



# Prisoners' Sunday

## Parish Pack



## Prisoners' Sunday:

*"This day... with me... paradise"*

Luke 23:43

# 8th October 2023

## 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 on 8th October 2023. Pact is the national Catholic charity providing support to prisoners and their families. Pact works in court, in prison, on release, and in communities in many parts of England and Wales.**

In this the charity's 125th year, Pact continues to rely strongly on the support of volunteers as well as the prayer and generosity of parishioners. You will find resources on Pact's website to help your parish mark Prisoners' Sunday.

In response to his appeal, Our Lord made a promise to the convicted criminal crucified beside him, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.'

The Gospel message on Prisoners' Sunday reminds us that Jesus is the cornerstone of our lives and of our communities. Alongside our concern for the wellbeing of those in prison, we remember that families in our parishes and neighbourhoods may be enduring anxious worry, isolation and perhaps hardship while a loved one is incarcerated.

It is good to know that Pact is there for people of all faiths and none, supporting prisoners and their families on our behalf and with our help. I encourage you to play your part in this work of the Gospel for the common good of all.

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster  
President of Pact**



**My name is  
Sister Hilda Baxter,  
I am a Sister of  
Saint Joseph of Peace.**



**Recently I became a volunteer with Pact. Imprisonment can cause great stress and anxiety to those in prison and to their families. Pact facilitates Family Days when prisoners and their families can enjoy quality time together. I help on those Family Days.**

The prison building can be daunting and overpowering. The procedure to get inside, to the Visits Hall, can be overwhelming. Fortunately for all visitors Pact renders a wonderful service. Their Family & Visitors' Centre is outside the prison wall and all visitors can go there first to receive a warm welcome from Pact staff and volunteers and help in sorting out identification papers and other regulations.

I am always inspired by the compassionate and courteous approach of Pact staff when dealing with visitors who arrive in clothing contrary to the prison's dress code. Some plead that "my partner likes me in this outfit" or "he bought it for me." The staff handle these situations with great skill and kindness.

Visitors then proceed to the main prison gate where they undergo

thorough checks and may be searched. By the time they reach the Visits Hall some, especially the grandparents, children and first-time visitors, are quite unnerved. Pact staff and volunteers are there again with a smile and a kind word - and refreshments from a café within the Hall. I find this part of my work very rewarding and worthwhile.

We prepare the Hall thoughtfully in advance with games, books and activities. I thoroughly enjoy watching the children wait in joyful expectation for the door to open and their dads to come through into the Hall. One of the prisoners told me that during the few hours with his family he feels he is not in prison.

I really enjoy my encounter with the groups as I mingle and chat and help where needed. The children can be quite entertaining when they ask: "How old are you, Miss? Do you work here? Do you get paid? Oh you should get paid for the work you do."

I feel privileged to be part of the work of Pact and I pray that my contribution will be of mutual help.

## A message from Pact CEO, Andy Keen-Downs



This photograph captures the humbling moment I brought prisoners and their families to Pope Francis' attention. I am holding an image of Mary Untier of Knots. In terrible Italian, I asked the Holy Father to bless the image on behalf of men and women in prison in England & Wales. Pope Francis, who of course washes the feet of prisoners on Maundy Thursday, smiled when he understood what I was saying and raised his hand to touch and bless the picture. I asked him to pray for all who work with people in prison too.



An image of Mary untying the seemingly intractable 'knots' in our lives may be especially appropriate for those whose difficult lives and poor choices have led them to a prison cell, and for their families too. It certainly feels fitting for those of us who as staff or volunteers in Pact, strive on a daily basis to make a difference in our prisons and communities.

Pact is 125 years' old this year. It is hard to put into words what this symbolic and spiritual support from Pope Francis for Pact's work means for us and for the people we serve. I am as ever deeply grateful for the continuing support of our Catholic communities who have helped enable us to grow and to keep on developing the ways in which we support our brothers and sisters affected by imprisonment.

As we go about our work, and through our links with chaplaincy, Pact's Faith in Action team will bring the image and Pope Francis' blessing, to men and women inside, as well as to our Catholic and Christian supporters and friends. For those who are strengthened by their Christian faith as they journey through the criminal justice system, we hope the image and its story will enable them to feel greater closeness to the whole Church and through the blessing of Pope Francis, to Jesus himself.

