



Action

by

Christians

against

torture

June/July 2008

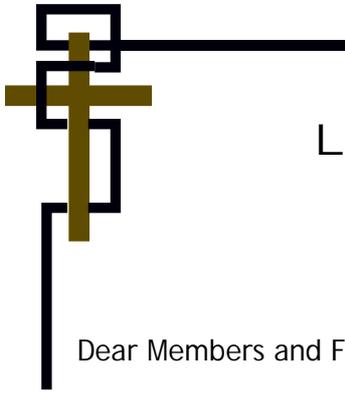
'A Powerhouse of Prayer'

*All that is required for the triumph of evil
is that
good men do nothing"*

Edmund Burke

In this Mailing: -

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Letter from the Committee

Dear Members and Friends,

If you read your newspaper, it seems, sadly, that torture and inhuman treatment of prisoners are almost the flavour of the month.

We do not use that phrase flippantly. Torture in some country has been mentioned in the UK national press almost every day for several months. It might be Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Burma, Ethiopia, or Saudi Arabia. Guantanamo is a by-word for abuse and man's inhumanity to man. It is almost a case of 'you name a country and you will find it there'.

This prompts us to wonder what effect, if any, our campaigns have. Do our letters produce results? Are they ever read? Is the effort we put in to write and protest against torture really worth it?

Doubt is a healthy aspect of faith. If our faith were always strong, always consistent, always the same, we would be right to ask the question 'Is it really alive?' Anything which is alive changes: it grows, matures, reduces, weakens, and gets stronger again. Doubts creep in, frustrations often abound. This all shows that our faith in a living, but unchanging- natured God, is alive and well.

At the national Committee on 6th May (the week before Pentecost), we read a few verses from the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles before the meeting started. One of these contained the words 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you'. It is not always easy to convince ourselves that the power from God is always there, for the asking and free for the taking. What a marvellous gift! It helps us to pray for the tortured, to feel for them in their shackles and their pain; it helps us to continue our campaigning and 'above all to take risks for God' as the London Yearly Meeting of Quakers in 1986 enjoined us to do.

One of the 'risks' we are taking is continuing our activities, our expansion and diversity without a chairman. As we reported in the last Newsletter, Rev. Tom Bayliss has had to resign because of pressure of other duties and family commitments. It is an act of faith to continue, to believe we shall very soon have a chairperson and that the power we celebrated at Pentecost will make provision for us.

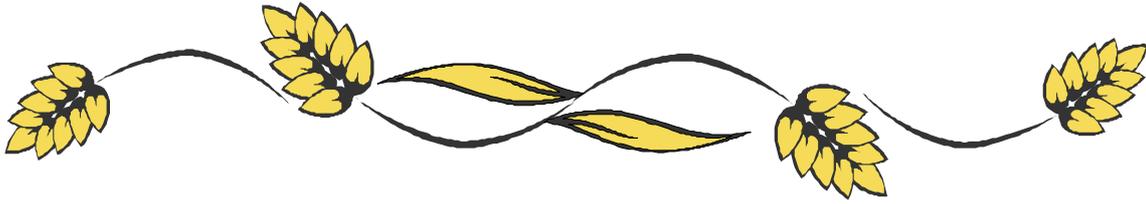
ACAT is a vital charity, doing vital work in an indifferent and, often, very cruel world. As you know, our objective is to have a member or group of members in every church of every denomination in the country. We have a good way yet to go and that will mean 'taking risks for God'.

We pledge our support for the cause of eliminating torture and all your efforts to bring it about. Thank you all for your hard work, your appeal writing, your praying and your giving.

May God richly Bless you. *Your ACAT (UK) Committee.*

APPEALS

**THE APPEALS ARE AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS OF
ACAT UK ONLY**



GOOD NEWS!

SAMI AL-HAJ, GUANTANAMO (Feb/March Newsletter)

Further information

Sami al-Haj, an al-Jazeera reporter, was suddenly released from Guantanamo on May 1st. He had been held for almost six years. A Sudanese, he studied English, computer technology and photography in India. He moved to the United Arab Emirates and then to Qatar with his family when he became a trainee journalist with Al-Jazeera. He was sent on an assignment with a camera crew to Afghanistan in September 2001, shortly after the 9/11 attacks and was then asked to return in December. He was arrested by Pakistani police near the border and taken by US forces to Bagram airbase, notorious for the torture of detainees, before being flown out hooded and shackled to Guantanamo.

