



The Rev Judith Swaine with Bishop Christopher outside HMP Isle of Wight on the occasion of her licensing

# Why ministry in prisons is so important

**IT'S the time of the year when we think about our ministry in prisons.**

Prisons Week happens this year from October 9-15, and is a week when Christians are asked to think about and pray for those who are detained in our prisons, their families, their victims and their victim's families, and those who work and volunteer in prisons.

The chaplain at HMP Isle of Wight, the Rev Judith Swaine, has been working there for two-and-a-half years. Before that, she was a volunteer in Kingston Prison in Portsmouth for six years and spent seven months as a sessional chaplain at HMP Winchester.

"Each of the prisons is different in many ways but what connects them is that they all have the duty of care for those who are all someone's son," she said. "Some will also be fathers, grandfathers, husbands or partners, brothers,

uncles and nephews.

"That duty of care extends past trying to ensure their physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing to also helping them to come to terms with and accept the responsibility for their crimes and aid them in turning their lives around so they can leave prison when the time comes and be valuable law-abiding members of society.

"The road these men go down to try to achieve this is long and hard, and some in society would say 'and so it should be.' Whatever the views in society about these men and what they have been accused of, it serves no one any good if they are returned to our communities in the same mind set in which they left them.

"As a chaplain my role is pastoral and spiritual, and most of the men I deal with here day to day seem to want nothing more than to turn their lives around, put their past behind them and give

something back.

"Some do not expect to be forgiven or even think they should be, and many find it almost impossible to forgive themselves. Some do the deep and heart searching courses required of them and come out the other end different people.

"Some come in to prison with a faith already, others find faith while they are in prison. At the beginning of May I baptised two in our chapel here, and in September Bishop Christopher came in to baptise three more and confirm six across the two sites.

"All those prisoners here who have a faith, whatever their faith is, are in agreement that their faith has been important in seeing them through their sentence."

Judith would love to speak about her work as a prison chaplain in your church. If you would like to invite her, please contact her at HMP Isle of Wight.

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## Time for new beginnings

NEW beginnings are in the air. With autumn comes a new school and university term, a fresh opportunity to engage with learning, new teachers, new friends.

Change is also in the air at Bishopsgrrove as I welcomed my new chaplain, Sarah Archer, last month. Change is exciting and daunting; it is also essential at the right time in order for any individual or organization to develop.

We all feel for the nervousness of children as they start a new school and for students as they leave home for the first time and perhaps even come to a new country to study. It's an experience that continues into adulthood as we begin new professional roles and personal relationships.

We hope and trust that the benefits will outweigh the worry, creating an opportunity for new friendships and for a new rhythm of life that will in



## the last word

by Bishop Christopher

the long term benefit everyone.

But change for its own sake can be highly destructive. The timing of new beginnings is crucial. Experts continue to debate the optimum age for a child to begin education in order to maximise their potential.

And one of my roles when appointing new clergy to parishes is to discern when the parish and the minister is ready for a new beginning, or when further time is needed to prepare and pray, to heal or to persevere.

Excitedly pursuing new

beginnings when what is called for is stability can be as destructive as hanging on to a relationship or a role when what is needed is the courage of a fresh start. As the famous preacher puts it in Ecclesiastes, "for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven." Discernment is everything.

So as the summer break recedes into memory and our schools and universities start up in earnest, I offer you a challenge: what time is this for you? What is this moment for?