

St Bridgets and Caldy Church Greensheet September 2019

Last month I visited an exhibition of work by prisoners from HMP Styal and Thorn Cross. This month's greensheet focuses on the organisers behind the event, which was held by Diocese of Chester, and on Prison Fellowship.

From the Chester Diocese Home News page on its website:

Journey into Light an exhibition of Prisoners Artwork

The aim of the exhibition is to demonstrate to visitors that behind every prisoner's conviction and sentence is a personal story of love, hope and loss. Titled, Journey Into Light, the exhibition is made up of more than 50 individual pieces of art produced by prisoners from HMP Styal and HMP Thorn Cross, Cheshire.

It has been coordinated and funded by the Diocese of Chester and Chester Cathedral. Debbie Dalby, Director of Social Responsibility at the Diocese of Chester, says: "We want people to view the exhibition and leave with a greater sense of empathy and awareness of prisoner experience. There is life beyond prison and we want to celebrate renewal and restoration and the hope of a brighter, more optimistic future.

"By seeing the creativity of prisoners and hearing their stories, people will be able to better understand some of the choices, mistakes and circumstances that they have faced in their lives."

The Diocese of Chester has been planning the exhibition for 12 months with the support of its prison chaplains who have worked with the prisoners to produce the pieces of art. The exhibits differ in style from large acrylic paintings, abstract landscapes, and self-portraits. The Bishop of Chester, the Rt Revd Dr Peter Forster, says: "Prisoners are often viewed as "the other" yet they live in our midst, are a part of our communities, and contribute to our societies. The Bible has much to say about the plight of prisoners and the Christian faith recognises that every person is made in the image of God and is valued despite our individual mistakes and regrets. This exhibition allows us the opportunity to understand better the lived experiences of prisoners in Cheshire."

An Overview of the Work of Prison Fellowship

Our Vision: Every life in prison transformed.

Our Mission: To show Christ's love to prisoners by coming alongside them and supporting them.

Prison Fellowship England and Wales has been active for 40 years. We have over 2,800 volunteers across England and Wales, connected in a network of 93 Local Groups. We are currently involved with 96.6% of the prisons in England and Wales (116 of 120).

Why we exist:

- Prison population in England & Wales is just under 85,000.

- The UK is the top incarcerator in Western Europe (145 prisoners per 100,000 population).
- 44% of adults are reconvicted within one year of release; for those serving sentences of less than 12 months this increases to 59%.
- 65% of boys with a convicted parent go on to offend.
- Rates of self-harm in prisons are at the highest level ever recorded (over 55,000 incidents in 2018), and assaults on staff have tripled in the last 3 years.

Prayer

Prayer is the basis for all that we do, and where it all started. Prison Fellowship Local Groups meet regularly to pray for prisons, prisoners, their families and prison staff. From prayer comes practical care to help and support.

Programmes:

Sycamore Tree

Sycamore Tree is a course about restorative justice and victim awareness that takes place in prisons over six sessions, using the biblical restorative story of Zacchaeus. It is run in 45 prisons. The programme develops offenders' understanding of the impact of their crime upon others and upon themselves. PF volunteers, motivated by their Christian faith, deliver the programme, which is accredited by Gateway Qualifications and Ofqual.

Angel Tree

It is estimated that around 200,000 children in England and Wales are affected by parental imprisonment each year. That means, more than double the number of children are affected by parental imprisonment than divorce in the family. It is run in 90 prisons.

Angel Tree supports prisoners in their family relationships by providing a way for them to give Christmas presents to their children. In 2018 we sent out nearly 5,000 gifts! On Mothers' Day we also enable young offenders to send a card and gift to their mum.

Letter Link

Prisoners often feel extremely lonely and isolated, and many have lost touch with their family and friends on the outside. A letter might be the only communication a prisoner receives and can provide huge encouragement and a link to the outside world. Our letter writing programme enables prisoners to feel valued and supported while in custody.

Chaplaincy Support

Everything that we do in PF, works alongside the Chaplaincy. In addition to our programmes, PF volunteers also assist in a variety of other ways, for example: Sunday services; Pastoral support; Bible studies and discipleship courses.

To contribute articles or information to the greensheets please contact Sally Cashen on 625 5970