



PFS HOPE

Prison Fellowship Scotland • Autumn Newsletter 2023



Supporting
families at
Christmas

An interview with
three incredible
PFS volunteers

Mental
health
challenges

Offering hope to people in prison, their families and our communities

Prison Fellowship Scotland (PFS) is a non-denominational, faith-based Christian charity, working in all 15 prisons and the two Community Custody Units in Scotland.

In partnership with the Scottish Prison Service, PFS provides bible study groups, Restorative Justice/Victim Awareness courses, a letter writing programme, an Angel Tree Christmas Gift programme and adventure holidays for children affected by imprisonment.

PFS puts relationships at the centre of all we do, supporting volunteers from churches in Scotland to make the Good News accessible to those in our prisons. ■

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Photos of people in prison and/or their families are models.



But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

MATTHEW 6:3–4



Supporting families at Christmas

I have just returned from climbing Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, both a physically and emotionally overwhelming experience. I am particularly grateful for our guide's expertise in showing us the way but also to the team of hardworking porters who carried our kit. A key purpose for these remarkable young men in doing this work was the opportunity to support their families with what they earned. The pride and joy they had in doing so was so very evident and has stayed with me as key memory of the trip.

Families are amazing units; they can be a real blessing and a protective factor in the trials of life. In my work setting, in school, I also witness the opposite. Too frequently the family unit is broken or under strain by the circumstances of life. We have all been helplessly watching the destruction and pain of families in Ukraine as well as in Israel and the Palestinian territories—families living through grief, trauma and loss.

In Paul's 2nd letter to Timothy, he notes: "I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother,

Lois, and in your mother, Eunice, and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."

Many of the families of those we support in Prison Fellowship live under great strain as they face the consequences of a bad decision made by a loved one. Like my school pupils and their families, they also face the strain of generational poverty and substance misuse. Unlike my new Tanzanian friends, prisoners don't (easily) have the opportunity to make amends or support their families.

Sometimes, we feel helpless, but we can and must continue to pray, interceding is powerful. Or perhaps like Granny Lois in the passage, we can start a new generational family tradition of Christian faith.

Where we can, we should also take practical steps to fulfil the needs around us. Prison Fellowship seeks to help families in practical ways, through its Angel Tree project supporting families at Christmas, which in turn can help repair relationships and build stronger family bonds. ■

Mark Sutherland

Mark is a PFS board member and head teacher at a school for pupils with additional support needs.



Valuing our volunteers

The work we do at Prison Fellowship Scotland would not happen without our incredible volunteers. We asked Judith Monye, Geoff Findlay and Al Lightbody to explain why they volunteer for PFS in prison.

What inspired you to become a volunteer for PFS?

JUDITH: I once visited a prison, and there was a lady with two young children. As we were waiting to go through, one of the young girls asked her aunt, 'Why is Daddy here?' Her aunt replied, 'Because he has been bad.' I was overwhelmed by her response. After the visit, I prayed about it, and God gave me a love for those in prison.

GEOFF: I am the pastor at Lifegate Church, Dundee, and our mission statement comes from Matthew 25, which includes, 'I was in prison, and you came to visit me.' As a response to this, I began volunteering with Prison Fellowship Scotland.

AL: It started 11 years ago when a chaplain from HMP Barlinnie spoke at my church and challenged people to get involved with a new prison in Low Moss.

Could you share a memorable story from your time volunteering with us?

AL: There was a time where three of the men who had been attending our fellowship group asked if they could lead the night session themselves. They gave powerful testimonies of their experiences of going to fellowship groups and their own faith journeys. It was so inspiring!

JUDITH: When I was helping run a fellowship group, a transgender woman began to break down in tears and said she wanted to share her life story with me. A few weeks later when I was visiting, she came to me with a book. She had written down her life story for me. It was amazing to see how God had been at work in her life.

GEOFF: There was a man who used to attend the fellowship group we ran, and he often argued or gave us a difficult time. One week, however, he came in

and was quiet—he looked completely different. Eventually, he told us that he was sorry for all the hassle and that God was real! He had encountered Jesus in his cell that week, and it changed him.

How has volunteering impacted you personally?

JUDITH: It has made me more humble and appreciate life more. It has taught me to see everyone equally through God's eyes, not my own. The Bible says Jesus came for everyone; we do not get to choose who this is. It has taught me to respect everyone around me.

AL: Volunteering has massively impacted me. It has helped me move out of my comfort zone and enter a world that I knew little about. To see and hear stories from the men has changed me. It has taught me that not everything is as set in stone or clear-cut as we perceive it. As a Christian, this has challenged me when it comes to love and forgiveness, and how I reflect this in my day-to-day life.

