

# Message from Bishop Rachel

## 8 October 2024



As we pause to acknowledge that yesterday was [exactly one year since the horrendous terrorist attacks on Israel by Hamas](#) and all that has continued to unfold since then, I am convinced that everyone reading this would say ‘Amen’ to seeing an end to human suffering.

Yet as I look at the places of conflict in our world, particularly at present in Sudan and the Middle East, I am very aware of words from different leaders about retaliation and punishment. When the word ‘justice’ has been articulated it has so often carried echoes of vengeance, and there appears to be an absence of words of mercy, and a lack of commitment to the sort of peace which will enable lives and communities to flourish. It is as if violence will somehow eradicate the wrong and bring about order.

It seems to me that this is not so different from what I hear in so much of the public narrative around crime and prison. Again and again I hear people emphasising the desire for punishment, living with a false perception that this will somehow make our streets safer and our communities stronger. The evidence does not support this and overall our prison system is not transforming the lives of offenders or the victims of crime. It is not bringing peace, order and transformation to our communities.

I am always very clear that I do not condone crime, but a stark focus on punishment and retaliation will not bring about restoration.

For over 40 years, the second Sunday in October has been designated as Prisons Sunday, and on that day and in the week which follows, the 25+ organisations that support Prisons Week are committed to seeing an end to the human suffering caused by crime and imprisonment.

The starting place is compassion, from the Latin ‘passio’ to suffer, and ‘com’ together with. And in the days of Prisons Week we are invited to stand alongside and with those impacted by the criminal justice system, as hearts and minds are opened to enter into people’s pain, struggles, fears and longings.

If you would like to join in, there are resources [here](#) encouraging us to pray not only for offenders and victims of crime (recognising that many people in prison are both) but also for families, friends, prison staff, chaplains, police, probation and all who make decisions which impact people’s lives. There may be those in your local communities for whom you can pray by name.

Compassion is not a passive word but a word which implies a response. As we are moved by different stories and circumstances of struggle and longing, may the Holy Spirit prompt us not only to pray but also stir us to act in practical ways, however large or small, as we offer to God who we are, our context, time, resources and voice.

+ Rachel