



Churches
Together in
Westminster

An Occasional Newsletter

Welcome to Issue 20 (Autumn 2020) of our Occasional Newsletter. Please feel free to photocopy this for distribution amongst your congregation.

One might well be forgiven for wondering where the past seven months have gone. Here we are in Autumn, when we should be celebrating Harvest and the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, and preparing for All Saints, Advent and Christmas. But where did Easter and Pentecost and the summer go? COVID-19 has not only meant daily services as well as these major church festivals have had to be celebrated in a very reduced form, often on-line where possible, but there is currently a question mark over what form Christmas can take. Thankfully live music and socially distanced choirs are tentatively starting to return, but for how long one wonders?

A huge vote of thanks has to be given to all the ministers and the helpers who have improvised and worked so hard to make it possible for services to continue to be held, and to ensure that our churches are kept clean and safe.

The CTiW Executive has continued to meet via Zoom, and whilst it is not possible at the moment to hold events, they have still remained active, including making representation to the Mayor of London concerning the impact the increased Congestion Charge might have on our congregations.

It was agreed to hold a Solidarity Sunday on 15 November to coincide with World Day of the Poor (see article on page 2). Also proposed was a Resources Booklet for the Global Impact of COVID-19 on fragile states, comprising Background, Readings & Reflections and Prayers.

Prisons Week 2020 will be marked nationally from 11th until 18th October, and The London Prisons Mission has produced a new version of their Resources Book <http://ctiw.london/wp-content/uploads/ResourcesForPrisonsWeek-LPM2020.pdf>

Additionally, it is hoped we can join an on-line Advent Service. Further information will follow by Email.

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COVID 19 PANDEMIC IMPACT ON PEOPLE IN THE POOREST AND MOST FRAGILE COUNTRIES:

Recommendations for a response from CTiW

Impact of Coronavirus in fragile countries

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the lives of all people, especially the poor, women and children across the globe in fragile states. Already there is evidence that famine is likely to be the biggest killer. Poverty, violence and conflict, lack of access to education, lack of health resources, amongst many challenges are devastating those in fragile states. Lockdown in our High Streets directly affects the livelihoods of those who supply them. Families who depended on this work, have been driven into destitution. The Pandemic in the Western world has directly contributed to making the situation for the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world doubly dire and worldwide people are dying because of us.

WHY WE MUST ACT NOW

For some time to come, the focus of people in the UK will shift almost entirely to domestic issues and to our own recovery. This will not be a quick process but has already led to claims that we cannot afford to support the most vulnerable countries at the level we did before, thus casting them adrift.

'Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.'
Teresa of Avila

In the UK, we are unlikely to face anything like the challenges encountered by those in the poorest most fragile countries. Now is the time for Christians to show their love for their neighbours – wherever they are. We can be a part of the body of Christ through a global Christian response and show how much we care, through learning about the issues, through our giving, and through prayer.

Solidarity Sunday 15 November, Remembering our Global Neighbours

Churches Together in Westminster will observe a **Solidarity Sunday** on 15 November, to mark our commitment to those most vulnerable in the Coronavirus pandemic – and those who are responding. It is about reminding ourselves and each other that there is so much good we can do - through giving, through prayer and through powerful demonstrations of unity.

The date coincides with the Roman Catholic World Day of the Poor. In his message for the fourth World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis writes that 'keeping our gaze fixed on the poor is difficult, but that it is more necessary than ever if we are to give proper direction to our personal life and the life of society. Until we revive our sense of responsibility for our neighbour and for every person, grave economic, financial and political crises will continue.' The Pope reminds us that prayer to God and solidarity with the poor are inseparable.

The Diocese of Westminster are planning to hold a special service on that day in which all CTiW members are invited to participate. Details of service will be sent out nearer the date.

If you cannot join in that service, we urge you all to mark Solidarity Sunday in your own churches.

We are producing a Resources Booklet of Readings, Reflections, and Prayers to help individuals and churches reflect upon and raise awareness of how the pandemic is impacting the vulnerable of the world. This booklet is arranged as a series of daily themes on specific issues. It will have information on organisations working abroad, and how you can support them. The booklet will be sent out to all our Members in early November.

Let us join together in support and solidarity with our Global Neighbours, for Christ has no body now on earth but ours.

