



Prisoners'
Sunday

Parish Pack



Prisoners' Sunday: **A Fresh Start**

9th October 2022

An Appeal from His Eminence Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster



As President of Pact, I invite you to join with me in supporting Prisoners' Sunday, 9th October 2022. Pact is the national Catholic charity for the support of prisoners and their families, working in prisons and communities across England and Wales.

Pact relies strongly on the support of volunteers as well as the prayer and generosity of our parishioners. You will find resources on Pact's website to help your parish to mark Prisoners' Sunday. The Gospel message for Prisoners' Sunday tells us that a person who has been an outcast can be restored to the community by the Lord's healing touch.

I met a group of prisoners in the chapel at HMP Wormwood Scrubs

earlier this year. They asked me whether they would find a welcome in parishes on their release.

Let us remember that our Lord calls the wellbeing of prisoners to our attention. Let us remember that families in our parishes may be enduring anxious worry, isolation and perhaps hardship while a loved one is in prison.

It is good to know that Pact is there for people of all faiths and none, supporting prisoners and their families on our behalf and with our help.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster
President of Pact



"Everyone embraced the Cardinal's visit. The lads were so pleased that he sat with them."
- Fr Chima Ibekwe, Catholic Chaplain at HMP Wormwood Scrubs

A message from Pact CEO, Andy Keen-Downs



Our society punishes wrongdoing by depriving people of their liberty - that is what prison is. The loss of freedom is the punishment. In Britain, our prison system also aspires to rehabilitate people, so that they don't reoffend. Family visits, education, training, communal worship, the arts, and exercise are all important to that aim, as is resettlement planning for the practical necessities of having identity documents, a universal credit claim or a job, and somewhere to live. But our system is broken.

During COVID restrictions, prisoners understood the necessity of the lockdown, even though it meant being locked in cells for more than 23 hours a day, day after day. I wish I could tell you that things are now back to normal, but prisons are facing another crisis: staffing. There are not enough prison officers to run decent regimes and more officers are leaving than joining. The consequence of this is that men and women are still kept locked up, with less than one hour a day out of cell to shower, make a call, or have any activity. It also means that if a prisoner attempts suicide or harms themselves, the risk of them not surviving is much higher.

At Pact, we work at building good relationships with prison and probation staff so that together we can strive to uphold the dignity of prisoners and their families.

We support people in prison to resettle back into the community and not reoffend. In a Young Offenders Institute I visited recently, I saw our brave, dedicated staff members walk from cell to cell asking officers to unlock so that they could provide one-to-one support to the damaged and vulnerable young men.

In the last few weeks, a woman told me that her brother had benefitted enormously from Pact's support while in prison. He had told her that Pact has a fantastic reputation in that establishment, both among prisoners and officers. I heard from another young man who had been in care before ending up in prison. Our Pact worker helped him to write the first letter he had ever written, reaching out to a family member who just might be willing to support him when he had no one else to turn to. It is the painstaking work we do at Pact to support the health and wellbeing of prisoners and their families, and to restore people on the margins to the community, that gives me hope.

I extend that hope to you now. Thank you for supporting the work of Pact so that we can continue our life-changing work helping prisoners and their families, in often desperate circumstances, to make a fresh start.

A Fresh Start Together

Pact is the national Catholic charity that supports prisoners, people with convictions and their children and families. We provide caring and life-changing services at every stage of the criminal justice process: in court, in prison, on release, and in the community.

Why does our work matter?

1. We create safer communities.

People who receive visits from family members are 39% less likely to reoffend.

2. We keep prisoners safe.

In the last year there were more than 50,000 incidents of self-harm in prisons – one every 10 minutes. Supporting prisoners to maintain family relationships reduces the risk of self-harm and violence in our prisons.

3. We care for children.

An estimated 300,000 children have a parent in prison. They are more likely to have mental health problems and be involved in crime. We empower fathers and mothers to build healthy relationships with their children and support the child throughout a parent's imprisonment.

What can you do?

- **Pray** – we encourage you to reflect and pray for prisoners and their families.
- **Act** – Prisoners' Sunday is a time to reflect on how we as individuals, as a Church, and as communities, are serving those affected by imprisonment.
- **Give** - we are very grateful to parishes who are able to hold a second collection to support the work of Pact - and to individuals who may send a donation at this time.

Thank you.

