

General Synod

Worcester Diocesan Synod Motion 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 all 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, and
 - (c) call on Dioceses to nominate a contact person or office to link the Probation Service locally to clergy, parishes and chaplaincies.
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Summary

The impact of crime on victims, their families and society can be immeasurable. The work of His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is to help those who have offended to recognise the harm they have caused and to work towards their rehabilitation. This process can be lengthy but the belief in the capacity of people to change their lives with the right support and intervention remains one of the core values of the Probation Service.

The HMPPS National Partnership Framework¹ was developed to recognise the positive contribution that multi-faith communities make at every stage of the criminal justice process. Following risk assessments, people can be connected to community chaplaincy projects² or faith communities like those included in the Welcome Directory³.

The recognition of faith and belief as a protective factor⁴ that can support desistance,⁵ presents an opportunity for all faith communities to work with HMPPS to provide a safe welcome.

Introduction

1. The Ministry of Justice data for September 2022⁶, shows that a significant proportion of England and Wales prison population (69%) identify with a faith or belief. Of these 45% are of Christian faith, 24% are of other faiths, and the remainder with no religion or not recorded (31%) making up the rest of the prison population. In prison, chaplains come from a wide

¹ The National Partnership Framework sets out the Probation Service's commitment to working with all faith-based communities. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-partnership-framework>

² Community Chaplaincies are independent multi-faith based voluntary organisations that provide tailored resettlement, support, and mentoring for individuals leaving prison. For example, see <https://www.communitychaplaincy.org.uk/community-chaplaincy>

³ The Welcome Directory connects those leaving prison with faith communities who have prepared to welcome them – see <http://www.welcomedirectory.org.uk/>

⁴ A protective factor helps decrease the potential harmful effects posed by a person's behaviour.

⁵ Desistance is a behavioural term referring to the absence of offending among individuals who had previously offended at repeated intervals; the cessation of offending behaviour.

⁶ Ministry of Justice, Offender Management Statistics Quarterly (Sept 2022)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2022>

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range of different faiths and belief systems and work ecumenically. They provide a multi-faith service of pastoral care and spiritual support for all faiths and none. This can be one to one support or group work such as the Sycamore Tree restorative justice programme⁷.

2. In the book '40 stories of hope: how faith has changed prisoners' lives'⁸, 40 former prisoners share personal accounts of how their faith found in prison has helped them to change their lives. In the Foreword, Archbishop Justin described it as "a vital reminder of the hope that Jesus gives. Reconciliation is at the heart of it... Many of the prisoners...have discovered life changing truth'. Rt Rev'd James Langstaff, former Bishop of Rochester and Bishop to Prisons, wrote 'through growing local links with prisons, victim services and other organisations, Churches can serve God, helping some of the most vulnerable in our communities ...'. By working collaboratively with other agencies, the Church can give hope to those leaving prison and contribute to a safer society.

Why is this theologically important?

3. The 40 *Stories of hope* shows the power of Jesus' love to reach out and embrace those who have offended. Those receiving such love have not only been able to turn their lives around but have become ambassadors of Christ, with much to give back to faith communities and to society. The Bible makes clear that everyone, including those who commit crime can find redemption through belief in Christ. Throughout Scripture the close link between faith, crime and rehabilitation is demonstrated.
4. We have the central Christian message, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that *whoever* believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16, emphasis added). Early in his ministry, Jesus affirms God's eternal purpose of liberty for all including captives (Luke 4:18, quoting Isaiah 61:1) and those living on the edge of society as a result of their crimes. Later, Christ identifies himself with those in prison and people in other positions of vulnerability (Matthew 25:31-46), strongly affirming the worth of all people.
5. Through Jesus' atoning work, he is able to bring redemption to all who believe in him. Paul also witnesses to the mercy he received from Jesus Christ after being "formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor and a man of violence" (1 Timothy 1:13).
6. When Jesus was crucified alongside two criminals, one sought forgiveness on the cross and asked to be remembered 'when you come into your kingdom' (Luke 23:42). Jesus did not judge him for his behaviour but, recognising his repentance and willingness to believe, said, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise'.
7. At the heart of the Christian message and indeed many world religions, is the belief that human life is not grounded on the retributive logic of an eye for an eye, but on repentance and forgiveness which can promote the rehabilitation of individuals. Forgiveness can be a difficult concept and indeed traumatising for many victims and survivors to consider when their lives have been changed by such crimes. The act of seeking forgiveness and restoration by those who have offended and who wish to change their lives, does not minimise the seriousness of their actions or diminish the experience of victims and survivors. However, it can enable positive change to take place that can prevent future victims and can

⁷ Sycamore Tree is a victim awareness programme that teaches the principles of restorative justice <https://prisonfellowship.org.uk/our-work/sycamore-tree/>

⁸ Butcher, Catherine (2018) *40 Stories of Hope, how faith has changed prisoners' lives*, Farnham: CWR Press <https://prisonfellowship.org.uk/our-work/sycamore-tree/>