By Rev'd Joan Ishibashi & Gillian Dare

LONDON PRISONS MISSION

Prisons Week 11th until 18th October 2020

This year Prisons Week will be marked nationally from 11th until 18th October, which includes two Sundays. The London Prisons Mission (LPM) has again produced a booklet of resource material to encourage and assist both ordained and lay people within churches of all denominations to arrange interesting services and other activities with the purpose of bringing issues concerning the penal and criminal justice system to the attention of congregations.

The Foreword to the booklet is written by Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester and Bishop for Women's Prisons. An introduction argues that there are too many men, women and children in British prisons, and they serve longer custodial sentences than our European neighbours. Despite this, reoffending levels are persistently high. It continues: "the prison population should be drastically cut and those people the courts and the public consider essential to detain are held in prisons where the focus is on education, mental health, skills training and rehabilitation. From the first day of custodial sentences all efforts should be concentrated on preparing each person to lead a constructive and law-abiding life when they leave prison".

This year the booklet focusses on women in prison. Despite being only 5% of the total prison population they suffer distinct and very different problems, have different needs and require special support and services while detained and on discharge. The booklet contains lots of little-known facts about this group. The Quiz (pages 20&21) and the piece by the Through the Gate Chaplain (pages 22&23) are useful bases for post-worship discussions about women in prison, and all the illustrations are by women artists in prison. Many churches reprint some of the illustrations on their own Prisons Week Orders of Service. (If you do this, please credit Koestler Arts, using the form of words on the back page of the booklet.)

We know that the 2019 booklet was used by churches far beyond London and received reports from all the UK nations, as well as both East and

West coast of the USA. This was usually because CTiW member churches had sent copies on to friends far and wide via their church and personal networks. If you find the 2020 booklet useful, please do the same again.

We hope that churches find this booklet suitable for digital circulation to their congregations and others, but some hard copies are available for collection from St George's Church Hanover Square, by arrangement with the Vestry (020 7629 0874, 2a Mill Street, London W1S 1FX). Please tell LPM how your church marks Prisons Week this year and make your suggestions for the 2021 booklet.

THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC IN PRISONS

It was not broadcast but the HM Prison Service feared the prospect of 2,500 to 3,000 fatalities of inmates and staff as the Covid virus spread through Britain's overcrowded and often insanitary prisons. This forecast caused them to impose and rigorously enforce, the most severe restrictions from a very early stage. All family, professional, support service and volunteer visitors were suspended, and inmates were not allowed out of cells for work, education, recreation, training, exercise or chapel worship. Inmates were confined to cells for 23+ hours each day, without the usual brief "association" with others on the wing and only unlocked one at a time to shower or attend the lavatory if they were without in-cell facilities. Newly sentenced prisoners were confined to cells for 24 hours for not less than 14 days after arrival from court.

The remarkable outcome of these extremely severe restrictions was that up to August there have been just under 100 fatalities formally attributed to the pandemic. Unfortunately, however these measures have had gravely adverse effects upon the well-being and mental health of many inmates, a high proportion of whom have generally poor quality of mental health. The HM Chief Inspector of Prisons has conducted a series of Short Scrutiny Covid focussed visits to several types of prisons and has reported seriously adverse effects

on health and well-being and a chronic lack of out of cell time for exercise and “purposeful activity”. Steps taken to very cautiously ease the pandemic restrictions by permitting very limited internal mobility have been accompanied by sharp surges in serious incidents of self-harm as well as increases in virus transmission.

The situation inside prisons continues to be very worrying. In addition, there is a huge backlog of court cases and un-sentenced people remanded in custody are increasing significantly. The time, skills and empathy of regular volunteers will be urgently needed to support members of multi-faith Prison Chaplaincy Teams in the very difficult times ahead.

SAFE HOMES FOR WOMEN LEAVING PRISON

The London Prisons Mission (LPM) is very modest in scale and ambition, but it has gained a reputation for competence and is recognised as an “honest broker” by other much larger and prominent organisations in this field. These factors have caused it to take an unexpectedly leading role in the Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison initiative.