Our Faith in Action Team

Theresa Alessandro and Marie Norbury are Pact's Faith in Action team. Pact offers your parish community practical ways to support prisoners and their families - as well as liturgy, reflection and prayer resources.

Take a look at these web pages:

Parishes and Groups

www.prisonadvice.org.uk/parish-support

You will find Prisoners' Sunday prayers here. If you do not already have a Pact Parish Representative, you can also find out more about the benefits of the role here or contact us at parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk.

Children and Young People

www.prisonadvice.org.uk/children-and-young-people

We offer specialised support, information and resources for children and young people who have a family member in prison. Find out more here.

Prisoners' Families Helpline

www.prisonersfamilies.org | 0808 808 2003 (freephone)

Pact runs the national Prisoners' Families Helpline on behalf of HMPPS, offering emotional and practical support to those affected by the criminal justice system. Since the pandemic, calls to the Helpline have almost doubled.

Fresh Start Newsletter

www.prisonadvice.org.uk/fresh-start

You can stay up to date with our work and upcoming events in your diocese by signing up to receive Fresh Start – our quarterly newsletter for Catholic supporters of Pact.

Theresa and Marie are ready to help you keep prisoners and their families in mind. You can contact the team at parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk





There is currently no structure in place for children whose mothers are in custody, and no official records are kept about how many children are affected by the imprisonment of a parent. Women are far more likely than men to be primary carers for children prior to imprisonment, and the effect of maternal separation on children is often more devastating, with far-reaching implications for their growth and development.

Christy is just one of the women supported by Pact's pilot project, Together a Chance, which supports mothers in custody to maintain links with their children. Launched in response to Lord Farmer's recommendation that all women's prisons should have an on-site social

worker as part of a multidisciplinary custodial team, the Pact scheme has placed social workers in two women's prisons – HMPs Send and Eastwood Park. It empowers women to play a positive role in their children's lives, and be involved in decisions relating to their welfare, while protecting the best interests of their children.

We shared Christy's words alongside key findings from the project's interim evaluation at an event earlier this year in the House of Lords. Her story shows how Together a Chance has become invaluable to both mothers and their children's social workers. The project is changing the way imprisoned mothers and their children are dealt with, responded to, and cared for.

Becky is the Pact Social Worker supporting Christy to connect with Local Authority social workers in matters involving her children and to speak for herself at court. Becky has also been able to build positive relationships with professionals working with Christy's children to encourage family visits and establish more regular contact through phone calls and letters. Christy said:

"I have always felt so alone in my fight to secure contact with my children. It's even more of a strain being a parent in prison because of the stigma attached to it. It's like you're losing before you begin.

"You're unable to use the internet for advice or support, you're unable to use a phone to chase courts or professionals who may be involved. You're stuck with just pen and paper, and let's face it, in this day and age it's just prehistoric and doesn't give us a good start. You're effectively isolated and alone.

"Maintaining family ties is crucial in the progress of rehabilitation. It can provide a stable foundation to build upon. Being part of the project has made me see how much help and support is needed in this area.

"Since my Pact social worker, Becky, started supporting me, my life has been so much easier. She has taken away so much stress and I am in a much better position in respect of child contact. Becky has been

consistent, friendly, non-judgmental, approachable, but most importantly reliable and professional. She has listened to me and for the first time in years, I feel "heard". I feel like my relationship with my children matters and my rights are being upheld."

"It is the little things that enable the big things to happen, such as printing forms, posting, phoning/ emailing, minute-taking, liaising with professionals and the option of a McKenzie friend. She has done - and continues to do - all of this for me, and more. She has been my rock. I know it is still not over, but she has enabled me to trust and hope again."*

Your support this Prisoners' Sunday could help to ensure more women like Christy are able to continue being mothers during their time in prison, minimising the harm on them, their children, and society as a whole.

We believe that mothers should only be sent to prison as a last resort and that custodial sentences for non-violent crimes are damaging for both families and communities. With your help, we can ensure that more mothers' stories are heard by those in power to change the system.

* A McKenzie friend is someone who supports or encourages an individual representing themselves in court proceedings.

A Reflection from Very Rev. Canon Paul Douthwaite, National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons



Luke 17:11-19

To the modern man or woman, having heard it used in books, films and in computer games, the mention of Armageddon arouses thoughts of the final battle or judgement at the end of the world or the end of time.