By 2005 he had been subjected to 130 separate interrogations, the aim of which, according to Clive Stafford Smith, from Reprieve, was to get him to link al-Jazeera with Osama bin Laden. He chronicled conditions at Guantanamo - those who died, attempted to commit suicide, or who went on hunger strike, of prisoners humiliated - this information was then passed to organisations such as Reprieve and Cage Prisoners.

On January 7 2007 he went on hunger strike and was subjected to force feeding. He described this in detail to lawyers from Reprieve - being strapped into what was called "the torture chair" and the incredibly painful process involved in force feeding a prisoner twice a day for over a year. He made sketches of what happened during this procedure, called "Sketches of My Nightmare". The sketches would not have passed the censors so he was asked to describe them in great detail. These descriptions were then passed to a cartoonist, who was asked by Reprieve to interpret them in cartoon form. These catch the grimness of life in Guantanamo and the horror of force feeding.

Our thoughts and prayers go with him as he starts his new life with his family and colleagues.

REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

DR. MOHAMMED ALI ABU RAZIZAH, SAUDI ARABIA, aged 60, psychologist and lecturer at UM Qura University, Mekkah, arrested in Febuary by "Vice Police" (CPVPV) and severely beaten for 3 hours for being "in illegal solitude with a woman", sentenced after unfair trial to 8 months imprisonment and 150 lashes; had previously openly criticised the work of CPVPV.

DR MAGDA ADLY and DR MONA HAMED, EGYPT, from the El Nadim Centre for Psychological Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, were assaulted inside a courthouse on April 30 - Dr Magda was hospitalised; a man confessed he acted on the orders of the Chief Intelligence Office from Kafr El Dawwar Police; they were due to testify in a case involving the torture of members of a family by the local police.

UMESH LAMA, NEPAL, aged 28, arrested in Kathmandu on 1 April, and repeatedly tortured by the police; he has suffered from kidney failure as a result of his treatment; his wife is fighting very hard to get justice for him.

LAWYERS AND TRIAL OBSERVERS, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, involved in a high profile appeal before a military court of 4 men sentenced to death after grossly unfair trial for the murder of radio journalist, Serge Maheshe; they (lawyers etc) have received specific death threats; there have been allegations that the military were implicated in the murder.

KAMAL UDDIN, ABUL KHAYER, BANGLADESH, arrested by soldiers of Bangladesh Rifles searching for drugs; both men were tied up and severely beaten at the home of Kamal Uddin; they, together with Rahima Begum (Abul's wife) and 3 year old son, were taken to the police station; Kamal was later found dead at a nearby hospital; the others remain in police custody, including small son.

SAMI AL-HAJ, recently freed from Guantanamo and others released over recent months; all suffer severely because of what has happened to them since their arrest and rendition to Guantanamo; pray for healing for them. Also **MUSTAFA AIT IDIR**, still held in Guantanamo, all others held with him and those held in other secret places of detention and 'ghost houses'.

FOR THOSE AWAITING BEHEADING IN SAUDI ARABIA, particularly the large number from Syria and other countries.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ
Thou wast poor and in misery,
a captive and forsaken as I am.
Thou knowest all man's distress;
Thou abidest with me
when all others have deserted me.
Thou willest that I should know Thee
and turn to Thee.
Lord, I hear thy call and follow Thee.
Do Thou help me.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Letters and Papers
From Prison - 1945



PRAYER VIGIL

Information was given in the April/May edition of the Newsletter about United Nations Torture Victims Day on 26th June and the Prayer Vigil to be held on 28/29th June. Enclosed you will find a simple booklet of Prayers, together with the names of individuals, situations etc which can be used in conjunction with the prayers. Do please find time to spend a few minutes to remember the tortured, their families, and the torturers at this time. Remember prayer is of vital importance in our work - prayer and campaigning go hand in hand.

It is hoped that as in previous years there will be a great wave of prayer for the tortured round the world on that night. If you, your group, your church etc decide to take part in the Vigil, even if only for a very short time, do please let us know at the office so that we can give details to ACAT France. ACAT France would like to know who will be taking part, the numbers (if possible) and the time(s). You can phone, write a quick note, or send an email.

In addition to the booklet of Prayers, a service to mark Torture Victims Day, is available, together with Prayer and Meditation (this also includes poems, readings etc) for Group (congregation) and Individual Use and also Prayer and Intercession for Group (congregation) and Individual Use. It is also hoped that churches will pray for the tortured during intercessions at services on 29 June. Materials and postage are free.

