



Prison
Fellowship
NORTHERN IRELAND

News Focus

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2021/22

OFFERING HOPE & A NEW BEGINNING

Called to Serve

As Christians, we are called to love God and love others.

Love manifests itself in practical deeds of service. Each of our staff and volunteers demonstrates God's love by serving men and women impacted by crime and imprisonment. Our call to love is a call to serve.

Jesus says in Mark 10:45 'that even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Volunteers are vital for Prison Fellowship and what they do is incredibly valuable. They come from all walks of life and serve by working with families, offenders, ex-offenders, or through fundraising, donations, and prayer.

Jordan, a second-year student at Belfast Bible College, began a placement with Prison Fellowship in November 2020. He came just in time to help with our Christmas Hope project. We asked him about his experience and how that affected him.

'On the 1st December, I started with the Christmas Hope project. Over the next few weeks, I helped with the packing and production of hampers and toy parcels. I noticed that each person took care and compassion with the tasks they were doing. From collecting tins to packing toys, each worked their full effort for God.'

I learned that PF was not just about helping the prisoners, but also their families. PF tends to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of anyone who requires help. I experienced that PF is not just any team - they are brothers



and sisters in Christ working together to help meet the needs of others.

The Christmas Hope days were like a military operation at times, with tactics, precision, and organization. It was a very well-run project. Saying that, the breaks were regular! All joking aside, to fit in with the team, you must love things: have the love of the Lord in your heart, love a chit-chat, and of course enjoy a wee cup of tea! Now a chit-chat wasn't just about last night's TV programme. I heard some amazing testimonies and incredibly personal stories of how God was at work in each of their lives. I found out a little about each of the team's backgrounds and how they came to faith. It really showed me that God uses people from all walks of life.

On my last day of Christmas Hope, I had the opportunity to deliver the hampers and toys to families. It was an amazing experience to share hope and joy with each of the families that were finding Christmas difficult. Working with the team on Christmas Hope was a once in a lifetime opportunity and an unforgettable experience working for God.'

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Step Forward

My name is Grace, I'm married to Phil, and have 2 children, Joy and Caleb. It's a privilege to co-ordinate the Volunteer work at Prison Fellowship, and wonderful to watch individuals step forward to serve God.

Having recently returned to work after my son was born, I wasn't sure how things would look regarding our volunteers. Many of our roles had ceased because of the pandemic, yet our regular volunteers were keen and active despite the restrictions.

My role is to recruit, support, and retain volunteers that work alongside PF staff in prison, in communities supporting ex-prisoners and their families, and any practical way they can minister. This includes speaking engagements, writing articles, Bible studies, preparing and enjoying meals together, Christmas Hope, and everything in between!

Each volunteer goes through a process to assess their suitability before entering a role. During the past 19 months, all our prison visits and centre-based programmes stopped. Yet, volunteers adapted in a practical way. They visited via Zoom, wrote letters, cooked meals, telephoned, and most importantly prayed for those struggling in the prison institutions or in their own prison at home.

Angela is one of our volunteers whose role is to visit two families. Throughout the past year despite COVID she



stayed connected with them by telephone.

'It's not easy,' says Angela, 'for older people with a loved one in prison especially with restrictions, when they haven't been able to visit. As a volunteer, calling them for a chat, listening, sharing, and praying with them helps to unburden the load they are carrying.'

So many lives have been impacted by the help and generosity of a volunteer giving their time to serve others. Looking forward to a new season, we have need for volunteers in the following areas:

- Family Support - offering pastoral care and a listening ear to those with a loved one in the justice system
- Hands Up Volunteers in the North-West - includes cooking/preparing meals for our frozen food ministry
- Prayer Groups - joining a local group to pray for the work

Commit to Pray

Prayer is central to all that we are and do in Prison Fellowship. Jesus said, 'And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.' (John 14:13)

We not only believe this is true, but we've seen His power in action. When you commit to praying for Prison Fellowship work, and for the hope and healing of prisoners, their families, and victims of crime, you're supporting us in one of the most important and meaningful ways and shedding light into some of the darkest places.

Currently there are nine PF prayer groups throughout Northern Ireland. Because of the pandemic, members have been unable to meet since March 2020. Some met virtually, and online events were organized to keep the groups connected. Members continued to pray, regular updates were provided, and hosts kept in touch with their group by phone, email and over coffee when regulations permitted.

William is part of the Kilkeel/Annalong group, which met in Shirley Crutchely's home.



'Surrounded by the lovely Mourne mountains,' he says, 'our gathering began with tea/coffee and home baked scones - a favourite for everyone! This was followed by a report by me or a representative from PFNI outlining important prayer topics, time for questions, then praying together. We are so thankful to Mrs. Crutchley for making her home available and giving us such a warm welcome. Sadly, we recently lost four of our regular members: Sadie, Margaret, Robert, and Jim who was in his 104th year. Each one was so faithful and contributed much to our fellowship.'

We miss our get-togethers, but we are looking forward to opening again soon with our regular team and some new members.'

A Fellowship of Friends

'I started volunteering for PF five years ago. For most of this time, I've helped with the music at Women's Aftercare meetings with Lynne, and as the choirmaster of Voices of Hope with my husband Neil.

When I first met the guys in the choir, I was so nervous! However, I can honestly say, from the moment I sat down among them, I felt God's peace and love grow in my heart and instant acceptance from the guys. We began a journey that has seen us meet weekly and play in Crumlin Road jail, The Haven Christian Centre, and many churches.

The guys have always risen to the challenge of the songs I have chosen and have been amazing. Each member has not only sung songs but has also grown as an individual voice. They bravely stand up at these events saying prayers, reading God's Word, or sharing what the Lord means to them. Voices of Hope is not just a choir, it is a fellowship of friends meeting weekly in a safe place to read the Bible, share their lives, and pray.

The incredible thing is that this didn't stop with COVID lockdown. When we could no longer meet in person we conferenced via phone. This was quite difficult and showed



a lot of commitment from the team. Being a member of Voices of Hope and PF has been both a blessing and a privilege and I am so proud of each member and how they have grown in the Lord.'

- Ali

Door of Opportunity Opens

Each Saturday morning over the past year one of our board members, **Jenny Holley**, has been running a Charity Table at Farm Gate, near Kircubbin. The opportunity was given by Davy Kerr to include a Charity Table alongside his colourful display of local produce. Each week, all monies go to PFNI and Tearfund, the charities closest to Jenny's heart.

We asked Jenny why she does it and what does it involve? 'As followers of Jesus, we are called to make ourselves available for His work and He guides us. So, when this door opened, I knew it was right to walk through it.

On a cold winter's morning as folk rush to get their veg, eggs, fruit, and jams, many stop by the table. I've been able to share about the work of PF. Many know nothing of Prison Fellowship, yet, since the beginning of November 2020, £2,190 has been raised for PFNI. I thank God for the generosity of many 'regulars' who never pass without buying a few items. Davy Kerr himself gave a donation in May to both charities, and I believe his support has encouraged others to stop, look, and purchase.



As long as I am given new and good quality items by the friends of PF, I'll continue to set up the Charity Table at 8.30am until this 'God-given' door of opportunity closes. As the love of Jesus is shared by our staff, and our newly refurbished centre at No39 continues to offer a welcome, my prayer is that God will bless and multiply each donation given for the extension of His Kingdom.'

Thank you to everyone

Who has given time to volunteer with Prison Fellowship. We appreciate you so much! If you are interested in volunteering with Prison Fellowship NI or would like more information about joining one of our prayer groups, contact Grace at gstewart@pfni.org to have a chat.