The valley of Armageddon, an historical site of many biblical battles and events, has alternative names, such as Valley of Jezreel or Jehoshaphat. At the time of Jesus, due to a particular Hebrew Exile, it was known as the land between Samaria and Galilee. This was in effect 'no man's land'; a place where, despite its fertility, no man or woman lived.

For the leper, the disease left him or her in 'no man's land' – no family, no friends, no food, no faith! In contracting leprosy everything that gave a person dignity was stripped away. Living on the border between Samaria and Galilee signified living in a land that was for 'no man' – a person's humanity was stripped away. No wonder the leper, in his or her

incurable state, was abandoned to see out their days in this place. The only redemption that the leper – or rather the ten lepers – experienced was in the person of Christ who provided healing and, intrinsic to that healing, restoration to fullness of life.

It has often been said that the prisoner is the leper of our times. In their incarceration, the prisoner, man, woman, adult or child, finds themselves in 'no man's land', in Armageddon. Stripped away from family, stripped away from loved ones, stripped away from work and education. The only thing that potentially remains a constant in their lives, unlike the lepers of Jesus' time, is their access to faith services.

Access to a Chaplain, the provision of the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation, a visiting volunteer from the local parish, support from a Pact family worker, help from a member of the SVP society: these are all ways in which the lepers of our time, the prisoners, can experience the person of Christ and experience that healing and restoration to the fullness of life for which we all long.

As the notion of Armageddon transcends time, so does the concept of rejection and redemption. As Christ brought redemption in his own person to the lepers, so this concept of bringing redemption to those

most abandoned in our own time transcends time; redemption for those most abandoned is found in and through the baptised – you and me.



Cardinal Nichols met with prisoners in the chapel at HMP Wormwood Scrubs earlier this year.

Prisoners' Sunday FAQs

Are prisons back to normal after the pandemic?

Although things are moving in the right direction, prison regimes have remained restricted for longer than the rest of society. The picture of serious repercussions on mental health and the longer-term impact of increased separation for children and families is still emerging. Children are beginning to return to visiting parents and as we go to press "family days" where they can spend a longer period of time together are being planned. We know prisons are struggling with shortages in staffing and that new staff who joined the service during the pandemic have only experienced prisons where people are locked behind cell doors for most of the day. There is much work to do and your prayers, practical support and donations are more important than ever.

Can we take a voluntary collection and where should we send donations?

Yes please! The support of Catholic parishes makes a huge difference and is very much appreciated. Please do not send cash in the post. Cheques should be made payable to "Pact" or Prison Advice & Care Trust and can be sent in the Freepost GiftAid Envelopes enclosed with this pack. If you would like our bank details, please call 020 7735 9535 and ask to speak to someone in the Faith in Action team who will provide you with our bank details. If you have an electronic collection plate, you may be able to set this up so that relevant donations come directly to Pact. Again, please call 020 7735 9535 and ask for our Faith in Action team who will be able to help.

Can we mark Prisoners' Sunday on another Sunday?

Yes, if you feel your parish could better mark Prisoners' Sunday and support those affected by imprisonment on a different day please choose one convenient to your community. If you have a moment to let us know your date that would be helpful but do not worry too much - we understand how busy you are and thank you for taking the time to acknowledge prisoners and their families.



Ways your parish can Pray – Act – Give:

- Please hold a **second collection** for Pact this Prisoners' Sunday, or on a suitable Sunday of your choosing.
- Use the resources in this guide and on our website during your Mass on Prisoners' Sunday, to **raise lasting awareness** within the parish community.
- Take a look at our Prisoners' Sunday events guide on our website and consider **holding an event** for your parish or group:
www.prisonadvice.org.uk/ps-events
- Encourage parishioners to consider whether they might be called to **volunteer for Pact**, from home or in a local Pact service.
- Please invite people to **consider leaving a legacy**. We are very grateful to Catholics who choose to remember Pact in their will. Pact are members of Your Catholic Legacy -
www.yourcatholiclegacy.org.uk



Name of Church/Parish:

Contact name for Parish:

Our Church/Parish has raised for Prisoners' Sunday 2022.

This was raised by:

Mass collection

Special Event

Other

Please tick this box if you would like us to contact you about ways for members of your congregation to volunteer for Pact in your local area.

Please send all cheques to:

Pact, 29 Peckham Road, London SE5 8UA

Remember to include all gift aid responses you have received.
Please do not send cash.



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Prisoners · Families · Communities
A Fresh Start Together

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Tel:
020 7735 9535

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www.prisonadvice.org.uk



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