

Submission to Justice Select Committee sub-inquiry *Prison Reform: governor empowerment and prison performance*

Chaplaincy plays an important role in prison regimes, with significant benefits for the wellbeing and rehabilitation of prisoners. It should be properly accounted for in the devolution of responsibilities to governors and establishment of new performance measures.

Provision of chaplaincy

The Prison Act 1952 enshrines the presence of chaplaincy in prisons, giving chaplains legal status and statutory responsibilities.

Prison Service Instruction 05/2016: Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners contains specific instructions and guidance on what prisons should provide including: chaplains to reflect the faith makeup of the prison population; access to chaplaincy upon reception into prison; the opportunity for one hour of corporate worship each week; and access to religious educational classes.

Provision is regularly reviewed through NOMS Chaplaincy Headquarters Audit and Compliance checks, and HMIP reports. These give prison governors important information on strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for improvement.

Prison governors and staff are generally supportive of chaplaincy, but practical difficulties sometimes restrict access. Recent research focussing on Catholic prisoners¹ indicated that 24% had experienced difficulties seeing their chaplain, including timetabling issues or not being let out of their cell.

Pastoral role of prison chaplains

Prison chaplains provide extensive pastoral care including listening to problems, giving practical support and facilitating family contact.

Over 90% of Catholic prisoners said they trusted their chaplain. One prisoner reflected a typical experience: *“her personality is such that one can trust in her, and the very first day when I came into the prison she came to my cell and we were talking, it was important because I was devastated getting into prison and she encouraged me.”*

58% had approached their chaplain with specific problems at difficult times including bereavement. One prisoner explained: *“she was there to comfort me when I lost my brother. She made all the appropriate calls to my family. I did not feel alone.”*

Several prisoners mentioned how this support had particularly helped during periods when they were struggling with mental health difficulties, self-harm, or suicidal thoughts.

25% had received support from their chaplain concerning a family issue. One described how the chaplain supported him by *“ringing my girlfriend and finding out how her pregnancy was going and*

¹ *Belief and Belonging* (Catholic Bishops' Conference: 2016). Research conducted by Lemos & Crane based upon responses from 332 Catholic prisoners in 17 prisons and young offender institutions. Full report available at: www.cbcew.org.uk/content/download/68794/510402/file/belief-and-belonging-final-070416.pdf

letting me know.” Another said that chaplains “can contact your parents to see if they are OK if you have no credit on your pin phones.”

Religious services can also help people to cope with being in prison. A majority of Catholic prisoners indicated that attending Mass helped them to feel happier, calmer, stronger or less stressed. Some said that it helped them to deal with suicidal thoughts.

Role of chaplaincy in rehabilitation

Research on desistance from crime has shown conclusively that faith can be an important factor in reducing re-offending. Through finding a new faith or making their own the faith of their family background, many prisoners begin to find a new, positive identity and a hopeful story about how their lives can improve.

Chaplaincy-led courses such as *Sycamore Tree*, *Alpha* and *Inside Faith* are often positive educational experiences for prisoners and support their rehabilitation. Many prisoners have found that participation helps to address the causes and impact of their offending, come to terms with the past, and give them motivation to reform. Furthermore they offer a valuable opportunity for prisoners who have difficulty learning in a more traditional classroom setting.

Prisoners who are educated and confident in their own faith are also less vulnerable to radicalisation, as they are better placed to challenge distorted beliefs that promote hatred or violence.

Recommendations to the government

1. Maintain the existing minimum national requirements for provision of chaplaincy in prisons, as outlined in *Prison Service Instruction 05/2016: Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners* and reviewed through NOMS Chaplaincy Headquarters Assurance and Compliance checks, and HMIP reports
2. Include access to chaplaincy in the new performance measure on time spent out of cells engaging in purposeful activity
3. Allow governors to commission chaplaincy-led courses with a proven impact on rehabilitation under their new responsibilities for education provision and allow these to count towards the respective performance measure
4. Recognise the role that chaplains play in supporting family relationships when developing the new performance measure in this area