

OFFERING HOPE & A NEW BEGINNING

Opportunities to Volunteer

The popular thinking when someone goes to prison is 'Lock them up and throw away the key!' Although society might have written them off, God still loves them. He still has a plan and purpose for everyone.

Many are genuinely sorry for their actions and desperately want to change the attitudes and behaviours that incarcerated them. But who will walk with them and their families on that journey?

Over the past 40 years, Prison Fellowship NI has been richly blessed with supporters and volunteers who help us on a daily basis. They serve by working with families, prisoners, and ex-offenders, and provide support through fundraising, donations, prayers, and office work.

Paul is one of our volunteers who visits men in prison. We asked him how he got involved and about the work he does.

'About seventeen years ago, not long after I came to faith, PF worker Norman McCorkell invited me to give my testimony in Magilligan. That was the beginning of my journey with prison ministry and in 2014 I became a volunteer with PFNI.

Many prisoners do practical work, so as a gardener, I have good connections with them. I've been asked several times to talk about gardening and how to become self-employed.

Prison ministry is challenging. Initiating conversations with men who are depressed or angry or even suicidal is tough.

Despite my own feelings of weakness, I get opportunities to speak about Jesus and pray with men who feel helpless.

Prayer is key and when I'm in the prison I'm aware of the power of God through your prayers.

Recently I was with a man in his cell. After praying together, he shared that he had been despondent that day. 'But now I feel really good,' he said and quoted Romans 10:15 – 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.'

Building friendships is also important. At times I play pool with the men, and this provides opportunities to get to know them and show that someone cares. Prison visiting is not an easy ministry as it takes time to see change in someone's life, but it does happen.

Recently, we had a mission week which was well attended, and many were spiritually challenged. One evening, one of the men sat down beside me and asked me to pray with him. He wanted to give his life to Jesus. On the last night that same man stood up and thanked PF and shared with everyone that he had committed his life to Jesus. These times are so special.

Please keep praying for all those we speak to in prison, that we will have wisdom in every conversation, and that God will open hearts and minds to the truth.'



Paul Darragh and Gillian at the PF BBQ

Getting the Ball Rolling!

“Miss, when is the football coming back?” is now the most frequently asked question I hear in Hydebank.

After having the football programme suspended during Covid 19, we were delighted to resume things again in June for the summer season.

The Prison Fellowship team was made up of volunteers in their 20-30's. They were from different backgrounds but were united by faith and football and the desire to share Christ with the young guys they would meet on the inside.

Each week we were able to play football with the young offenders for almost an hour, pausing at half time for a breather, and the all-important Oranges and Jaffa Cakes!



During the break, one of the volunteers had the opportunity to share their story with the group. He explained who Jesus is and the difference He made in his life.

It was incredible to watch the young men not only listen with great respect but to also ask questions. They got to know the volunteers and for some, began to look to them as role models.

For me it was fantastic to bring the team in for six weeks and be able to follow-up individual calls afterwards with the young offenders. Currently we are trying to 'get the ball rolling' for another session this Autumn!

Joanne

Lessons Learned

As part of my Bible College placement in Prison Fellowship, I worked alongside Dean, Neil, and Joanne in their respective ministries within prison and in the community.

I had the opportunity to help in Maghaberry with Sycamore Tree which is the victim awareness programme. I also shadowed Dean on the landings. In Aftercare, I helped lead a Bible study and also took part in the men's choir. In Hydebank, I shadowed Joanne in her work within the young men's section. I was also very privileged to work alongside Norman and Robin for a day in Magilligan and attend a church service in the grounds of the prison.

Each prison and each day were very special. The staff of PF were extremely good to me, and I learned invaluable life lessons and skills.

Neil gave me very good advice – stay out of God's way and be led by the Holy Spirit in God's time. Through Dean and Joanne, I learned to never give up on those individuals who seem lost. They are only ever one step away from God.

From Robin, I now know how to better manage my time. He shared that we cannot help others if we cannot help ourselves, so advised me to keep reading the scriptures and rely on God's strength so I don't become burnt out.



Jordan with PF Prison Worker Dean Moore

A key focus I have taken away from my placement is communication skills. How we as Christians can bring the Gospel of Christ into such a dark place and how a brief conversation can change lives in the name of Jesus.

This placement has changed me as a person. One key part is not to show judgement, just as God does not judge my own wrong doings. I enjoyed every second at PF and I am so glad that God placed me there. Each memory will stick with me, and my prayer is to channel my new skills into my third year in Bible College.

Jordan

How Will You Serve?

Volunteers are vital to our ministry. Without them, none of our programmes would exist. The need to serve in our prisons and in our communities is greater than ever before and we invite you to be part of our next 40 years. Offering your time and talents for just a few hours each week or month could alter the life of a person forever.

‘There are so many ways to make a difference and practical opportunities for you to be involved in,’ says **Grace, our Volunteer Co-Ordinator.**

Presently, we are seeing a high turnover of food from our Hands Up Freezer ministry. This has long been a practical way to serve men and women walking through difficult seasons of life. We need more volunteers to cook specific meals that are then frozen and distributed across Northern Ireland.

Prayer has always been the heartbeat of the ministry of Prison Fellowship. After a summer break, each of our prayer groups are gathering again to seek God on behalf of those whose lives are impacted by crime and imprisonment. Could you commit once a month to join a group in your area? If there’s not one locally, could you help start one?

Celebrating a Milestone

It’s amazing to think that 40 years ago a small group of Christians gathered to pray about starting a ministry to prisoners. Little did they realise what would take place and how this would impact prisoners’ lives, their families, and the wider community.

We have an opportunity to give thanks for God’s faithfulness and for the service of those who have ‘gone before us’ at our anniversary celebration, Saturday 8th October, 7pm in Glenabbey Church.

We are very privileged to welcome some special guests. **Andy Corley** is President and CEO of Prison Fellowship International and we are hopeful that he will bring greetings from our brothers and sisters in prison ministry around the world.



Social Media has become a dominant means of communication in our society. PF needs a volunteer who could give a few hours to help assist in this capacity.

As we head towards our annual Christmas Hope project, we need volunteers to aid the smooth delivery of hampers into homes. Activities include:

- Sorting and recording food items (Daytime hours Mon-Fri in Nov/Dec)
- Preparing hampers, building boxes, working within a team in Templepatrick (Daytime hours Mon-Fri in Dec)
- Delivering hampers across various locations in Northern Ireland and collecting hampers in Templepatrick (Daytime & Evening hours in December)

Thank you to every volunteer that has given their time and energy to the ministry of Prison Fellowship. We really appreciate your help and support. If you would like to join one of our local prayer groups or want to know how you can serve in any of the above areas, please contact me at gstewart@pfni.org.

Ron Nikkel from Canada, a former President and CEO of PF and involved from its earliest days, will also be with us: as long as the chaos of post-pandemic air travel allows! Finally, we are honoured to welcome **Philip and Janet Yancey** from Colorado, USA. Philip’s writing will be familiar to many of you, and he will draw the evening to a close with insights and challenges for us all.

On Monday 10th October we are hoping that the renovations for 39 University St will have been completed so that the premises can officially be opened. Our guests will also be involved with an event in Hydebank Wood College and a prayer breakfast for local business people. Please pray for these events and join us for our night of celebration on Saturday 8th October.

Book your ticket at bit.ly/celebration40 or contact Grace at gstewart@pfni.org

For 40 years God has blessed and grown the work of PFNI. In a Northern Ireland that has changed so much in that time, where will He lead us to in the years to come?

Gordon