

An Occasional Newsletter



Welcome to our new Chairman

At the June CTiW Executive meeting, Fr Dominic Robinson SJ, who has been our Interim Chairman for almost 2 years, stood down, and Rev'd Ruth Gouldbourne was elected as the new Chairman. Fr Dominic will remain a member of the Executive, and on behalf of everyone, he was thanked for all his past and continuing work for CTiW.

Ruth is currently one of the Co-Ministers at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in London, a church that, although in Camden, has had a long association with CTiW. She has been there 10 years, and in that time has been very involved with the local ecumenical Clergy Breakfast, a regular meeting that she values very much. In the last few years, she has become involved with the exec of CTiW, and says she is honoured and rather intimidated at becoming chair.

Before coming to London, she taught history and doctrine at Bristol Baptist College for 11 years, as a part of an ecumenical federation of colleges, and was delighted in particular at the opportunities to be co-teaching on the nature of the church across denominational boundaries, believing that it matters greatly that people who lead churches understand why other churches see and do things differently.

Her first pastorate, before going to Bristol, was in a church in Bedford with a proud history – the church where John Bunyan had been minister. This church was an ecumenical project, being both Baptist and Congregational.

As a denominational representative over the years, she has attended conferences of Churches Together in England, what used to be the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (now Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) and World Council of Churches. She is currently a member of the Trustee body of CTBI, and chairs the Faith and Order Reference Group for CTBI.

Finding ways to explore and express faith together, rooted in mutual understanding of our differences as well as the things we have in common is at the heart of her ecumenical commitment. The question is not simply finding what we can all agree on, but also discovering the riches we offer one another from our different heritages and positions. Working together for the coming of the Kingdom, praying together, as we seek to know God more, and trusting together that the gift of unity will be made known among us; these are the values to which she is committed.

We hope you will all join us in wishing Ruth well in her new role, and assure her of our support and prayers.

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Contents

Welcome to our new Chairman 1

Prisons Mission Progress Report 2-3

"Meet the Neighbours" at The Royal Military Chapel on 1st June 2016 3-4

Dates for your diary

2016

9-15 October Prisons Week

Sunday, 27 November—CTiW Advent Service at St James' Church, Piccadilly (details to follow)

Note: Venues and dates may be subject to change

If your church is interested in hosting a future "Meet the Neighbours" we should be pleased to hear from you.

Contact us

Website: www.ctiw.london
Email: ctiw.net@gmail.com

PRISONS MISSION PROGRESS REPORT

• OVERCROWDED AND ANGRY

The work of our Prisons Mission continues, but not without difficulties. Prisons in the UK are grossly overcrowded. On 17th June there were 85,310 men, women and children in our prisons. This is 143 per 100,000 of the total population. More than any other country in Western Europe. The reoffending levels are also the highest. This level of overcrowding, coupled with cuts in staff numbers, due to the Government's austerity measures, results in prisoners spending more time locked up in, usually shared cells, less opportunity for movement inside the prison for education, work, exercise, recreation, worship, or any other meaningful activity to aid resettlement and rehabilitation on discharge.

These intense pressures are said to be major causes for the recent sharp increases in the incidents of suicides, self-harm and violence among inmates. The sad fact is that many of the people in our prisons suffer serious mental ill health, often not adequately diagnosed or treated for many years. They are unhappy people in unsuitable places. The atmosphere of tension, anxiety and distress is palpable to our Prisons Mission participants.

Our work currently focuses on HMPs Wandsworth (1877 males) and Wormwood Scrubs (1,279 males). We have an agreement, currently on hold, to extend to HMP Pentonville (1,310 males) and are in discussion with the Chaplaincy Teams at HMP Bronzefield (527 females and expanding) and HMP Brixton (798 males). Given the scale of the prison population in London, our efforts are clearly minute. We are convinced that every such effort is both justified and worthwhile.

