

PRISONS WEEK 2012

18-24 NOVEMBER prisonswweek.org

**TAKING
THE
PATH
OF**

LEAF

 **PRISONS WEEK 2012**

The Christian life is often described as a journey, and we are the travellers or pilgrims on that journey. Our theme for this Prisons Week comes from Psalm 16:11, "You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures for evermore."

The idea of a path as opposed to a motorway is one of degree; the path is gentler, better suited to human feet and often harder to find; so we may need more sensitive guidance than the 'sat nav' which seems regularly to lead us astray, as it seeks to send heavy lorries down bridleways with disastrous effect. Jesus, as John's gospel tells us, is the Way; he is also our companion and guide on the journey. Seeking to follow the "path of life" is not always straightforward, but with his help and companionship the way becomes clearer and the path more obvious. We do not make the journey alone, but in the company of the faithful, our brothers and sisters, and of Jesus himself; though like those on the road to Emmaus, we may not always recognise him in one another. We pray this week for all those engaged in any way in the criminal justice system, for guidance, inspiration and refreshment on their journey, and for a vision of God's justice and mercy that sustains them on their way.

The Prisons Week Prayer: Lord, you offer freedom to all people. We pray for those in prison. Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist. Support with your love prisoners and their families and friends, prison staff and all who care. Heal those who have been wounded by the actions of others, especially the victims of crime. Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly together with Christ in his strength and in his Spirit, now and every day. Amen

TAKING THE PATH OF LIFE

DAY ONE TAKE REFUGE

For those who are the **victims of crime** there is often an abiding sense of outrage and abandonment, of fear and impotent anger as well as a lasting sense of threat and insecurity. If your home or your person has been attacked by someone else, where can safety be found? For all those who feel that there is no place of safety and for those who have been the victims of crime, we pray today for God's healing and peace, for the refuge of his love to be the place where new hope and new confidence can grow and flourish. We pray too that they will be given the help and support they need to continue successfully on their journey.

Loving God, whose Son asked forgiveness for those who abused and crucified him, be a safe refuge for all those who have become the victims of crime. May they be strengthened and supported as they take each step on their journey to become not victims but survivors. May we listen to their stories, hear their pain and hold for them the hope that this is not all that there is. With you as their support and strength they can continue to grow and flourish. May they begin to imagine a time where life can be restored.

DAY TWO MY CHOSEN PORTION

As we pray today for all **those who work in prisons** we remember the difficult conditions in which they work, the frequent lack of time and resources, and the personally taxing nature of the work and the demands it makes. We remember too those staff who are hurting or facing difficulties, who are drained still more by the needs of those for whom they care. As they walk their journey, we pray that the Lord will be their portion in their lives and in their workplaces, with strength and grace sufficient for the tasks in hand and enough to spare for the continually unexpected demands of their work. Our prayer is that they remain focused and unafraid, compassionate and strong.

Loving God, source of all strength and understanding, give to all who work in prisons the wisdom, compassion and strength they need to defeat despair and doubt, that they might know and share life in all its fullness. Be present with them as they seek to engage with prisoners and guide them into new ways of living and along right paths.

DAY THREE YOU HOLD MY LOT

It is always extremely difficult for **the families** of prisoners and for those of their victims. They are caught up in drama and despair which is not of their making. They have to come to terms with either the horror of one of their family being abused or exploited, or the equal but quite different horror of dealing with the knowledge that one of their own family has been responsible for the hurt caused. In both situations family members need support, and they need the wisdom, strength and grace that only God can provide. God alone holds the power and the answers to how these difficult situations can be overcome or contained and the journey continued.

Loving God, your Son knew the love of an earthly family, we pray for the families of prisoners and their victims as they, each in their different ways, come to terms with what has happened and walk alongside those whom they love and care for. Give to them the full riches of your grace and the strength they will need as they continue on their journey. Pour upon them the power of your Spirit that they may know wholeness and peace and in that peace, hope once again for good things.

DAY FOUR HE GIVES ME COUNSEL

Those who administer justice have a difficult and thankless task. In their daily journey they must balance the needs of a community which demands harsh punishment with the needs of a wide variety of people who require the opportunity to take a new path of life. As we remember today all who work in the criminal justice system, we pray that they be given, for the tasks they are engaged in, the wisdom of Solomon by that same creator God who alone is the source of discernment and good judgement and the guide on their daily journey.

God of justice and mercy, source of wise counsel and understanding, be present and active in all situations of judgement and sentencing, that justice with mercy will guide all those who work in our criminal justice system. Help them to act justly, to love mercy and to ensure that wise and compassionate judgements are made.

DAY FIVE AT MY RIGHT HAND

Being sent to prison can be one of the most frightening things imaginable. You often know no one; those you meet may be very dangerous at worst and strangers at best. Someone else has all the power and responsibility for you. It is disempowering and infantilising, easy then to believe you have no ability to change anything. The psalmist takes comfort from the fact that God is at our right hand and is the source of all richness and all the resources we need for growth and sustenance on the journey. When any one of us realise that God is at our right hand, then new possibilities arise, new paths become possible and we can move forward on our journey of life.

*Loving God, from whom nothing can separate us, keep close to you **all those in prison**, especially those serving long and seemingly endless sentences, those who will arrive for the first time today and those who will be released today into situations of uncertainty and difficulty. Be with them all, present at their right hand to give them strength and support, to keep hope alive and to encourage new life and growth.*

DAY SIX YOU DO NOT GIVE ME UP

God does not give us up, neither does he give up on us; he does not abandon us to the pit. We believe and act on those beliefs, that change and redemption are possible and that we can, as communities, move forward in new and positive ways. As **members of communities** it is important that we do not give up our prisons, our prisoners, their families, their victims, or our criminal justice system, to punitive and vengeful responses. As God shows us mercy and forgiveness when we repent, we too should seek to show both mercy and forgiveness to those who are released from prison and who are seeking new paths of life within our communities.

You never give us up Lord, despite our sin and loss of innocence, you came to us to bring us into a new and living relationship with you. You love us still, even when we stray from the path. Help us to recognise your image in one another and to offer that same generosity to those in our communities who have fallen into crime and been punished, that we might be always ready to forgive and offer help and companionship on their journeys.



Prisons Week was formed to pray for and raise awareness of the needs of prisoners and their families, victims of offenders, prison staff and all those who care. It consists of representatives of Christian denominations and Christian organisations.

Please pray each day during Prisons Week, but also ask yourself whether there is one thing that you as an individual or as a church can do to assist in any of the above.

For suggestions as to how you can help, to make a donation or to order larger quantities of these prayer leaflets/posters, please visit our website at www.prisonsw.org where you will also find additional materials including prayers, worship resources, ideas, useful contacts, books and more.

You may also write to: The Secretary, Prisons Week, PO Box 2733, Lichfield, WS13 6GZ



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prisons week 2012 is generously supported by:

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