⁸ Butcher, Catherine (2018) *40 Stories of Hope, how faith has changed prisoners' lives*, Farnham: CWR Press

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contribute to a safer society. It can “challenge wrongdoing whilst reintegrating the individual wrongdoer, refusing the impulse to expel and reject human beings as irredeemable”⁹. Rehabilitation of those who offend is everyone’s concern, and personal change, however positive, cannot in itself be enough to deliver social justice and is reliant on other factors contributing to that process¹⁰. If society is unable to accept the changed individual or continues to stigmatise individuals for their behaviour, the person is never released from the consequences of what they have done and their capacity to act becomes confined to their actions from which they are never able to recover. This can lead to a society which is unable to fully embrace a rehabilitative culture or acceptance of those who genuinely wish to change and move away from crime.

8. The prison community does not exist in isolation but is an integral part of the wider community. It is formed of people who come from the community and return to the community upon release. Their inclusion and acceptance into faith communities with the appropriate safeguards from HMPPS, will not only support their rehabilitation and public protection, but also support the community’s demonstration of its acceptance of them as members of the community from which they were incarcerated. Prison chaplains are part of the community and attend prison to provide faith services and pastoral care. Their work enables faith communities to be present both inside and outside the prison, delivering hope to all people in all settings.

The contribution of faith communities to rehabilitation

9. Measuring rehabilitation and desistance can be complex, but what comes through in the limited literature on faith and desistance, is the important role that faith communities can play in providing positive pro-social links that can support a person’s journey of rehabilitation. Fergus McNeill¹¹, demonstrates through his research that the critical factors in desistance are how the person has matured in their views about crime, how they view their identity as someone who is no longer involved in crime, and their stake in society and the social ties they develop to help them to maintain a life free of crime such as belonging to faith communities.
10. The role of faith and belief in rehabilitation was the subject of a substantial review of 270 research studies on this subject in 2011¹². The review found that approximately 90% of the studies reported a beneficial impact of religion on crime/delinquency and only two studies reported a negative effect of religion, therefore supporting the view that involvement with religion can be a positive and protective factor. In another study of those convicted of sexual crimes, religion was found to act as a protective factor as it reduced isolation, provided peer

⁹ Maruna, Shadd (2016) ‘Desistance and restorative justice: now or never’ *Restorative Justice* 4(3):289-301, p295

¹⁰ Burke, Lol, Collett, Steve and McNeill, Fergus (2018) *Reimagining Rehabilitation: Beyond the Individual*, London: Routledge

¹¹ McNeill, Fergus and Weaver, Beth (2010) ‘Changing Lives? Desistance Research and Offender Management’ The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Report 3/2010 https://www.sccjr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Report_2010_03_-_Changing_Lives.pdf

¹² Johnson, B. R., & Jang, S. J. (2011). Crime and religion: Assessing the role of the faith factor. In *Contemporary issues in criminological theory and research: The role of social institution: Papers from the American Society of Criminology 2010 Conference* (pp. 117–150)

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support, gave hope, reduced delinquent behaviour and helped the prisoners cope with prison life¹³.

11. In a review of 12 research studies in the United States examining the association between religion and rehabilitation, they found that religion helped to humanise the prison situation and that within prison, religion was more intense due to the closed and controlled context and therefore served to heighten the religious experience of prisoners in the same way as it would in a monastic setting. Those who received a Christian based aftercare programme that began pre-release, were less likely to breach their programme¹⁴. When a person is released, the risk of re-offending can increase, however, faith communities can assist people to develop positive attachments that can replicate the supportive faith community in prison which has helped to shape their attitudes, thinking and behaviour¹⁵. Such a community can help the person to maintain positive connections and thereby the motivation and hope to stay free from crime.

12. The Cambridge University research into community chaplaincies in England followed the progress of service users in two community chaplaincies. Community chaplaincies usually start their work in prison, meet the individual at the prison gates on release and provide on-going support in the community for as long as needed. They are multi-faith organisations and work with people of all faiths and none. The study found that the approach used by community chaplaincy supported the principles for desistance practice, namely individualised support for change, building and sustaining hope, developing people's strengths and recognising progress. The service users described the 'added value' of such projects being the positive relationships, individual support and hope in their ability to move forward and keep out of trouble. The values of community chaplaincy flow explicitly from the faith base of the organisation, namely hope, love, forgiveness and a belief in the importance of every person. These values are at the heart of religion.¹⁶

13. A recent research study conducted by the Good Faith Partnership¹⁷ set out to explore the impact of faith in the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Its findings highlighted that faith communities can play a crucial role in working 'upstream' of the criminal justice system to reduce risk factors and support those most likely to end up in prison; that Prison Chaplains play a vital role within prisons which was highlighted in new and important ways during Covid; that making better links between faith in Prison and faith-communities 'beyond the Gate' can help support desistance and prevent re-offending. The research makes recommendations for Government, HMPPS and faith communities, that will enable faith to play a more prominent role in the criminal justice system in the future.

