



Prison  
Fellowship  
NORTHERN IRELAND

# News Focus

Spring  
2022

## OFFERING HOPE & A NEW BEGINNING

### A New Era for PFNI

Ten years ago, we had a dream.

We dreamt about how the PF Centre at 39 University Street could better serve our vision. We dreamt about improving and extending our facilities to better support ex-prisoners and their families and of sharing the hope of Jesus.

That dream is now becoming a reality.

Construction work began in January and significant progress has been made already. Our chairman, Gordon McIlroy, attends the regular site meetings, and shares what's happened so far.

'I was a bit nervous and excited to see the progress as I rang the doorbell. I could hear noises from inside, but I couldn't see through the front window, so I gave the door a good thump with my fist.

Tommy, the foreman, opened the door to let me in. What a change! The ground floor was one big open space with only the old staircase in the corner, leading to the first floor, remaining. The walls had been stripped back to the original brickwork and the ceiling had been pulled down revealing sagging beams holding up the first floor. There was a huge hole in the back wall, and I could see the steps in the backyard leading up to the alley. There was no going back now; the long-anticipated building project was well and truly underway!

Tommy is one of those characters who takes everything

in his stride. Problems don't get in the way of progress as far as he is concerned and discussion with his boss, the architect, quantity surveyor, and structural engineer seemed to go smoothly.

The second site meeting took place on 9th March. The chimney has been rebuilt, despite the storms in late February, and work on the roof was to start the following week. There was much discussion around waste and storm drains so some readjustments have been made...all in a day's work for Tommy! The first progress certificate was issued in the middle of February and has been paid. It is exciting to see all the support that has been given to us being put to good use.

Thank you to everyone who has prayed and contributed to the building project. Whether you are an individual or part of a grant-giving organisation, your support is greatly appreciated. I have shared how the fund raising reached our targets in summer 2021, only to find that the actual costs had outstripped those figures when the project went to tender. Currently, we are £70,000 short of finishing and furnishing the completed building which is on schedule for July 2022. Please continue to pray that God will bless the project and help us reach the finish line, leading us into a new era for PFNI.'

Check out our website to see a video on the redevelopment: [www.pfni.org](http://www.pfni.org)

Gordon McIlroy (Chairman)



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## New Partnerships



*(Pictured left to right. Philip Larragy, CEO of RELEASE Ireland - Robin Scott, CEO of Prison Fellowship Northern Ireland - Hugh Greathead, Regional Director, Europe and Central Asia)*

Release – a registered charity in the south of Ireland that supports ex-offenders to live transformed lives – has become the newest member of Prison Fellowship International. They have worked with 5 of the 15 prisons in the south and have built enduring and respectful relationships with many men who have never returned to prison. They also continue to love and care for the many who have failed to integrate and have returned to prison, often for reasons beyond their control.

‘This partnership’, says Philip Larragy (CEO), ‘will provide us with new initiatives to share with many more prisoners

and maintain contact with them during their reintegration. Our approach is to relate to prisoners through Christian faith-based education programmes in Addiction Recovery, Bible Study, and now the Sycamore Tree Project.

We assist prisoners through personal mentoring in spiritual and practical areas including Communications Skills. Our volunteers are trained in Restorative Practice and offer family mediation support when invited. We are delighted to have the help and support from all the PF ministries in the UK in training us for our new projects.

A challenge in prison ministry that we face in the south of Ireland is growing secularism, especially in the prison environment. We need to have the support of chaplains and other Christians who work in the criminal justice system if we are to contribute to changing society, reducing criminal offending, and helping those in danger of becoming offenders to change direction.

We seek prayer for:

- favour with the justice ministry, prison authority, and probation services. Pray for the development of good relationships with prison governors and chaplains.
- good volunteers, social champions, and funders. This is vital to our growth and mission effectiveness.
- our full-time volunteer staff who run the office, support volunteers, plan training, and seek financial support.
- for the men and women, we are called to love without compromise.’

We are delighted that our CEO, Robin Scott has received a significant award for his faithful service to Prison Fellowship NI.

He first started out as a volunteer in 1983 and has been in his current role as CEO since 1996. His work has touched the lives of many prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families throughout Northern Ireland.



‘I’m honoured to have received the MBE. It was a big surprise! This award is not just about me but recognises the staff and the volunteers I am fortunate enough to work with. I would like to thank everyone on the team and the people who nominated me. I’d also like to thank my family who supported and enabled me to be able to serve in this role.’

Congratulations Robin and thank you from all the PF family for your faithful and dedicated service.

## Walking With Prisoners For 40 Years

This year, Prison Fellowship NI is set to mark 40 years of ministry to prisoners, their families, and those released into communities.

More information will be posted on our website and in the Summer News Focus, so please plan to join with us to celebrate God’s wonderful faithfulness.





## Sycamore Tree Resumes

Restorative Justice plays an important role in our work through the Sycamore Tree course. At the end of March, we will be halfway through our first programme in Maghaberry prison! We are delighted that this Victim Awareness course has taken place as we believe that it helps reduce offending. Those who have completed the programme now recognise the consequences of their crime and the impact on their victims.

There are 13 men on the current course with two more courses planned before the summer. Some come because they want to while others have 'just agreed' to come. Many wouldn't ordinarily sign up for such a programme, but we believe that God has them there for a reason.

During the third week they have an opportunity to hear a victim's story first-hand. It is often a very emotional experience. One man left the session saying that it wasn't for him. He returned the following week and when a victim came in to share their story he wept throughout their talk. Listening to the impact of crime on this family, the pain and devastation caused, and how they were able to forgive the perpetrators, deeply affected him.

*Men and women's lives are transformed through Sycamore Tree.*



Jim found it so difficult to 'revisit' his crime. He was very withdrawn but writing about what happened helped him deal with some of the issues he had been holding onto for years. After working through the course and asking Prison Fellowship to visit him, he finally started to focus on writing his victim a letter, telling them how sorry he was and that he would do anything he could to help them and their family.

*"The Sycamore Tree course has been the best thing I have done while being in prison," says Jim. "Thank you for your prayers and support."*

On the final week, the attendees are challenged to present a symbol of restitution and a plan for restoration. One facilitator said, *'The thought, effort, and emotion the men had poured into their work was incredible. I could only cry. The past can't be changed but the future sure can, God is good!'*

It is our vision to see more of these courses conducted in each prison in Northern Ireland.

## Helping Ukraine



*Relief items on a journey from Czech Republic through Poland and onwards to PF Ukraine*

I am sure we wish we could wake up and find the conflict in Ukraine was only a nightmare. Another week passes by, and the suffering grows worse.

Amidst the disaster, we also see the best in people. The combined actions of individuals, churches, and organisations responding throughout Europe is a joy. The number of miracles amidst the tragedy is growing.

PF Ukraine continues to help those in Kyiv

and surrounding areas. Their commitment and sacrifice are an inspiration, and we pray they will experience God's presence and protection more than ever. They have helped to evacuate over 300 women and children and provide support with food packages. They have donated two prisons with extra food. They have helped people within Ukraine as they figure out their next steps. Their tireless activity is an inspiration.

**Hugh Greathead**



*The shelter for refugees in Ternopil in Ukraine receiving support through PF Romania*

Please consider helping by donating online on our PFNI Facebook page [Standing with Prison Fellowship Ukraine](#)