GEOFF: It has taught me to reserve judgement. People who you may perceive as being further away from God are often on a journey we can never imagine! It has changed my thinking about everything. We are not here to judge, whether in the prison or outside, and we certainly shouldn't judge a book by its cover. God is transforming lives without us even knowing!

How have you been challenged?

AL: My preconceptions and attitude towards people in prison have been

challenged. I have come to recognise that the men are incredibly gifted, they have just not had an opportunity. Seeing this is hard, as you wish you could do more to change it. God wants the men and women in prison to know they are loved, and there is hope.

JUDITH: A big challenge for me was moving from an all-female prison to HMP Barlinnie (all-male). It was an adjustment, but through God's grace it was overcome!

GEOFF: I think the challenge for me has been coming with my own thoughts and forgetting preconceived notions. The prison and the men are totally different to what I expected. I realised I needed to think through it all again.

What would you like to say to readers of PFS Hope who may be interested in volunteering for us in prison?

GEOFF: You don't need to try and fix people—only Jesus can do that. All we need to do is be there.

AL: Definitely consider volunteering—although it is not for everyone. Engagement with the men has changed me and humbled me. I think everyone should be aware of it and get involved. Like Peter on the boat, if you want to walk on water, you have to step out of the boat. I think people should step off the boat, and do it.

JUDITH: There is really nothing like it. Volunteering is fulfilling, and you become very aware that you are meeting the needs of other people. ■



Mental health challenges in prison

Mental health—it's a growing concern and priority, which we're reminded is just as, if not more, important than our physical health.

So, what do you do to look after your own mental health? How do you practise a bit of self-care when you're finding life challenging, and you know your stress levels are rising?

Maybe you go for a long walk or jog in the fresh air, a drive in the countryside, or even a weekend away for a change of scenery? Maybe you prefer to be at home and soak in a hot bath with a good book? Or dinner with friends and a wee glass of wine? A trip to the cinema? Or maybe you seek some quiet space; silence—where you can pray, reflect, practice some mindfulness or simply be still.

Of course if you are living in prison, none of these options are possible. Fresh air is restricted to one hour per day, and even then, it's in a crowded exercise yard under the watchful eye of officers. There is no change of scenery—or even routine—sometimes for many years at a time. There is limited access to family and friends—those who love you the most. The people who understand and care

about you. And as for silence? Well, that is never an option.

In fact, prison is probably the worst place to try and maintain one's mental wellbeing: loss of liberty, restricted movement, noise, overcrowding and cell sharing with a stranger who may have complex mental health or addiction issues to cope with themselves. There is no access to nature, the companionship of a pet nor the kinds of social activities that many of us depend on for balance. There is a sense of total powerlessness over one's life and future, constant hyper-vigilance and fear for one's personal safety, and never knowing who can be trusted or what might 'kick-off' from moment to moment.

Even for the strongest and most stable, this is a difficult environment to maintain one's equilibrium.

But of course, prisoners do not tend to be the healthiest, most resilient people to start with. According to a 2022 report by the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, 76% of prisoners had a history of poor mental health on reception to prison, with 60% receiving mental health support immediately prior to sentencing. These are astronomical figures. Add this

to an increasing prison population and limited resources, it is no surprise that the same report found that 77% of Scottish Prison Service staff interviewed expressed concerns about the level of provision available. (And what of the mental health of those working in such an environment?)

In such a context, small things can be so important. Like Prison Fellowship volunteers simply showing up faithfully, with smiles on their faces and a welcome to those who are weary and struggling. People from the outside world who are there because they care and because they choose to be, whilst offering a safe, quieter place to escape the noise and pressure of the halls. Someone different to talk to and listen. All this even before the group activities begin carrying with them a message of hope, grace and love. ■

Graham Bell

Graham is a board member and chaplain at HMP Glenochil

**JOIN US IN PRAYER
FOR THOSE IN PRISON.
[PFSCOTLAND.ORG/PRAY](https://pfscotland.org/pray)**

Prayer for healing

by **Gwen Roxburgh**

Loving Father, we come to you to pray for those in prison who struggle with poor mental health. Though the issues may be complex, you are Sovereign and know every detail of the problems they face.

We ask that each one may receive the medication, counselling and support that they need. We know that you desire their wellbeing for body, mind and soul.

We pray for your comfort for those who are depressed and discouraged from being separated from their families and for those who are fearful for their own safety and their future.

