

PRISONS WEEK

A WEEK OF PRAYER

'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.' HEBREWS 4 v16 NKJV

"To boldly go where no one has gone before"

Who can forget these immortal words of Captain James T. Kirk announcing his star trekking mission? The writer to the Hebrews recognises an even more challenging journey in his call to boldness. And yet it is a journey that anyone can travel, especially at times of need, the journey to a God who promises justice, grace and mercy. Those who through their own actions, or the actions of others, find themselves engaged with our penal system and those who work and volunteer in criminal justice, can find that they are travelling this path. The prisoner, the victim, the family member, uniformed and support staff, magistrates, prison chaplains – all can find themselves calling out or silently yearning for mercy and grace to help them in times of need. The motivation and encouragement to keep moving forwards can be drowned out by the pressing, competing voices of very real needs. The light at the journey's end might be elusive. But we believe that it is before God's throne, surrounded by the power of grace, that all those who are searching and asking will truly find the help they seek. In Prisons Week, as we boldly approach His throne, let us stand together in prayer with those struggling to cope with imprisonment or involvement in our criminal justice system: that all affected will know what it means to find the compassion of God's mercy and the grace of Jesus Christ, carrying us through particular and difficult times of need. "To boldly go" ... where many have gone before, and where we go together, in prayer.

– Rt Rev Richard Moth Bishop of Arundel and Brighton and Catholic Bishops' Conference Liaison Bishop for Prisons

SUNDAY: 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.*

MONDAY: FOR THOSE WHO ARE PRISONERS

Inside a cell, the temptation is to give up, to abandon hope and just wait for release. It requires courage and boldness for any one of us to acknowledge wrongdoing and seek forgiveness.

Merciful God, full of grace, give strength and humility to confess any wrongdoing. Give to all those who seek truth the courage to approach you, to ask for mercy and forgiveness. For all who come to you with empty hands and impoverished imaginations, may your power and inspiration fill their hearts and minds, leading to a real understanding that all things are possible with you. So may they boldly go forward into new life through your Son, our risen Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

BOLDLY GO

TUESDAY: FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

To become the victim of a crime is to be undermined at a very deep level, to become distrustful and fearful for the future. Others are needed, to gather round to sustain and support; God's grace and strength is needed to carry on.

*Loving Father, we pray for all who are the victims of crime, give them the strength, courage and power they need to step boldly into the future, comforted and supported by your Holy Spirit. Help them conquer their fears in the company of those who love and care for them. Build them up and inspire them, restore their confidence and lead them into new life through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

WEDNESDAY: FOR THE FAMILIES

When families of perpetrators or victims are caught up in the consequences of crime, it can be costly and shocking; turning the familiar upside down, stripping away any sense of security or comfort and exposing the innocent and uninvolved to distress, judgement and condemnation. It could happen to any one of us.

*Generous God, always ready to share your gifts with us, we are all your children who could at any time be caught up in criminality or need to care for our loved ones as they deal with imprisonment or victimhood. Be present and strengthen those who are supporting the victims of crime, those who visit prisoners and await their release. Give support to the damaged and vulnerable, so that they can come boldly before you and claim your promises of grace, mercy and new life through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

THURSDAY: FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

Prisoners and victims of crime all come from our communities, and return to them. We need to boldly proclaim the role of communities as places of nurture, renewal and healthy growth for individuals. They need to become places where honesty and humility are possible and where we seek new and bold, life changing solutions to social inequality and lack of neighbourliness.

*God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit living in loving relationship, teach us to acknowledge our need of you, remind us that the repentant sinner is always welcome in your kingdom, that the criminal can serve their sentence and be welcomed back, and that the poor and disadvantaged are loved and valued. Help us to recognise one another always as brothers and sisters in your family, made in your image and worthy of all reverence and respect. We ask this in the name of our brother Jesus. **Amen.***

FRIDAY: FOR THOSE WHO WORK IN PRISONS

Working in a prison is a hard job, involving risks and difficulty and not well understood by others. It can bring out the best and the worst in any of us. Every day prison staff deal with the vulnerable and dangerous, often with great boldness and imagination, despite the lack of resources and recognition.

*Living God, give to all those who work in our prisons boldness and confidence, grace and courage in the face of distress and danger. Keep their energy levels high, and fill them with your Holy Spirit. May they support one another and strengthen hope in all those for whom they care. Merciful and generous God, pour out all the richness of your gifts into our prisons that your light might triumph. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Saviour. **Amen.***

SATURDAY: FOR ALL WORKING IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Those who work in the Criminal Justice System are trying to square diminishing resources and increasing demands, at the same time as trying to balance justice and mercy. They need bold vision and imagination, wisdom and discernment and our support, for they act on our behalf.

*Gracious God, with you all things are possible. Be present with all those who seek to administer justice wisely and well. Give to them a bold vision, and your Spirit of wisdom and discernment as they try to balance justice with mercy amid demands for harsh and punitive sentences. Surround them with the grace and strength needed to carry these heavy responsibilities. We ask this in the name of our eternal arbiter and judge, Christ Jesus. **Amen.***

For over forty years Prisons Week has prepared prayer literature for the Christian community to use as they pray for the needs of all those affected by prisons: prisoners and victims, their families, their communities, those working and volunteering in prisons and the criminal justice system. 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 help any of the people that you are praying for.

For more information, to make a donation or to order more of these prayer leaflets: visit our website at www.prisonswEEK.org, email us via info@prisonswEEK.org or write to **Prisons Week, c/o Free Churches Group, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH**

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