• SUPPORT FOR MULTI-FAITH CHAPLAINCY TEAMS

Prisons Mission participants do not promote, or support any particular model or approach to Christianity, but undertake activities chosen and directed by each multi-faith Prison Chaplaincy Team. These include being trained to act as "befrienders" to mentor inmates for several weeks before and after discharge from custody to help them to adjust and rehabilitate. We also help with Bible Studies and services of worship in chapels. We aim to move towards becoming "Auxiliary Chaplains", in order to help the teams with their wide range of duties with prisoners on the wings and with their families. The first objective of all Prisons Mission participants is to support all the members of each prison's multi-faith team.

We have found that our participants must be remarkably patient and persistent. Prisons are excessively bureaucratic, as well as inefficient organisations. They operate behind high walls, out of sight of most of the general public and seldom visited by outsiders. They are not comfortable with the levels of scrutiny, comparison and examination which are expected elsewhere. Hence being kept waiting and having pre-arranged events cancelled without notice is a frequent, but frustrating, experience. This just goes with the job.

One of our participants recently met her "befriendee" at the prison gate on his discharge. She then spent five hours with him attending an appointment at a Local Authority Housing Department, before he was given access to unsuitable temporary accommodation which had no bedding. For this to happen to an inmate defined by the system as a "prolific, persistent offender", whose discharge date and housing need should have been known to the prison and housing authorities for many months, does not indicate an efficient or properly coordinated approach to effective resettlement and reoffending risk management.

• CHURCH "ENGAGEMENT"

The second objective of all our participants is to report back to their churches, where the management committees have agreed to "engage" with the Prisons Mission. We all report on what we have learned inside the system and, while strictly observing client confidentiality, explain to other members of the congregation something about the life and experiences of prisons, and the people detained and working within them. This practice has been illuminating and has stimulated a better-informed interest and concern about penal policy, issues and the criminal justice system.

Three churches are currently formally "engaged" with our Prisons Mission. These are St James Piccadilly, St Martin in the Fields and St George's Hanover Square. (The participants from The Church of the Immaculate Conception decided to continue prisons work with the London Jesuit Volunteers). We are presently in discussion with several churches in order to increase the denominational spread of the initiative, and hope to include churches which serve the Polish community in London and other groups who are often very isolated when in prison. Our expansion will be deliberately slow and cautious, as "engagement" requires a big commitment by churches, and we appreciate the need to provide ongoing support and guidance for participants. This is very different from recruiting a few volunteers to take on hospital visits.

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PRISONS MISSION PROGRESS REPORT Continued...

• PRISONS WEEK 9th-16th OCTOBER

Prisons Week will be held from 9th to 16th October this year. In 2014 and 2015 we published and distributed a booklet of resource material for use by CTiW member churches. This was very well received and encouraged more churches to mark Prisons Week locally. This year, we are taking advantage of the knowledge and practical experience of our participants, to revise and improve the booklet. It will contain a wider range of prayers, intercessions, texts and suggested sermons, collected from many sources. These will include references not only to prisoners, but to their families, Prison Officers, Chaplains and victims of crime. There will also be a quiz, which is a suitable aid for use with church discussion groups, as well as a series of anonymised case studies to add colour to the human realities of prison. The Foreword will be written by Jonathan Aitkin, the ex-Cabinet Minister who has served a custodial sentence and is now President of Christian Solidarity Worldwide. We aim to provide material from which either lay or ordained people, of different denominations, will be able to select items which are suitable for their particular styles of worship and discussion. Our purpose is to

encourage and enable every church in London to mark Prisons Week interestingly and effectively. Our participants are ready to do what we can to help churches to achieve this purpose. The new Prisons Week booklet will be available and sent electronically to all CTiW member churches in late August. We will ask you to respond with your own review of the material. We need to know what works well with your church, so that we can include this in the material we prepare for Prisons Week 2017.

It is significant to note that our Prisons Mission is certainly not a campaign, but a modest and simple form of Christian ministry. Despite this, as more people become involved, and more church congregations better informed, we are drawn towards pressure to change and improve the system. Too many men, women and children are seriously damaged by time spent in British prisons, and go on to reoffend on discharge, and thus damage other people. It should not be like this.

