

Lay Ministry in Prison and Beyond

Funding Report to Bernard Mizeki Trust

In 2016 I received a grant from the Bernard Mizeki Trust to support my volunteer placement in the Chaplaincy at HMP XXXX during my training to become a Pastoral Assistant. The grant paid for childcare for my child whilst I did my volunteer placement inside the prison, and also covered the first leg of my ministry after I was licensed. I am very grateful for this grant support, which provided the practical solution I needed (childcare) to complete my training and get started in pastoral work.

During my training placement, I accompanied the Church of England Chaplain on pastoral visits to prisoners each week. We often had 20 names of prisoners who had asked for a visit, plus those identified at risk of self harm or suicide, and all those in the segregation unit. Due to the nature of prison, nearly everyone we visited was in the midst of a traumatic situation. We spoke with men who had been assaulted by other prisoners, those who were in withdrawal from drug addiction following their arrest, those whose children had been taken into care due to their chaotic lifestyles, and those who had learned of the death of a loved one whilst they were inside and unable to go to the funeral.

Through these visits, I saw that the simple act of pastoral visiting, listening and offering prayer - which we take for granted in a parish setting - is a precious gift in the prison, and can have a significant impact on the men during times of personal crisis. On one occasion we visited a young man in his twenties whose mother had just died. He was very thin and emaciated, his legs twitching and moving at random from drug withdrawal. We listened as he talked about his mother, and it was a privilege to offer to pray with him before we left. I saw how vital it was that a chaplain could visit him in private and provide a safe space for grief to be expressed.

I gradually learned that the goal in prison ministry is not to “sort things out”, provide answers or wrestle problems into submission. It is to be a bearer of Christ’s love and light within all the problems. Chaplains are not in prison to “reform” or “save” the men from their life situations and patterns of crime, but to stand compassionately with them as they seek God within their own stories and crimes.

In 2017 I sensed a call to use my pastoral training in my everyday life, amongst the other local parents I found myself bumping into at playgroups and in the park. So I focussed my time on being with other parents at our local children’s centre. This was a bit like being an invisible chaplain mixed in with being a mum. In particular I spent time with some single mothers who had experienced domestic abuse and were moving on from that. It made me aware of how much support I have from my husband and my church family, yet even with all this support there are times when parenting feels overwhelming. I had great respect for those who were facing much harder challenges, with less support, and I was grateful for the chance to walk alongside and offer a listening ear for a season.

My family also made some small ministry ‘experiments’ in our block of flats, inspired by reading *The Irresistible Revolution* by Shaine Claibourne, which encourages Christians to

share their lives and possessions. We set up a 'sharing cupboard' on our landing and filled it with baby equipment and toys, then put notes into our neighbours' letterboxes inviting them to borrow anything they needed. Through this, we met a young European couple who had recently had a baby and were missing their family back home. Over time we became good friends, and they joined in with the mini community events we hosted in our flat such as an Easter Egg Hunt for the children.

We have since become more involved with family ministry at our church, and I am now training as a lay pioneer minister, further exploring how to develop connection points between our daily lives and our church. I am very grateful to the Bernard Mizeki Trust for helping me to get going in exploring lay ministry, and I have loved my journey so far over the past three years. I look forward to what else is to come.