



Baptisms in my local prison

By volunteer Prison Chaplain and retired Baptist minister
Pam Bryan

When I retired from church-based Baptist ministry, I moved back to my hometown of Leicester and a friend took me along to a Sunday service at a young offenders' institute in Leicester. I found it very moving and so I went to see the chaplain and asked if they needed volunteers. He said he yes, that would be good, but to come back in six years' time, as they were knocking the place down and building a larger prison for 1700 adult men.

So six years later, and well into retirement, I did!

Even as I was driving along the road which led to the prison and could see the buildings in the distance, I felt drawn to ministry. When I arrived to see the managing chaplain, I found I was there before any prisoners had arrived. I went to the second ever service. There were 12 men in the chapel, as at that time there were only 128 men in the prison.

There are now more than 60 men worshipping in the Protestant service on a Sunday and others at the Saturday Catholic service, plus midweek activities such as Bible studies.

I've been taking one service a month since then, with someone from my church leading worship and we offer the men prayer at the end. We have been privileged to pray for so many things going on in their lives.

One of the people who takes a service on a different week is an evangelist, and she leads people to the Lord. There is also an *Alpha* course and others have come to know Jesus through that.

When people ask about baptism, they come to me - the Baptist minister. The first baptism was in June 2024, when the prison had been open for about a year and four men were baptised. The second was in December just before Christmas, when two men were baptised. There had been three, but then one had early release.

When I ask their stories, some are rekindling faith from their childhood and others have no faith background but have found their way to the chapel and then to Christ. We use *Christianity Explored for Prisons* as the baptismal classes, then we can be sure people are grounded in their faith, as they work through Mark's gospel. It was so good to hear from someone recently that he could see God changing both the way he thought and the things he did, and was anticipating how life would be so different in the future.

Baptismal day is exciting, as we borrow a small pool from a local church and baptise by immersion.



Pam with Garry, another volunteer, on baptismal day. The portable pool is in the background.

I run some other courses at the prison as well and I often say I wish I had known about this ministry 40 years ago, the harvest is so plentiful and the workers few! I say to anyone praying about what God is calling them to next, contact the Prison Fellowship and see how you can be involved in what they are doing in a prison near you.

Pam Bryan has served with BMS in DR Congo (Zaire) training Baptist ministers. She is also a Baptist minister and spent 13 years as Community Minister at Purley Baptist Church before returning to her home town of Leicester to retire.

Find out more about the Prison Fellowship on their website: prisonfellowship.org.uk