*John Plummer
Coordinator. Prisons Mission
Churches Together in Westminster*

“Meet the Neighbours” at The Royal Military Chapel, The Guards Chapel, Wellington Barracks, Birdcage Walk SW1E 6HQ on Wednesday June 1st 2016

Thirty five of us from ten different places of worship in Westminster gathered in the lofty white grandeur of The Guards Chapel to hear about the charity *The Guild of St Helena*, to share the Eucharist, to learn a little about the chapel's history and purpose and to see its silverware.



Our visit began with a short talk by Joan Mallett, who explained that the Guild was founded in 1875 by Florence Malet, the wife of a young Major, who had already set up a Christian Guild to support soldiers. Her aim was to support army wives and families especially in the times when their lives were incredibly challenging and tough. The Guild evolved and, at its zenith had sixty eight branches with over two thousand

members. It has now diminished, reflecting a lesser need for its interventions and support. There are several groups around the country and where troops are stationed abroad, but there is no longer a Central Office and affiliated branches.

Nowadays the historical sterling work of the guild is mostly undertaken by other

agencies, but present day members still find work to do in supporting army families in need, and continue to meet together monthly as friends.

We moved into The Choir for Eucharist celebrated by the Senior Chaplain to the Household Division, the Rev'd

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“Meet the Neighbours” Continued...

Dowell Conning, and, as the timeless language of the 1662 Prayer Book enveloped us, our visual sense was excited by the golden glow of the apse with its intricate mosaic. Our focus was upon the altar and its dressings which had miraculously escaped the bomb damage of 1944 which had reduced the rest of the church to a pile of rubble.

The chapel had been hit by bombs several times during World War II, but it was a flying bomb of one Sunday morning in June 1944, during Morning Service, which killed 121 people and injured many more. The rubble of the destroyed chapel was quickly cleared and a temporary worship space was created by joining the undamaged apse to a Romney Hut erected inside the remains of the walls of the chapel. This served until 1962 when plans were made for a rebuild. The old highly decorated Victorian church was now replaced by a modern building of clean and simple lines. The apse was refurbished. Original stained glass and the font, saved from the damage also feature in the new building.

Chris Harpham, who is the Keeper of the Chapel (also serving as Verger) showed us the collection of silver and communion plate. Some of it was given by Queen Victoria. We were intrigued by a ciborium which can also be used as chalice and paten. We were asked to ponder on its use, possibly where communion is celebrated in

hostile environments, rather than in the tranquil setting of a chancel.

We enjoyed refreshments served by The Guild and welcomed the opportunity to speak with those who serve the needs of those who, in their turn, serve us in the defence of our freedoms.

The many memorials reminded us of the role the Church and the Army play in our lives:

***“To the honour and glory of
Almighty God and a record of faithful
and gallant service”***

Ray Crocker



“Meet the Neighbours” & Future CTiW Events

We are very grateful to the many churches who have kindly hosted “Meet the Neighbours” and other CTiW events in the past. These have been most enjoyable times of fellowship, shared worship, and learning, and we hope that we can continue with more visits, or perhaps even re-visits in the months and years ahead. Several churches have already offered to host future events, either as special “Meet the Neighbours” visits, or as part of other celebrations, so our thanks also go to them, and we look forward to visiting them.

As you will have read from Ray Crocker’s reports, numbers attending are picking up well, and we hope even more people will take these opportunities to visit other churches, and with an open heart and mind, find out more about the rich diversity of architecture, ministries and worship traditions in Westminster.

If your church would like to host a “Meet the Neighbours” or invite others to join you for a special event, we should be very happy to hear from you. Some brief guidelines are available at <http://ctiw.london/meet-the-neighbours>. Be assured that we do appreciate that every church is different, and resources vary. As your guests we are happy to fit in with what you feel able to offer us, and we are very flexible and open to discussing arrangements.

Likewise, if your church is celebrating a special event or anniversary to which other churches are invited, then please do let us know brief details, and we will circulate them. Email: ctiw.net@gmail.com

*Rosa Postance
Administration & Communications, Churches Together in Westminster*