How wonderful it would be if every parish in England & Wales marked Prisoners' Sunday as a sign that people who genuinely want to make a fresh start after a prison sentence, and their families in our communities, are truly welcome and accepted by all of us.

## Pact's Faith in Action Team

Theresa Alessandro and Marie Norbury offer your parish community practical ways to support prisoners and their families - and resources for prayer and reflection.



### Take a look at these web pages:

#### Parishes and Groups

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

Find out how Pact Parish Reps can help keep prisoners and their families in the hearts and minds of the whole parish.

#### JustPeople Workshops

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

Book to join a JustPeople Workshop. Reflect on scripture and Catholic Social Teaching through the lens of imprisonment.

#### Fresh Start Newsletter

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

Stay up to date with our work and upcoming events in your diocese by signing up to receive Fresh Start – our quarterly newsletter for Catholic and Christian supporters of Pact.

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

### Prisoners' Sunday Bidding Prayers: Use these at Mass

God of mercy, you offer freedom to all people. We pray for those in prison and for their children and families. Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist. May your love overcome struggle and heartache and bring new life.

Lord God, we commend to you all who work or volunteer, in courts, prisons and communities. May they know your presence with them as they work and may their efforts inspire us to share your love ever more widely.

## Prisoners' Sunday FAQs

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

Yes please! The support of Catholic parishes makes a huge difference and is very much appreciated. Please do not send cash in the post. Cheques should be made payable to "Pact" or Prison Advice & Care Trust and can be sent in the Freepost GiftAid Envelopes enclosed with this pack. If you would like our bank details, please email your request to [parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk) and one of the team will take care of this.

If you have an electronic collection plate, you may be able to set this up so that relevant donations come directly to Pact. Again, please email us at [parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk) to discuss this further!

### 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 day please choose one convenient to your community. If you have a moment to let us know your date that would be helpful but do not worry too much - we understand how busy you are and thank you for taking the time to acknowledge prisoners and their families.

### Can we arrange a speaker from Pact for next year's Prisoners' Sunday?

Yes, we would love to help with that. We have staff, volunteers and contacts nationwide who would be very happy to come and speak at a service. It really brings our work to life! We would match your location to that of a suitable speaker. Again, an email to [parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk) is the best way to start the wheels rolling on this.



## Our impact over the last year – a snapshot

Pact staff & volunteers supported **more than 100,000 prison visits**.

We delivered more than **890 hours of support** to families through our national befriending service.

We **answered 40,000 calls** to the Prisoners' Families Helpline - 13,700 more phone than the previous year.

Our **Welfare Fund awarded 289 grants**, which have directly supported a total of 120 children. An additional 123 children have been indirectly supported via their parent receiving a grant.

Pact's Court Service now offers **support in 11 courts**, having rebuilt in the aftermath of the pandemic.

From January to June 2023, **164 families benefitted from practical and emotional support in the Courts**, compared to 56 families between January and October 2022 when pandemic restrictions were slowly being lifted.

# Ways your parish can Pray – Act – Give:

- Please hold a **second collection** for Pact this Prisoners' Sunday, or on a suitable Sunday of your choosing. See also FAQs.
- Use the resources in this guide and on our website during your Mass on Prisoners' Sunday, to **raise lasting awareness** within the parish community.
- Take a look at our Prisoners' Sunday events guide on our website and consider **holding an event** for your parish or group:  
[www.prisonadvice.org.uk/ps-events](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/ps-events)
- Encourage parishioners to consider whether they might be called to **volunteer for Pact**, from home or in a local Pact service.
- Please invite people to **consider leaving a gift to Pact when making their will**. Pact are members of Your Catholic Legacy -  
[www.yourcatholiclegacy.org.uk](http://www.yourcatholiclegacy.org.uk)



Name of Church/Parish:

Contact name for Parish:

Our Church/Parish has raised  for Prisoners' Sunday 2023.

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**

Remember to include all gift aid responses you have received. Please do not send cash.