This initiative arose from an Away-Day LPM arranged for the entire multi-faith Prison Chaplaincy Team of HMP & YOI Bronzefield, in Middlesex, now the biggest prison for women in Europe, at St Martin in the Fields, early in 2019. All the 22 chaplains present shared their experience of distress and anxiety to spend time with women who struggled to recover from often chaotic lives, substance abuse, addiction, physical and sexual violence and poor mental health, leaving a period of relative safety in custody for “no fixed abode” on discharge. The consequences of this were for these women to soon become victims of further abuse, exploitation, danger reoffending and return to prison. The prospects of such women being able to resume care of their children, gain employment, health and safety were very slim. Many of these women become well known to the prisons and chaplains as they repeat the sad cycle.

LPM formed the initiative in collaboration with the Prison Reform Trust, where a specialist team has

focused on reducing the imprisonment of women, St Martin in the Fields, which has a long record of support for the poorest including those with no recourse to public funds, the management of Bronzefield Prison, and the Mayor’s Office for Police and Crime, (MOPAC) which led by Deputy Mayor Sophie Linden, acts as the Police and Crime Commissioner for London. The purpose of the initiative was and remains “to identify and strive towards realistic and sustainable solutions to the plight of vulnerable women leaving prison to homelessness.”

Hundreds of public, private and voluntary sector organisations have been consulted in London and elsewhere and in November 2019 many of these came together for a Summit Event as part of the process of moving from the assessment of the scale of the problem to reaching solutions. The intense work has continued throughout the pandemic and in October a Report will be published outlining the changes in policies and practises required to prevent vulnerable women being discharged to homelessness in future. A group led by Rt Revd Rachel Treweek Bishop of Gloucester and Bishop for Women’s Prisons will present the Report to the Secretary of State for Housing, the Justice Secretary and the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of London. The Bishop’s team will want to know which of the many detailed recommendations will be implemented and supported by Government Departments and by the Mayor and MOPAC. The Report will also be circulated to London Councils and all the London Boroughs, who have a crucial role to play in delivering realistic solutions locally. The support and active involvement of many specialist service and housing providers will also be essential for success. Copies will also be sent to all CTiW member churches, as LPM and the initiative would value their interest and support and they can really help to take the recommendations forward.

A few folks have argued that work on this project indicates that LPM has become “political”. It is certainly true that we are joining others to explain the need for changes which will benefit vulnerable women who are at grave risk - but this has arisen directly from the work of volunteers in support of multi-faith Prison Chaplaincy Teams and this is LPM’s primary purpose.

VOLUNTEERS FROM CHURCHES REQUIRED IN PRISONS.

There is an urgent need for additional volunteers to undertake regular work within prisons, or in support of LPM's activities in this field. Introductory visits are arranged to explore and discuss the wide range of needs and opportunities available to match the skills, experience and available time of suitable volunteers. Relevant training and regular support is provided and new volunteers never function alone. The role of regular volunteers is challenging, interesting and working in the prison system, if often frustrating, is invariably very rewarding.

We expect each volunteer's home church to engage informally with the LPM, receive regular reports from volunteers and from time to time inform the congregation about developments and some of the issues involved. No subscriptions are required from churches, but if the proceeds of an occasional collection is donated to LPM this will be gratefully received and frugally expended.

For further information about any aspect of the present and future work of the London Prisons Mission please contact its Coordinator, John Plummer, Tel: 020 7272 1639 Mob 07967 761841, Email johnplummer@londonprisonsmission.org

John Plummer is also a member of the CTiW Executive

CTiW 2020 Executive Members

Rev'd Jonathan Evens – St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square – Chairman

Gillian Dare – All Saints Church, Margaret Street – Minutes Secretary

Rev'd Joan Ishibashi – St James's, Piccadilly – Treasurer

Rev'd Canon Anthony Ball – Westminster Abbey

Rev'd Matthew Catterick, St Saviours Church, St Georges Square, Pimlico

Rev'd Roderick Leece – St George's Church, Hanover Square

Major Richard Mingay & Major Caroline Mingay – Salvation Army, Regent Hall, Oxford Street

John Plummer – Coordinator. London Prisons Mission.

Rev'd Dominic Robinson SJ, - The Immaculate Conception, Farm Street

Rob Thompson – Hinde Street Methodist Church

Martyn Watson – Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church

Rosa Postance – Administration & Communications (inc Website & Newsletter)