We pray for inmates who turn to alcohol and drugs through despair, that they find you, for you are their hope. We thank you for the peace that passes understanding and pray that this might be the experience for each man and woman during their sentence.

We ask all this in the name of Jesus.

Amen. ■



As of October 6th, there were 7,918 individuals in prison across Scotland. This figure is expected to rise in the coming year. Prisoners Week looks to shed light on the work of prisons and increase understanding and empathy towards those in prison. This year, Prisoners Week urges us to reflect on what gives us 'Strength for the Journey'. Where do we find our Strength for the Journey? What gives us hope and resilience along the road? Stand with PFS as we centre our focus on this theme during the week and extend this focus throughout the year.

To kick things off, the Prisoners Week launch service will be held at Letham St Marks Church in Perth on Sunday, November 19th, from 3–5pm. It promises to be a day filled with personal stories, community engagement and educational experiences. Everyone is welcome!

Visit prisonersweek.org.uk for details.

You can also show your support by signing the Prisoners Week Charter. By signing, you will join a community of people who are committed to supporting the work of prisons. Your church or organisation's name will appear on the Charter, and Prisoners Week trust will help you to explore ways in which you can support those affected by imprisonment. Signing will also help to raise awareness about the justice system's effects on individuals, families and communities. To sign, visit: prisonersweek.org.uk/charter.

You can also participate by downloading our daily prayer resource at pfscotland.org/prisonersweek. Please share it with your church and/or consider inviting a speaker to address the congregation.

This week is pivotal in increasing awareness of the struggles faced by those impacted by imprisonment. It is crucial that we all come together and make a difference this year. ■

ANGEL TREE

Our Angel Tree project is back for 2023, helping to bring a bit of extra joy to the families of those in prison. For many of us the holiday season is a time of excitement and meeting together with family. However, it can hold a very different sentiment for children with a parent or other family member in prison who will feel their absence even more deeply during the festive period.

Angel Tree partners with family centres in Scottish prisons and works to make Christmas brighter for the children of those in prison by organising festive events and ensuring they receive gifts.

Beyond the joy the gifts bring to children and young people is the opportunity it offers parents in prison to connect with their children as well as alleviate some of the financial struggles for the parent or caregiver on the outside.

Join PFS in this important mission and help to spread even more hope and togetherness this Christmas. Any contributions genuinely make a difference and bring smiles to those who need it most. ■

Scan the QR code with your smart device to donate securely online or visit: justgiving.com/campaign/angeltree2023.





Giving to the work of Prison Fellowship Scotland

Prison Fellowship Scotland works in all 15 prisons and the two Community Custody Units in Scotland. Our Prison Fellowship groups, Sycamore Tree course, Letter Writing programme, and the Angel Tree and Summer Holiday programmes support families of those in prison and are making a difference in the lives of people up and down the country. We depend on the generosity of our supporters and volunteers, especially as our work continues to grow.

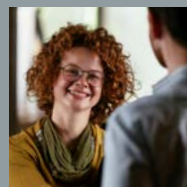
Would you consider becoming a regular financial supporter of PFS? No matter how much you give, your contribution will positively impact the lives of people in prison throughout Scotland.



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SET UP YOUR REGULAR GIFT BY:

- scanning the QR code
- donating online at pfscotland.org/donate
- or by contacting us at the office for further guidance to setting up a standing order: office@pfscotland.org. (Remember if you are a UK taxpayer, you can add 25% through Gift Aid at no further cost!)



PFS Annual Gathering

On Saturday the 7th of October, we held our Annual Gathering in Perth. Despite heavy rain and with many people not able to attend as a result, the day was a great success! A huge thanks to everyone who braved the elements and joined us. Doing the work we do is an honour, and the fellowship we shared was worth the journey.

Laura Caldwell started things off by leading us in a time of worship and helping us centre our thoughts on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Charles Maaz, Chief Executive of Glasgow City Mission, then opened the Word and shared the importance of seeing people as God sees them. He reminded us all how each person

PFS works with is uniquely created in God's image and so deserves our best.

In the afternoon, John Caldwell, Chaplain at HMP Shotts and former teacher, led us in a helpful discussion on the topic of 'creating conversations'.

He helped us think once again about the priority of listening attentively to those we work with and making sure they feel valued in our groups.

We shared updates on PFS' work, prayed together for those serving in Scotland's prisons and looked ahead to the future. It was a great day full of community and growth.

Thank you to everyone who was a part of it—we appreciate you! ■



W You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake."

DEUTERONOMY 15:10



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