



# CCJF News

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This issue of CCJF News contains reports from the Network Meeting held on 4 March 2009

## Speaking Truth to Power

Some time between now and next July, there is going to be a General Election. Crime & Justice will be a hot topic, and the political parties will be working out how to position themselves on this agenda. The rhetoric usually gets tougher, as politicians play to 'middle England' and accuse one another of either being soft on crime, or just incompetent.

Of course, it will be happening during the worst global financial crisis for decades. Parties will be facing huge pressures to bring down taxes to help working people survive the downturn. A recent report in the press spoke about leaks from the Home Office, predicting that the financial crisis would trigger an upsurge in crime on our streets. Others have argued that it is

not the economy per se that drives crime, but inequality.

What is particularly interesting about this election is that one of the biggest parties that younger voters will belong to, according to ICM, the polling organisation, will be the 'no party party'. Old class-based and 'tribal' party affiliations are disappearing, as younger voters become more interested in single issue concerns, such as the environment. Labour are as we know struggling in the polls, but 'a week is a long time in politics', and it would be a brave person who would predict the outcome of an election. Which of course makes it all the more interesting, and all the more important that people with a view get their message across.

It seems to me that at

election time, it is quite common for political parties to want to be associated with people who 'represent' the Christian perspective. Unlike some previous elections, where politicians courted celebrities, these are more sober times. 'Britannia' isn't so much cool, as broke, if not 'broken' as Ian Duncan Smith would have it. So, the endorsement or support of serious minded people of faith matters to politicians at election time. Christians worry about the secularisation of Society, but there are still a lot of us around, and we tend to vote. So folks, we have power. Question is, do we want to use it?

### A United Christian Voice

I would like to see the Churches Criminal Justice Forum develop a policy paper for the po-

litical parties. I think we need a clear 'rallying cry' in terms of the kind of Justice we want to see; a Justice that Heals. I think we should argue forcibly against the building of Titan prisons, and for a greater use of community-based programmes and healthcare-based institutions to meet the needs of people with mental illness and addiction problems. I think we should argue for support for faith communities who want to deliver services based on an understanding of the need for relational support, and building 'community'. I would like to see us briefing politicians, policy ad-

visors, think tanks, and also demonstrating our unity through the media.

I gave a short presentation on this topic at the March 2009 Network Meeting where it was warmly received by those present. But the meeting was not representative of the whole Network. Therefore I would like to bring out these ideas to the wider Network in the hope that people will come forward with ideas. It is important that whatever we do, can be done at high level, particularly in Westminster and Whitehall, but also that we can provide some tools for local churches

and communities to campaign with a united Christian voice. The Executive of CCJF will of course need to discuss these ideas with Churches Together, as proper consultation with the various churches and denominations and the support of our leaders is vital. These proposals are offered in a personal capacity, from me to all of you, and I hope that some of you may have the time and energy to respond.

**Andy Keen-Downs**  
CCJF Executive Member  
& Director of pact

To offer financial support:  
[www.prisonerspenfriends.org](http://www.prisonerspenfriends.org)  
and/or contact Gwyn Morgan at Penfriends, PO box 33460, London SW18 5YB, 0208 870 6939,  
[gwyn.morgan@prisonerspenfriends.org](mailto:gwyn.morgan@prisonerspenfriends.org).

To see what prisoners say about the work of Prisoners' Penfriends, visit the website.



## Prisoners' Penfriends

Gwyn Morgan, Director of Prisoners' Penfriends, spoke about the life-affirming work of this small, thriving, professional and very effective charity, which is managing to reach a large number of lonely men and women in prison.

What they do is simple: they make it possible for volunteers in the community to write letters to prison inmates without having to reveal their addresses.

Prisoners' Penfriends employ just one person, who works in a shed with a phone and a computer. Since they began forwarding letters in 2004, they have expanded exponentially: they have written over 5,000 letters to over 300 prisoners in over 80 prisons. They operate with the consent and co-operation of the Prison Service, at national level, working closely with prison chaplains. As part of preserving both anonymity for vol-

unteers and support from Prison Governors, all letters are checked and logged.

Prisoners' Penfriends is funded by a combination of private donations, mostly from individuals and a time-limited grant from a single donor – but this has now come to an end. They don't need much – but, without it, they just can't carry on. Any donation at all would be extremely welcome.

# Mental Health in the criminal justice system

At the Network Meeting Christopher Jones gave an update on mental health issues in the criminal justice system, drawing attention to three reports published in February: (1) *Too Little Too Late* from the Prison Reform Trust, based on data from Independent Monitoring Boards: see at [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/standard.asp?id=1686](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/standard.asp?id=1686)

(2) The Policy Exchange report by Charlie Brooker and Ben Ullmann, *Inside Out: Solutions for mental health in the criminal justice system* [www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/Inside Out.pdf](http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/Inside%20Out.pdf)

(3) *Diversion: A Better Way for Criminal Justice and Mental Health* from the Sainsbury Centre for mental Health [www.scmh.org.uk/pdfs/Diversion.pdf](http://www.scmh.org.uk/pdfs/Diversion.pdf)

With Lord Bradley's independent review of diversion of people with mental health problems from prison and the criminal justice system due to appear shortly, it is striking that three re-

ports from different quarters show a large measure of agreement on the problems being experienced and the solutions required. The PRT report finds high levels of serious mental illness among prisoners, combined with inability to conduct full psychiatric assessment and inadequate training among prison staff. Independent Monitoring Boards expressed particular concerns about care of women, older prisoners, prisoners with learning disabilities and remand prisoners, delays in transfers out of prison and the adequacy of resettlement arrangements.

The three reports converge in some of their practical recommendations, notably the need for nationally-led diversion and liaison schemes at police stations and courts, better information and clearer lines of responsibility in providing mental health care in the community, and more effective arrangements for commissioning and monitoring of mental health care in prisons.

The Policy Exchange and Sainsbury Centre reports offer highly detailed analysis of diversion at every stage from arrest to resettlement. It is clear that better design and co-ordination of services would not only relieve and prevent suffering but would save wasteful expenditure resulting from failure to intervene earlier and more effectively.

The challenge facing Lord Bradley in recommending reform is great: it will require political leadership in a not particularly popular cause, provision of resources against a background of financial stringency, and complex organisational changes on a demanding scale. However, in tackling this long-standing and scandalous failure to meet human need, Christians must pray, and work, for a miracle.

**Next CCJF Network Meeting: will be on Wednesday 28 October 2009 in Birmingham.**

Full details including venue and speakers will be in the June Newsletter.

**Speaking Truth to Power:** please send your responses to Andy Keen-Downs c/o CCJF (details as below)

**CCJF News:** we now hope to publish this three more times in 2009. If you would like to use it to publicise your own events, please send the information to CCJF. Publication dates and deadlines for copy are:

Friday 12 June for July News

Friday 4 September for October News

Friday 13 November for December News

CCJF is a network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. Its purpose is to uphold Christian values in the field of criminal justice, to promote awareness of criminal justice issues in the churches and to make representations to Government on behalf of the churches. It advocates the use of restorative justice, supports Christians working in the criminal justice system, and promotes community projects to reduce offending.

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**Promoting good practice in criminal justice.**