"We know in our experience what it has meant to be upheld by the love and prayers of so many around the world. It has been almost a physical sensation, this being borne up by those fervent prayers." Desmond Tutu

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SOS Torture

At present, 32 ACAT members belong to the SOS scheme, which has the task of making appeals to the authorities on behalf of victims of harassment, 'disappearance', arbitrary detention, torture, unfair trial - in countries which are all subject to international law on the treatment of prisoners, the conduct of trials, etc., and are nearly all signatories to relevant UN Conventions.

These appeals are in addition to those, which accompany the ACAT bi-monthly mailing and of course can follow much more promptly on the receipt of information.

In April two or three members responded to each appeal reaching me by e-mail from the observatory and from OMCT - altogether 67 appeals reached at least one address in the country concerned, with a copy to the Embassy or High Commission in London. This scheme is at the heart of ACAT's work - so members of ACAT are encouraged to join. Forms are available from the Office, or from Margaret Russell (Membership Coordinator).

Anselm

PRISONER SUPPORT NOTES

Thanks to the generosity of our members I have been able to forward a considerable amount to Father Bohan for the benefit of some of the men held in Kabwe. So far as I am aware, the distribution will be made on Sunday the 25th May, just before Father Bohan leaves Zambia for his customary summer break.

Having said that, I have experienced difficulties with regard to the donations that I have received for men in prisons outside Kabwe, namely, Kitwe, Luanshya and Lusaka. You will recall that the Reverend Happy Chileshe originally undertook to receive and distribute donations intended for men held in these places, and indeed, he did so at the end of 2007. He was subsequently moved to Lusaka; a city being at a considerable distance from the other prisons that I have mentioned, but he informed me that he wished to continue to help us in this way. Unfortunately, however, I have had no response to any of the 3 e-mails that I have sent to him, asking him to confirm that I could send the funds over that were intended for the men held outside Kabwe, and so I must advise those who have sent donations for those particular prisoners that they have not been sent, and the funds are still being held in our No. 2 account.

Various members of the Committee are endeavouring to ascertain if members of other Church bodies in the Country are able to help us in any way, and I will forward the outstanding donations as soon as someone has come forward with an offer of help. I will keep you advised of what is happening, and I hope to be able to report something positive in the next Newsletter; in the meantime, if any member who has sent me funds intended for these places and wishes to have their donations returned, please let me know.

Finally, just to confirm that the next transfer of funds is due to take place at the end of November, probably, on the 27th of that month, and I should be glad to receive any cheques, made payable to 'ACAT No. 2 account', as usual, by the 19th.

Kenneth Watson, 34, Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SF.
E-mail: ken335@btinternet.com.

INFORMATION ON THE ACAT (ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY CAMPAIGN)

PLEASE FIND ENCLOSED A LEAFLET AND OTHER INFORMATION ON THE CHINA/OLYMPICS CAMPAIGN

GOOD NEWS! - FROM GUATEMALA

Congress approved a Decree on 12 February to allow the resumption of executions, in the face of increased violence and murders in the country. This was vetoed by President Alvaro Colom on 4 March. Congress was then given a one-month deadline during which it could have overridden the President's veto. This deadline expired on 5 May and means that happily Guatemala will not be resuming executions.

SAUDI ARABIA

In 2007 Saudi Arabia executed at least 158 people, including 3 women and children. Almost half the executions involve foreigners. More than 2000 Syrian prisoners, including children, are currently detained, among them 200 awaiting execution for involvement in the sale of illicit drugs. Executions usually take the form of public decapitation. Trials, especially of foreign nationals are unfair and they are more likely to suffer miscarriages of justice. They have little chance of escaping capital punishment. They are usually sentenced to death often after receiving little or no legal representation or consular assistance.

WORK DONE BY THE COMMITTEE

The ACAT Committee, at its last Meeting, thought that members might be interested to know what it has been doing over the past six months, apart from the production of the bi-monthly Newsletter, the work involved with the SOS torture Campaign, the Prisoner Support Scheme, membership, finances, the office - including appeals etc.

PUBLICITY - CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN

With the change in policy last year by Amnesty International over abortion, ACAT took the initiative and did a considerable amount of publicity in the national and diocesan Catholic press and to individual bishops. This was very successful and as a result a significant number of Catholics joined. This led to a considerable, but welcome, increase in the office workload.

