...  
I AM prosperous, to let you know...  
I AM loved, what God says goes...  
I AM forever, flowing positive vibes & that's how I roll...  
Because I AM living, I'll share the flow...  
It starts with an L...  
The next letter is O...  
I'll add in a V...  
And go with an E...  
So trust God's plans & let it be...  
HIS DIVINE LOVE FLOWS, it's for you & me...

- Matthew

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