¹³ Winder, Belinda et al (2018) "Because you've got faith it doesn't mean that you've got wings on your back": a qualitative analysis of the accounts of Christian prisoners serving time for a sexual offence, *Journal of Sexual Aggression* Vol. 24, No. 2, 240–256

¹⁴ O'Connor, Thomas (2005) 'What works, religion as a correctional intervention: Part II' *Journal of Community Corrections* 14(2):4-26

¹⁵ See O'Connor, T. (2004) 'What Works, Religion as a Correctional Intervention: Part I' *Journal of Community Corrections* 14(1):11-23

¹⁶ Dominey, Jane and Lawson, Elizabeth (2017) 'Community Chaplaincy and Desistance: Seeing a new future' University of Cambridge <https://www.ccsj.crim.cam.ac.uk/news/SeeingNewFuture>

¹⁷ Good Faith Partnership (2022) 'A Heart for Justice: Faith and the Prisons System' <https://goodfaith.org.uk/case-studies/faith-in-prisons>

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Prison and Probation Service developments

14. The role of HMPPS is to protect the public and to support the rehabilitation of people sentenced to prison and community sentences. This work involves addressing the factors that contributed to the offending, working with victims and engaging in partnership with other agencies such as police, social services, housing etc, to access interventions that will support the change to a life free from crime. Such partnership work did not previously include faith communities, however in 2020, the National Partnership Framework was published following a 12 month pilot in which Prisons and Probation recognised the valuable work being undertaken by multi-faith communities.
15. The National Partnership Framework highlights the important contribution that faith and belief can make to desistance and sets out HMPPS' commitment to include faith and belief in its supervision of individuals and to work with all faith communities. This work has been overseen by the HMPPS Chaplaincy team which is managed by the Chaplain General and includes multi-faith advisors including an Anglican Advisor. This team oversees the work of all Prison Chaplains and there is a strong relationship with the Bishop of Gloucester who is the Anglican Bishop for Prisons, supported by the Bishop of Derby who focuses on young offenders, and the Bishop of Lichfield who supports the work with the male estate.
16. Since 2020, the commitment to deliver the National Partnership Framework has been evidenced by: the creation of a new role of Faith Lead for the Probation Service, the development of faith training materials for all Probation staff to help improve their faith literacy, a pilot to introduce prison chaplains into Approved Premises¹⁸ to provide faith and pastoral care to residents and staff, the creation of new partnerships with multi-faith communities. The Faith Lead for the Probation Service has worked with the Anglican Bishop for Prisons to establish a 'link' Bishop in each Probation region to engage directly with regional Probation Directors. The intention is that each Bishop can act as a catalyst to enable opportunities for working collaboratively with leaders and communities of different faiths, whether that is in identifying faith communities which can provide a safe welcome to people from Prison, providing placements for Community Payback work, or identifying local developments that can support the rehabilitation of individuals and safeguard victims of crime.
17. These developments represent the start of a process of embedding faith and belief into the criminal justice system. Most notably, this work does not detract from HMPPS' priority of protecting the public and its duty of care to victims; indeed, the arrangements that are put in place with each faith group and Diocese to provide a safe welcome, is in keeping with the learning from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

Opportunities for the Church of England

18. The Church exists in every community alongside Prisons and the Probation Service and plays a key role in people's life events. Those who offend and those who are victims of crime, will often belong to the same community including church community. When the custodial element of a sentence has been served, the individual will return to the community

¹⁸ In the United Kingdom, Approved Premises, formerly known as probation or bail hostels, are residential units which house people mainly released from prison.

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under the supervision of the Probation Service. If the individual wishes to attend church, the Church's role in managing their return will be pivotal to supporting their journey of rehabilitation. This is where the Church and HMPPS can work together to provide a safe welcome, with appropriate safeguards.

19. The report of the Faith and Order Commission¹⁹ and the IICSA report published in October 2020²⁰ makes clear that the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults are key priorities for the Church of England. The Church has responded by implementing a robust national framework that includes rigorous training, monitoring, independent scrutiny and sharing of good practice. However, there is still more that can be done. By working in partnership with HMPPS, a lead agency for public protection, the Church can strengthen its safeguarding arrangements. Where people under supervision seek to join faith communities, they can be supported by risk assessments and safety plans that are jointly developed by the Church and Probation staff. These plans can provide a safe welcome that will enable the Church to support the rehabilitation of individuals and also safeguard victims and survivors.
20. The role of 'link' Bishop as a nominated contact person for each Probation Service region, can support the development of local partnership arrangements. As this work develops and examples of good practice are shared, this work can be integrated into the training of clergy and authorised lay ministers as well as Diocesan Safeguarding Boards to support safer Church communities.
21. This is an opportune time for the Church and all multi-faith communities to engage with HMPPS, to transform the lives of those who have offended and to care for those who have been affected by crime. By doing so the Church can deliver its mission to create healthy and safe church communities for all.

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¹⁹ The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church, A theological resource for the local church, The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, 2016, page 33 <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/theologicalresourcefaocweb.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/anglican-church>