CHRISTMAS CARD CAMPAIGN

There was a great increase in the number of inquiries both from individuals and from churches in connection with the Christmas Card Campaign. This also led to a fair number of new members. Again a cause for rejoicing.

REPORT TO FIACAT FOR THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE VISIT TO UK IN MAY

This was produced at the end of March in time for a briefing meeting between FIACAT and other NGO's and the Human Rights Committee, prior to the visit to the UK in May. This involved a tremendous amount of work - with material being accessed from Government reports, from newspaper and TV reports, endless internet trawling etc. - these had then to be digested, summarised and put into suitable report form.

The list of concerns raised by ACAT included: -

- **Four assassinations, Northern Ireland - Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson (lawyers) Robert Hamill, Billy Wright.**
- **Death of Jean Charles de Menezes, shot by police on the London underground.**
- **Death of Baha Mousa, Iraq, Aitken Report, impunity etc.**
- **Memoranda Of Understanding - made with countries where torture is known to take place.**
- **Deportation of failed asylum seekers to countries where torture is known to take place.**
- **Conditions in detention centres for failed asylum seekers.**
- **Deportation of child asylum seekers.**
- **Renditions.**
- **Evidence obtained under torture and its possible use in court cases involving "terrorists".**
- **Proposed change in Pre-charge Detention Limits to 42 days.**
- **Proposed change in the law on inquests - this would allow inquests to be heard without a jury, lawyers could be vetted, and evidence heard in secret in cases thought to be sensitive.**
- **Restraints in detention centres for "child offenders".**

Note:- The Government announced (14th May) that an independent inquiry is to be held under the Inquiries Act 2005 into Baha Mousa's death - there is concern that ministers could have a significant say into how it will be run, thus limiting its effectiveness.

The Inquiries Act is being used in some of the Northern Ireland case inquiries - but with considerable reservations - the relatives of Pat Finucane have refused to agree to such an inquiry.

ONSY ZACHARY - EGYPT/USA

Onsy and his wife, Fadia are awaiting depuration to Egypt where he will face imprisonment, torture and death. ACAT took up this case at the urgent request of Susan Gillis, his niece. The campaign is ongoing and has involved a very considerable amount of work - he was featured as FIACAT's Prisoner of the Month on two occasions recently. The Truro and Bath and Wells diocesan magazines featured his case, which resulted in a number of inquiries.

FUTURE PLANS

PRAYER VIGIL

The Service to Mark UN Torture Victims Day has been revised and 3 sets of new material for the Prayer Vigil have been produced.

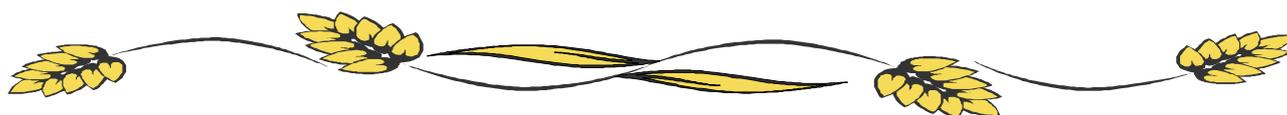
The religious press and Catholic and C of E diocesan magazines have been given information.

URC CAMPAIGN

The Committee has agreed to run a campaign in the autumn to target the United Reformed Church - members and local churches were very active during ACAT's first years.

60th ANNIVERSARY OF UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Committee will be discussing how to mark this important event at its next Meeting.



REPLIES FROM GUANTANAMO

A number of ACAT members and individuals who sent greetings to Mustafa Ait Idir in Guantanamo have received replies from him. This is very pleasing and the first occasion that letters have arrived from there.

Replies have taken a very long time to arrive, which was to be expected. The censorship is very harsh, which means that detainees have to be very careful about what they write - only the most innocuous letters are going to pass the censor. Mustafa has really appreciated the cards and messages and says how much they mean to him. When a prisoner has been held for so long under what are very harsh conditions, to say the least, such cards and messages can mean so very much.

Some of those receiving replies are intending to write back and have asked what they should write and whether they should mention that they are Christians - Mustafa has spoken of his faith. It is probably better to be on the safe side and to just say that he is remembered in prayer.

Letters and cards can be sent on a regular basis - perhaps once a month even if a reply is not received back for a long time. Picture postcards are probably ideal - either of places of interest or where one lives. Details of one's family, town, countryside, weather etc could be mentioned if more than just a postcard is sent.

