



# Prisoners' Sunday



# I was in prison and you came to me

Matthew 25:36

10th October 2021

Parish Pack

# Prisoners' Sunday FAQs

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## **How has the pandemic affected Prisoners' Sunday?**

This is the second Prisoners' Sunday since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The day we pray for prisoners and their dependants as marked in the Catholic calendar. We know that some of us are now able to meet together in church, but for others, attending Mass in person isn't possible. Alongside this pack, we have developed some online resources which you can find on our website at [www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prisonerssunday](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prisonerssunday)

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

Yes please! We depend upon the generosity of our supporters to keep our services running. All cheques should be made payable to 'Pact' or 'Prison Advice and Care Trust' and returned in the enclosed Freepost envelope. We have also enclosed Freepost Gift Aid envelopes for you to pass on to individuals who may prefer to return a donation separately. Please forward any completed Gift Aid envelopes from your parish directly to us as well. Please ensure you include your name and parish contact details. If you would rather donate to us using bank transfer please get in touch for more details.

## **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 date, please choose one convenient for your community.

## **How can people receive Pact's Fresh Start newsletter?**

Fresh Start is Pact's newsletter which is published in printed mail and email format. We keep costs low and are happy to send people a copy in the post – it can be so much nicer than reading from a screen. Fresh Start features stories of our work, impact reports, and information on how to become more engaged in the work of Pact. Please encourage your congregation to receive Fresh Start.

## **Who do I contact for more information/ materials?**

Our Parish Action team are here to answer any questions you might have. We can arrange for more information to be sent to you on request.

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Please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Email us on:

[parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk)

Visit: [www.prisonadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk)

Call our team on 020 7735 9535

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



Recently I was speaking with a retired prison officer who was perplexed by society's enthusiasm, yet at the same time lack of value, for material things. The example in question was the latest Samsung Galaxy mobile phone, costing over £1,500. He predicted that this would not only be on the wish list of wealthy businesspeople, but that within a matter of weeks it will be the aspiration of teenagers to have one in their hands.

The direction which Jesus gives in today's gospel, 'go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven', flies in the face of what has become the norms of our day. However, the reaction of the wealthy young man to Jesus' challenge speaks volumes. It would appear that nothing much has changed in 2000 years and for many, wealth, possessions and status remain the overriding principles in their lives.

It is not surprising that Jesus' further direction, 'come, follow me' is also a hard pill to swallow. To 'follow him' is to embrace all that he taught and to put it into practice in our lives. A hard pill to swallow, because all that Jesus taught is so often in contrast to common and popular practice in our world. It is not just selling our possessions

and giving money to the poor that is a challenging directive; speaking up for and having compassion for the outcast and sinner, visiting and caring for those who are sick, giving shelter to those who are homeless and spending time in prayer with God are also gospel imperatives. In addition to these, one of the clearest directives of Jesus, one that is conveniently overlooked, was to 'visit the prisoner'.

On this day each year, 'Prisoners' Sunday', the Catholic Church in England and Wales responds to Jesus' invitation to visit the prisoner. The Church embraces that which challenges society's norms and demonstrates, as Jesus did, compassion for those who are imprisoned. The invitation to 'visit' the prisoner can be responded to in so many ways. Today as a Church we are invited to reflect on the many opportunities around us that enable us to live out that which Jesus asked of his followers. We are invited to reflect on how we can 'follow him'.

Whilst today is an opportunity to highlight the work of our National Catholic Prison Charity, Pact, and a means by which we can contribute financially to its work, it is also an opportunity to explore other ways in which we can respond to Jesus'

invitation to 'follow him'; by praying for prisoners, their families, all who have been affected by crime and for those who care for them, especially Prison Chaplains. Or by volunteering in the many works that are associated with prisons and prisoners, either directly at your local prison, or through the works of Pact.

Today's gospel challenges us to put aside the attractions of the world and in a real and tangible way respond to the teachings of Christ. Are you ready and willing to take up the challenge and 'follow him'?





