

General Synod

Worcester Diocesan Synod Motion

The contribution of Faith to the Rehabilitation of Offenders

Note from the Secretary General

Context of UK Prisons

1. The Prison population is extremely high. The UK has comfortably the highest imprisonment rate (measured as number of prisoners per 100,000 of population) in Western Europe. The prison population has increased by 70% in the last 30 years and is projected to reach around 100,000 by 2026. Of the 41,000 people sent to prison in the year to June 2021 61% had committed a non-violent offence and 40% were sentenced to serve six months or less.¹
2. There are a number of factors explaining this high prison population, including constant legislation tweaks that have consistently lengthened sentences and introduced custodial sentences for a wider range of offences than previously. However, one key factor is that the reoffending rate remains high for people who have served a prison sentence (particularly shorter sentences).
3. Between 30-45% of adults released from prison in any given year will be reconvicted within a year of release. For those on short sentences (less than 12 months) this rises to 55-60%.² In 2019 the Ministry of Justice estimated the annual total estimated economic and social cost of reoffending as £18.1bn.³
4. Reducing reoffending, particularly after custodial sentences, has been a goal of a succession of government white papers for several years. A key element in this has been the work of the National Probation Service.

Probation Service and Faith Partnership Work

5. Probation services undertook a pilot in 2018-2019 with 12 prisons and 6 Approved Premises, linking chaplaincy and probation services support for the contribution that working in partnership and focus on faith could make to risk management, safeguarding, resettlement and desistance. The pilot evaluation was extremely positive noting “where faith was assessed as a protective factor for those in prison by Chaplains and Probation and was included as part of the sentence plan journey, it contributed to their rehabilitation and wellbeing. The awareness of faith, and its inclusion in sentence planning meetings and sentence plan objectives, also helped to identify any changes that was indicative of other needs and risks.”⁴
6. These partnerships build on a long history of successful projects between churches, prisons, chaplains and probation services in supporting people leaving prison. This history goes right back to the origins of the probation service in the Church of

¹ See Prison Reform Trust (2022) ‘Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile: Winter 2022’
<https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/publication/bromley-briefings-prison-factfile-winter-2022/>

² Reoffending rates and reconviction rates are hard to calculate and the data during the covid period has seemed to be particularly volatile. The latest ‘proven reoffending statistics’ bulletin from the MOJ presents the lower end, while other studies put the true number higher.

³ Ministry of Justice (2019) The economic and social costs of reoffending, London: Ministry of Justice

⁴ HMPPS and National Probation Service ‘National Partnership Framework with Faith based communities (including Prison chaplaincy’ October 2022

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England Temperance Society and its support of Court Missionaries. More recent positive projects have included the excellent work of community chaplaincies (chaplaincies that provide community based support for ex-offenders, see <https://communitychaplaincy.org.uk/>). These now support more than 2000 ex-prisoners a year.

7. Other projects include the Welcome Directory, an interfaith project which allows faith communities (such as a parish church) to sign up and receive training and support in safely being a place of welcome for those leaving prison and seeking a new community of faith (<https://www.welcomedirectory.org.uk/>).
8. There is a growing body of evidence that such projects can be extremely helpful in providing the support, community and sense of purpose that is helpful in supporting people to rebuild their lives after leaving prison and to provide a protective factor against re-offending. Faith is of significant importance to many prisoners, as explored in recent report from Good Faith Partnership.⁵ Only 31% of prisoners have no religion (6% lower than the public at large). Around 45% are Christian, while 17% are Muslim.⁶

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⁵ Good Faith Partnership (2022) 'A Heart for Justice: Faith & the Prisons System'
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ddfbd78adffd3a0d2a44f7/t/639218d3854c664ac16c36b6/1670518998048/GFP_FaithinPrisons_Report_V6.pdf

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