MOUDUD AHMED, BANGLADESH (NEWSLETTER, April/May)

At least one reply has been received by a member from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, South Asia Group following a letter asking for pressure to be put on the Chief Advisor to the Bangladesh Government when he was on a recent visit to the UK. The Supreme Court had ordered Moudud Ahmed's release in October 2007 but he remains in prison.

New information was given in the letter, which is useful. The Supreme Court, when it declared the detention illegal, gave the Caretaker Government leave to appeal. This it has done and the case is pending in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. In addition the letter also said that the Anti-Corruption Commission has filed a further corruption case against Moudud Ahmed and others, in connection with a case involving Niko, a Canadian oil company. There was unfortunately, no mention of Moudud Ahmed's serious health condition. Do continue to write to the Bangladesh authorities.

Copies of Services for the Prayer Vigil are available from the Office.
Please let us know in good time if you need any.

They can also be e mailed to you.

We also have available leaflets and flyers should you wish to have some
available in your churches or meeting places

'THE DISAPPEARED'

Ever since Gen. Pinochet's rule of terror in Chile the word 'disappeared' has taken on a new meaning.

Instead of just being used as the past tense of a verb 'to disappear', it has referred to people who 'disappear' - disappear from their villages or towns, from their families, from all civil records. They do not, after arrest, as far as the authorities are concerned, exist anymore. Therefore, their friends and loved ones are met with total silence and /or denial when they raise questions with police, army or the security sections of government.

The idea behind making people 'disappear' suits despotic regimes very well. They can and do plead ignorance of where such a person may be detained. It is not so

much that the 'disappeared' may have been killed (although that happens in many cases); it is that their very existence is denied by everyone in authority.

ALIVE OR DEAD?

Not only are family members not told the whereabouts of their loved one, but also they have no idea whether that loved one is alive or dead. And if he/she is dead (of the result of torture inflicted on them very soon after arrest) there is no body to bury and therefore no emotional 'closure' of the tragedy. The hope of the loved one still being alive can continue for years, with little real prospect of that hope turning into reality.

The pain and frustration from such a situation is beyond belief. In Chile mothers and wives of men who had 'disappeared' often protested in strength, with processions, banners and expressions of great grief, but the regime of Pinochet was not moved to give help or information. Most of the men have never returned because the state controlled forces murdered them long before the demonstrations took place.

WIDESPREAD

Although Chile is the country most associated with 'the disappeared' the practice is wide spread throughout the world. Opponents to the ruling powers or junta are arrested, very often in the middle of the night, taken by armed men to an unknown place of detention and never heard of again. The security forces cannot be accused of murder because nobody knows what has happened to those detained, or where they are, and therefore no legal case can be brought against any particular individual because no evidence is available: it has all just disappear'.

ANY SOLUTION?

So what can be done? Very often ACAT (UK) and other ACAT's publish details of the people who have 'disappeared' In these cases we can, and should, write very strong appeals to the governments and security force commanders concerned, calling for the whereabouts of the 'disappeared' to be made public, and for them to be either released immediately or charged with a known criminal offence.

No country that is acting illegally wishes to be seen by the rest of the world as doing so (unless, as in some cases, they take no notice whatsoever of the disapproval of other states). So any publicity that can be given to regimes acting in this way is good: it may bring about the release of innocent detainees and prevent further 'disappearances' we just do not know.

If we know the names of the 'disappeared' men and women, (or even if we do not) we can add them to our prayer lists. We have seen in the past that prayer changes everything; governments are affected by the power of prayer as well as the power of the pen.

Just as torture is an evil against which we all campaign, so is the practice of 'disappearing' people. We must therefore renew our efforts to combat it and react strongly whenever we hear of it occurring.

News from other ACAT's



ACAT-France has a new President

Anne-Cécile ANTONI has replaced Marc Zarrouati at the head of ACATFrance.

She is the 12th President of the association since it's founding in 1974.

For the last few years Anne-Cécile Antoni has taken on various responsibilities within the ACAT network along with her long-standing involvement in the field of catechism. Born in 1954 in Paris, she is married with three children. She is currently on sabbatical from an executive position in public administration.

She is a graduate of "Sciences Po" of Paris and also holds a degree in Catholic theology. A catechism teacher in Bastia, Valence, Montpellier, Strasbourg and Nice, she was also leader, in the Alsace region of France, of a Caritas Catholic Relief team in charge of the reinsertion of persons in difficulty through access to culture. She has collaborated with the review "Etudes" and writes regularly for the monthly "Eglise de Corse".

