



ing to help resettle and rehabilitate people leaving prison

Sam Atkins / Church of England

The General Synod has backed a call for more churches to join partnership working to help resettle and rehabilitate people leaving prison, in a debate led by the National Faith Lead for the Probation Service.

Kashmir Garton, a General Synod member for the Diocese of Worcester, (pictured) told members of the Synod that the Probation Service is already working with churches, bishops and Diocesan Safeguarding Panels to help support people leaving prison.

“Each week our churches open their doors and seek to share the message of hope and love of Christ to all who enter,” she told the General Synod.

“Yet, many of the people currently leaving prison each week are unable to find a faith community after practising their faith in prison.

“Synod, this is a loss for people leaving prison who wish to maintain their faith, it is a loss for the Church that can provide a safe welcome with appropriate safeguards from Probation, and it is a loss for our communities that can support their rehabilitation journey.”

A motion to the General Synod (wording below) from Worcester Diocesan Synod received support from the Bishop for Prisons and the Chaplain General for Prisons along with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek, who is Bishop for Prisons, said the debate was a ‘challenge’ to the Church of England to be more connected with the Probation Service.

“We need a holistic approach in everything and this includes partnership with our probation and our amazing prison chaplains. When people leave prison, our chaplains play a key role in trying to pass on the baton and this is where this motion comes in,” she said.

She added: “This motion is challenging us to be more imaginative and more connected with the probation service.”

She added: “This motion is about joining in with God’s work of reconciliation and transformation.”

The Chaplain General for Prisons, the Ven James Ridge, said the motion “confidently asserts and acknowledges that faith makes a difference in the rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders.”

He said: “By becoming welcoming, accepting communities who safely integrate those whose past is not their future, we live out the call of our Lord and Saviour to be his representatives and to model our lives on him.”

Currently following risk assessments, people can be connected to community chaplaincy projects or faith communities such as those in the Welcome Directory, connecting prisoners with faith communities that have prepared to welcome them.

A background paper for the General Synod showed that between 30-45% of adults released from prison in any given year will be reconvicted within a year of release and for those on short sentences (less than 12 months) this rises to 55-60%.

In 2019 the Ministry of Justice estimated the annual total estimated economic and social cost of reoffending as £18.1bn.

The Synod gave its backing to the following motion put by Worcester Diocesan Synod on the contribution of faith to the rehabilitation of offenders:

‘That this Synod, recognising that faith and belief can have a positive impact on an offender's behaviour:

- a. note with pleasure the decision made by the Probation Service to recognise faith and belief as a protective factor in reducing reoffending, and its desire to work in partnership with churches, prison and community chaplains and faith communities to support rehabilitation;
- b. commend the value of partnership working with the Probation Service as an important additional support in churches' welcome of people leaving prison, including training of clergy and authorised lay ministers;
- c. call on dioceses to nominate a contact person or office to link the Probation Service locally to clergy, parishes and chaplaincies.’
- d. call on dioceses to enable a swift welcome of offenders after release into an appropriate church community, subject to agreed and clear safeguarding boundaries; and to make this part of the brief for their Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/churches-urged-help-re-settlement-people-leaving-prison>