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

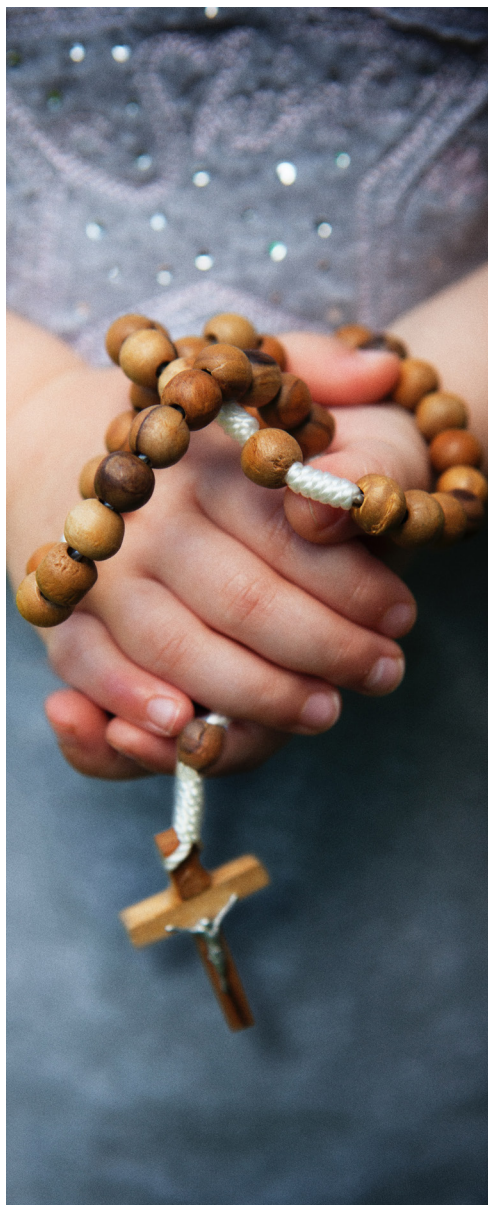


**As President of Pact, I invite you to  
join with me in supporting Prisoners'  
Sunday, 10th October 2021.**

Pact is the major Catholic charity for the support of prisoners and their families, working in prisons across England and Wales. Wherever it is active, Pact relies heavily on the support of volunteers, expressed not least through the 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 shows how God's forgiveness and welcome are for all: no one is excluded. So let us not forget that the needs of prisoners are great and growing, particularly as we emerge from the lockdown imposed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. For prisoners this has meant being confined to their cells for over 23 hours each day for many months and not receiving visits from their loved ones, including their children. We must not forget either the prison staff or our chaplains who too have had to confront the additional challenges posed as a result of the pandemic.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster  
President of Pact



# A Message from Andy Keen-Downs, CEO Pact

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I know from my own parish how difficult this year has been for our parish priests and communities. I know from my own family the toll it has taken on young people. We have, each and every one of us, faced struggles of one kind or another. And we are faced with so many concerns, about jobs, education, the plight of refugees, the future of the planet itself. It can feel overwhelming at times.

I ask you nonetheless for your support this Prisoners' Sunday. I ask you because it is our Christian obligation to 'visit the prisoner'. I ask because we are facing a crisis of mental illness and despair in our prisons, the scale of which I have never seen before. I ask because unless we can provide the care, support, and rehabilitation services needed, far too many people will leave prison only to commit further crimes, harming our communities. And finally, I ask you, because so few people are prepared to support this difficult work, and we depend almost entirely on the generosity of our Catholic community for donations to fund our core operation.

Please pray for the prisoners and families we serve; for the women and men who have lost hope; and for those who are ready to make a fresh start and live lives free from crime. Please pray for our brave volunteers and staff, and for the prison officers, healthcare workers and chaplains we work alongside. And please pray that our political leaders will grow in understanding that if we continue to neglect the justice system, mental health services and social care, we will all pay the price. Thank you.

Andy Keen-Downs



# Michael's Story

At 56 years old, prison was the last place Michael\* expected to be. He hadn't ever been in trouble before and thought he'd lived a relatively ordinary life. But after the death of his wife of 35 years, Michael's life spiralled out of control. Pact got involved just as he was facing the end of a 12-month prison sentence, with no-one to turn to and nowhere to call home...

When Michael's wife, Clara, died, his world started to close in. He had always struggled with his physical health and was registered disabled, but he'd managed to get out and about enough with Clara. Now he was on his own, he was much less able to leave the house and his chronic anxiety and depression was making him feel completely hopeless. He began numbing his pain with prescription drugs.

Soon, Michael began to rely on a group of 'friends' who'd said they could bring him the drugs he needed and keep him company. They had seemed like a lifeline. It wasn't long before Michael began to help them out with their business, doing them small favours including letting them use his home to sell drugs to other people.

Michael was the victim of exploitation and cuckooing by a criminal gang – but his involvement with their business earned him a 12-month prison sentence.

It was Michael's first time in prison, and he was desperate for it to be his last. But the arrival of Covid-19 meant that the world had changed beyond all recognition. Michael would also be homeless on release: his rental agreement had been terminated due to his imprisonment and he had lost everything. As his release date approached, Michael was referred to Pact's Through the Gate team for support. That's when he met Annabel\*, one of Pact's Mentors.