While representing FIACAT at the Council of Europe between 1997 and 2002, she was rapporteur for the umbrella group of Human Rights NGOs within this International instance.

Member of ACAT -France since 1978, she was elected to its governing board in 2004. Elected Catholic Vice-President in 2005, she is in charge of the relations between European ACAT associations, Churches and the new religious communities.

In 2006 she initiated the « All Night Prayer Vigil in favour of torture victims "which in 2007 brought together eight thousand persons and which has become an international event taken up by sixteen different ACAT organisations throughout the world.

ACATUK is participating in the Prayer Vigil , details of which are on page 10 of this mailing

Meditation.

"It's a funny thing about God, which I still haven't understood. If you say with all your heart: He isn't there, then oddly he isn't. He seems to withdraw. In the same way, just not noticing produces the same results. He doesn't come thrusting himself into your life if you don't want him there.

Yet, if we say: God, I need you then he moves closer to us. If we start the conversation, surprisingly it does not simply seem to fade into empty space. A sense of presence gradually begins to make itself felt."

Tony Brown. Quaker. 1984.

O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I believe in You, I have faith in You, I need You. Help that faith to grow and to be put to good use in your beautiful but divided world. May I be a healer and not an injurer, a reconciler and not a divider, a giver rather than a taker. By Your nature of love may I be fed, so that I may in turn feed others.

Dear Lord Jesus, You suffered and were tortured on the cross. By your death you have destroyed death. Enable us to feel for and help those who are now being tortured or treated cruelly by their fellow human beings. Give us, we pray, the breadth of mind and vision to understand something of their suffering, so our prayers and actions for them may be relevant, brave and effective.

Meditation.

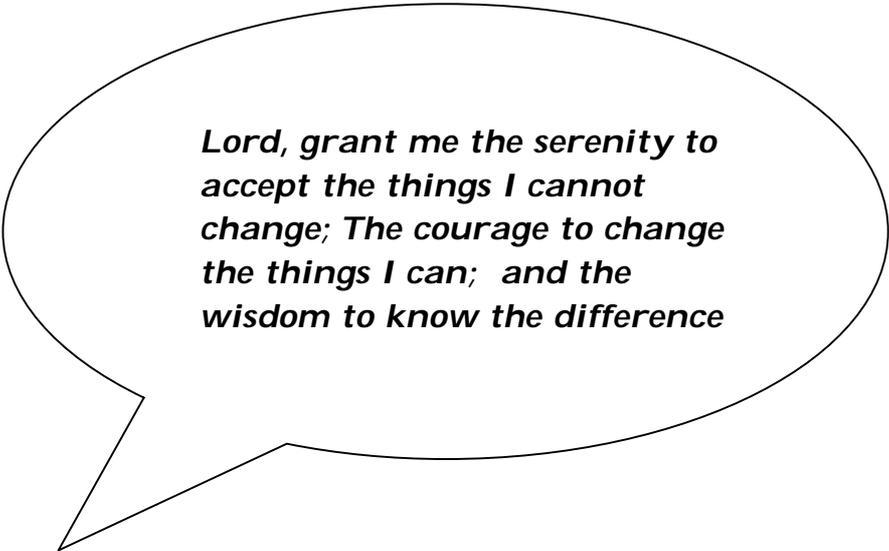
"Prayer is never just a matter of words. Its roots are in the desires of the heart. The act of speaking may often assist in developing and expressing our inmost desires, but the words are a help to US, not to God. We should be warned that words and phrases, however holy in their sound, cannot become prayer merely by being repeated. For prayer requires always an involvement of mind and heart and will."

Robert Llewelyn 'Prayer and Contemplation'

Strengthen our hearts and wills, O God, to worship and adore You; to place You and Your divine will at the very centre of our lives and to fulfil your desires in us, so your world and its people may rejoice in your presence. Day by day help us to live trusting in your purposes for each of us.

Lord, set our hearts and minds free to work for the persecuted and oppressed. May torturers repent and prison doors be opened. Break down the walls of prejudice and apathy between peoples so your love May peacefully conquer all.

A final thought



*Lord, grant me the serenity to
accept the things I cannot
change; The courage to change
the things I can; and the
wisdom to know the difference*

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*The things good Lord I pray for give me
grace to labour for.*

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