



Good Faith
Partnership

A Heart for Justice: Faith & the Prison System



Executive Summary

Faith has played an essential role in the criminal justice system in the UK for centuries. And yet, in recent decades, the role of faith and faith-based initiatives has often been overlooked and under-appreciated. This report contends that the time is ripe to redress this, and to focus attention and resource on the positive impact that faith can have at every stage of the criminal justice process – before the Gate, behind the Gate and beyond the Gate.

Our research, conducted over the last two years, has investigated the contribution of a wide variety of faith actors and faith-based initiatives working in different parts of the country. We have found that:

- Faith communities and faith-based initiatives can play a crucial role in working ‘upstream’ of the criminal justice system, reducing risk factors and supporting those most likely to end up in prison.
- Prison Chaplains play a vital role in pastoral support within prisons, and the Covid Pandemic highlighted the value of this role in new and important ways.
- Making better links between experiences of faith within Prison and faith-communities ‘beyond the Gate’ can help support desistance and prevent re-offending, and the re-nationalisation of the Probation Service presents a unique opportunity to rebuild and deepen these connections.

The report makes a number of key recommendations for how faith could play an even-more positive role in the criminal justice system in the future, including:

- Police and Crime Commissioners should work through Violence Reduction Units to establish Faith Alliances along the model pioneered in the West Midlands
- Multi-faith Chaplaincy should be given greater prominence and profile within the Prison system through the expansion of training and induction processes for staff.
- The newly-nationalised Probation Service should focus on faith as a protective factor in supporting desistance, and work with partners to establish more robust links between Chaplaincy and faith-based initiatives within Prisons and Community Chaplains and other programmes for ex-offenders.

We believe that the adoption of these and other recommendations could lead to a renaissance of faith within the criminal justice system in the UK, with significant potential benefits not just for those within the system but for wider society as a whole. At a time of significant pressures within the prisons system, and of struggle and uncertainty in the country more generally, this represents a unique opportunity to unlock the positive power of faith for the benefit of all.

Recommendations

The aim of this research project is to inform and equip efforts to enhance the impact of faith in the criminal justice system. With this in mind, we offer clear recommendations here, based on our findings, for the government, policymakers, the prison and probation service, faith-based organisations, faith institutions and local faith communities. It is our hope that each of these stakeholder groups will welcome our recommendations, and take them forward as necessary.

Our proposals require partnerships, funding, and political will. Moving forward requires a clear commitment from all parties involved in order for real progress to be made. Despite our focus on Christianity, our research has shown that the impact of faith on those before, behind and beyond the prison gate is not limited to a particular denomination or approach, but is widespread, through education, pastoral care, advocacy work and practical support. The impact of this work is multidimensional, and our recommendations form the basis of working towards a more inclusive and holistic criminal justice system.

For the Government and policymakers

We recommend that:

- A Faith Alliance be established in every Violence Reduction Unit across the country, to replicate the work of the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership and to have dedicated resources to explore the role of faith in crime prevention. Furthermore, we recommend that the directors of all Violence Reduction Units receive faith awareness training.
- The Violence Reduction Toolkit for faith leaders and communities, produced by the West Midlands VRP, should be expanded and replicated in other areas. This includes trauma-informed training adapted to different faith communities and also features an online directory of faith resources in the region. Scaling this up and reproducing it elsewhere would help upskill and train faith leaders to respond to young people and the community in a culturally competent way with a clear focus on trauma-informed practice.

- The Government engage, support and resource faith communities to do more preventative work, particularly in regards to supporting vulnerable families. This could be achieved, for example, by prioritising faith-engagement within the rollout of Family Hubs.

For the Prison and Probation Service

We recommend that:

- The Prison and Probation Service publicly recognise and value the work of faith-inspired actors and grassroots faith-based organisations in this sector. We also recommend that the probation service conduct analysis on the number of faith groups and faith-based organisations it is in active partnership with, and seek to understand and break down any barriers to effective engagement.
- All prison staff receive training not just on the formal services offered by the multifaith chaplaincy team but also on the pastoral approach and value of chaplaincy and the ways in which faith and spirituality can act as a protective factor against recidivism. This could be incorporated effectively into the induction for new prison staff and, for current staff, chaplains could run professional development sessions where current prisoners discuss their experiences with the chaplaincy team.
- All probation staff receive training on the ways in which spirituality and being involved in a faith community can act as a protective factor against recidivism. For new probation staff, we suggest this could be done effectively by including awareness to faith as part of the induction programme. The Welcome Directory also offers a training package, the Prisons Awareness Course, which explores what it means to welcome people leaving prisons into a faith community, which we recommend be offered to all existing staff.
- The existing offering for Prison Chaplains in terms of professional development and public recognition be expanded, for example through a high-profile national awards ceremony for excellence and innovation in Prison Chaplaincy.

- Comprehensive sets of statistics on employed chaplains, vacancies in chaplaincy positions, chaplaincy usage and volunteers be collected and published regularly.

For faith-based organisations working in criminal justice

We recommend that:

- Multifaith practice in prison be reflected in community chaplaincy. This should be a formalised process, with community chaplaincy groups acting as a crucial link between chaplains in prison and those in the community. We recommend the introduction of a formal structure, so that prison chaplains create links with local faith groups/community chaplaincy groups for those released from prison to receive further help and guidance on the outside if they so wish. At present, there is a great disconnect between prison chaplaincy and faith groups in the community. We advise that the Community Chaplaincy Association should be in communication with each prison to support chaplains to begin to rectify this.
- A formalised group is initiated to connect similar organisations working beyond the gate together, so they can connect and learn best practice from each other. This might be helpful in the form of regular online and in-person events, where faith-based organisations can build connections and share best practice.
- The work of the Welcome Directory be expanded. This would help bring more prison leavers into local communities to spread their vision of helping faith communities become places where people who leave prison find acceptance, belonging and practical support. This could be funded by the probation service, as it supports those leaving prison.

For faith institutions and local communities

We recommend that:

- Faith communities seek to upskill and train their local leaders and congregations to understand the criminal justice system and effectively support those at different stages of engagement with it. Lived experience should be prioritised within this, for example programmes that provide paid opportunities to those with experience of the criminal justice system to share these with local faith communities.
- Places of worship recognise the resources they have for the benefits of young people and the community, and reach out to work in partnership with others to provide early intervention and support to those at the margins of society.
- Faith communities seek to promote prison chaplaincy as a vocational opportunity for clergy and lay leaders. Where possible, denominations should monitor levels of interest in prison chaplaincy, and explore opportunities to boost these through greater profile, recognition and funding for professional development.



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