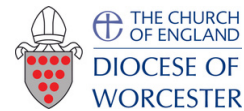


Worcester Diocesan Criminal Justice Affairs Group

Prayer Guide - February 2025



The Diocese of Worcester hosts a group whose focus is criminal justice and offers a faith perspective on criminal justice matters & raises awareness of the issues.

CJAG offers this bi-monthly prayer guide which we hope will be useful for personal & intercessory prayer in local parishes. Do pass it on to those who would be interested and encourage its usage. Welcome to the CJAG Prayer Guide for February.

Young people in the criminal justice system

The United Nations recommends 14 yrs as the minimum age of criminal responsibility - the global average is 11.3 yrs; in England & Wales it is 10yrs. Evidence demonstrates that criminalisation of younger children has negative consequences for them, including increasing the likelihood of future criminal acts. Last year there were just under 8,300 child first time entrants, with black children over-represented across most stages of the youth justice system.

Almost two thirds of children remanded to custody received a non-custodial outcome (the average time from offence to completion was 225 days). Most young people were arrested for violence against the person offences (almost a third), followed by theft (18%). In one study, 71% were suspected/confirmed to have been abused & nearly half had witnessed domestic violence.

Researchers have consistently highlighted parental & educational neglect as important determinants of decisions to engage in anti-social and criminal behaviours. Current division of government departmental responsibilities leads to vulnerable children being seen in a punitive light, being criminalised rather than safeguarded. Inspectorate reports state that prison is no place for a child & that they continue to experience significant harm & neglect there. 70-90% of children at all points in the CJS have some form of special educational needs & disability.

Heavenly Father, as your son blessed the children who came to him, look with compassion on all children and young people in the criminal justice system especially those who are vulnerable, at-risk, abused, misguided and anxious; and any who have offended and are lost and frightened. Lead us to create a world in which every child may grow into a happy and fulfilled adult, and equip your Church to help young people to feel special and loved.

Amen

Especially we pray for:

- Vulnerable children needing help & support rather than punishment.
- Children who have known nothing but rejection & abuse & have no place to call home.
- A compassionate society that recognises the need to treat those under 18 as children rather than mini adults, providing what is required to stop the cycle of reoffending.
- Those who experience fractured family relationships exacerbated by young offenders being placed in penal facilities a long distance from home.
- An end to the high level of violence & disorder in Young Offender Institutes (YOIs) & for those who feel unsafe within them.
- An improvement in the standards & practice within YOIs, incl. education provision.
- Those experiencing long hours locked up in cells, & feeling the impact of the increasing use of solitary confinement for young people in YOIs as punishment
- That YOIs may be replaced by smaller secure homes around the country, closer to children's families
- For all who work within the criminal justice system & in police custody with young people, for compassion & wisdom.