Although she couldn't visit in person because of Covid-19 restrictions, Annabel got in touch with Michael using Email-a-Prisoner and reassured him that Pact could help him through his first days on the outside. This was an enormous relief for Michael, who told Annabel that he was feeling extremely anxious and overwhelmed: he didn't know how he was going to cope without somewhere to live – and he was in desperate need of some basics like a change of underwear and a coat.

Annabel got to work. She contacted the local housing authorities and managed to secure the offer of a council flat for Michael just two days before his release. It was unfurnished but it would be a roof over Michael's

head – somewhere warm and safe. Annabel also contacted the local homeless shelters to see if there was any suitable clothing for Michael. But there was nothing appropriate and charity shops were closed at the height of the pandemic. Michael had no savings and was being released with just £46 to his name – the standard discharge grant – so Annabel needed to find some other funding, and fast.

Annabel knew of some organisations that might help with basic furniture and managed to secure a bed and a chair for Michael. She also made an application for a Pact Welfare Grant to cover the costs of setting up his home – including bedroom curtains to give Michael some privacy, and some basic cleaning products. Pact Welfare Grants are designed to make a significant and tangible difference to an individual in need and, because of Michael's desperate situation, Annabel's application was approved within a few hours. This was a huge boost to Michael's self-esteem: he felt that he could leave prison with the very real prospect of making a fresh start.

On the day of his release, Michael walked out of prison with his head held high. He made his way to his new flat with enthusiasm, and slowly he started to imagine what his future might look like. It would look very different without Clara, but he no longer felt that his life had ended with hers.

Gradually, Michael's confidence grew. He managed to take some trips outside by himself for the first time in many months, and even took himself to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting to support his recovery from the prescription drugs. Michael has now begun talking about gaining skills for the future, including learning how to do his shopping online, to help him take charge of his life again. The last time that Annabel spoke to him, all was well.

*\*Names and some details have been changed to protect anonymity*

**Vital funds received on Prisoners' Sunday help to train and support Mentors like Annabel, as well as other Pact projects throughout England and Wales.**



# About Pact

Pact is the national Catholic charity that provides support to men, women and young people in prison, people with convictions, and their children and families.

Our vision is of a society in which justice is understood as a process of restoration and healing, and where the innate dignity and worth of every human is valued.

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## What does Pact do?

We support people to live crime free lives after prison.

We support prisoners' families and healthy relationships.

We reduce the risks of self-harm, suicide, and violence in prisons.

We speak truth to power and raise awareness.

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## Pact's Services

We provide a range of resettlement and rehabilitation services, including:

- Prison-based family workers
- Mentoring for prisoners
- Prison Visitors' Centres for children and families
- Prison and community-based relationship and parenting programmes
- The national Prisoners' Families Helpline and website

## Where does the money go?

**Last year Prisoners' Sunday raised over £40,373 which contributed to:**

Emergency welfare support to **508** women and men leaving prison and their families – ensuring people had a bed for the night, food, and other essentials.

Supporting **360** volunteers who undertook **10,281** hours of work.

Training **147** brave new volunteers who will be joining Pact over the next few weeks/months.

Befriending support for **101** prisoners' families, helping them at a time of crisis to cope with the custodial sentence of a loved one.

## HIGH IMPACT

**Our services for prisoners and their families are based on Ministry of Justice research which shows that maintaining family ties reduces the risk of prisoners committing further crime after release by 39%.**

# Your Parish and Prisoners' Sunday

We ask you to:

- 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 awareness within the parish community.
- Encourage parishioners to consider whether they might feel called to volunteer for Pact, from home or in a local Pact service.



## Your Catholic Legacy

Please invite people to consider Pact when making a Will. Pact are members of 'Your Catholic Legacy'.

[www.yourcatholiclegacy.org.uk](http://www.yourcatholiclegacy.org.uk)

## Prisons Week

We have also included a **weekly prayer guide** for Prisons' Week, the ecumenical week of prayer and awareness.



Name of Church/Parish:

Contact name for Parish:

Our Church/Parish has raised  for Prisoners' Sunday 2021.

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**

Please include all gift aid responses you have also received.





Prisoners • Families • Communities  
A Fresh Start Together

Pact - Prison Advice & Care Trust  
29 Peckham Road  
London  
SE5 8UA

Tel: 020 7735 9535

Email: [parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk)  
Social Media: @prisonadvice

[www.prisonadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk)

Pact is a registered in England & Wales as a charity (no. 219278)  
and as a company limited by guarantee (no. 356443)