

An aerial photograph of a city, likely in the United States, showing a dense residential area with many houses and trees. In the center of the city, there is a large, multi-story institutional building complex, possibly a prison or a government facility, with several interconnected buildings and a large parking lot. The sky is clear and blue.

# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

November 2012 No 204

# Ex-Prisoners Beyond the Gate:

## making a case for the development of community chaplaincy

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### Introduction

**There is a well established historical association between religion, the emergence and reform of prisons, and other features of criminal justice formation. Religion influenced the penal system in the United States which was differentially manifested in the Quaker Philadelphia Separate system and the Calvinist Silent system. Canadian penitentiaries reach back to the 19th century when the reformative influence of religion upon the imprisoned was a salient feature when crime was equated with sin. Religion stimulated prison reform in England and Wales in addition to the emergence of probation after 1876. For these and other reasons it is accurately stated that 'religion has been a major force in shaping the ways in which offenders are dealt with'.**

It is also pertinent to acknowledge that chaplains have been located in the British penal system for over 200 years. In what is now a little read and referenced text, Hinde<sup>2</sup> refers to four pieces of legislation during the 18th century which gave power to the justices of the peace to appoint chaplains to local gaols. Much later Radzinowicz and Hood,<sup>3</sup> at two specific points in their analysis of penal policy in Victorian and Edwardian England, consider the work of chaplains. It is suggested they played only a minor role in 19th century convict prisons and that governors had the upper hand in terms of influence. Furthermore, the authors proceed to state that chaplains 'seemed to be more like tired functionaries, expected to discharge difficult duties in a hostile environment'<sup>4</sup>. Initially they were drawn from the Church of England, but after 1864 Roman Catholic priests were appointed. Also Jews and non-conformists were allowed their religious representatives, in addition to which there were facilities for Hindus. Today chaplains can still be found within the prison system of the United Kingdom, as well as those of other countries, where religion persists in various denominational forms and modes of expression.

The purpose of this article continues to excavate this religious theme by drawing attention to what is a relatively new faith-based phenomenon in the criminal justice system of England and Wales, namely *community chaplaincy*. The argument will be advanced that there is the scope to develop and expand the work of community chaplaincy which will further establish its role in providing support to prisoners when they exit the prison system. Building a case and developing an argument for community chaplaincy will be illustrated by drawing attention to original empirical research which has recently explored, among other subjects of relevance, the relationship between prison chaplaincy and community chaplaincy. But first it is necessary to fill in the details of the origin, rationale, and development of community chaplaincy.

### Origins of community chaplaincy in Canada

The origins of community chaplaincy can be traced to the initiative of the Rev. Dr. Pierre Allard in Canada during the late-1970s and early-1980s<sup>5</sup>. This was a period when Canadian prisons were harsher than subsequently, when prisoners existed in a 'world apart' so that the inchoate vision of community chaplaincy was to build bridges between the prison institution and community. Significantly these bridges were to be built by faith motivated volunteers establishing contact with serving prisoners. It was acknowledged that prison chaplains could 'not go it alone' but required the assistance of volunteers to share the responsibility for what is often difficult work. Subsequently the vision was enlarged to the period beyond the release of prisoners from custodial facilities.

The Canadian vision was uncomplicated, theologically grounded in the injunction to serve others, and concretely expressed in a commitment to build human community for released prisoners which involved forging links with partnership resources and supportive multi-faith communities. Community chaplaincy does not dilute the criminological postulate of offender

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1. Garland, D. (1990) *Punishment and Modern Society: A study in social theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press p.203.
  2. Hinde, R.S.E. (1951) *The British penal system 1773-1950*, London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd.
  3. Radzinowicz, L. and Hood, R. (1990) *The emergence of penal policy in Victorian and Edwardian England*, Clarendon paperbacks, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
  4. Ibid p.541.
  5. During a research-based visit to Ottawa, Canada, during September 2010 to enhance understanding of community chaplaincy in its country of origin, I was provided with the opportunity to discuss relevant matters with Dr. Allard.

responsibility and behavioural accountability, but it does affirm that communities of faith have a responsibility for *all* citizens which includes offenders who have served custodial sentences. Currently there are only two full-time community chaplains in Canada employed by Correctional Services Canada. The explanation for this is that the dominant operational model in Canada incorporates a much wider definition because it involves people of faith who are not ordained (unlike prison chaplains), offering their time and support to ex-prisoners. Accordingly it has more flexibility than the formal structures of ordained ministry; it has emerged from and is sustained by grass root voluntary support; it is bottom-up rather than top-down. Community chaplaincy attracts and encourages people of faith from different faith communities to get involved and make a difference in the lives of ex-prisoners by volunteering their personal capital with the ultimate goal of reducing reoffending. If this religious phenomenon began in Moncton, New Brunswick and Kingston Ontario approximately 30 years ago, by 2006 there were 26 projects scattered throughout the five regions of Canada<sup>6</sup>.

#### **Migration to England and Wales**

Community chaplaincy crossed the Atlantic during the period 1999-2001 and the first project was established at Swansea Prison<sup>7</sup>. It should be noted that its development in England and Wales coincided with what can be described as the renaissance of the *religious question* in the criminal justice system. In other words this was the beginning of a political process that culminated in the emergence of the National Offender Management Service which, in 2003-04, established the conditions whereby public, private, and voluntary sector organisations could contest for the business of providing offender services. Even though the competitive dynamics of NOMS may well enhance levels of performance in public sector organisations, New Labour governments between 1997 and 2010 increasingly encouraged the voluntary sector and its charitable organisations, including multi-faith traditions, to get more involved. It was being

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asserted that central government cannot promote citizenship, reduce re-offending, or promote community cohesion by itself, which is why it must seek alliances with, as an example, The Faith and Voluntary and Community Sector Alliance. One specific manifestation of partnership alliance is community chaplaincy which 'provides a bridge between prison and the community. It takes prisoners from the gate and supports them as they start their new lives, building the links between churches and the community'<sup>8</sup>.

Since the first project was established in 2001, community chaplaincy has expanded so that at the time of writing there were numerous projects located in the following areas: Low Newton (Durham), Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Leicester, Exeter, Buckinghamshire, Rochester, Lewes, Feltham YOI, Basic Caring Communities in London, Wandsworth, Wormwood Scrubs, and Swansea. Furthermore Northern Ireland has recently joined this list. In March 2010 the Community Chaplaincy Association was founded whose vision is to provide all those leaving prison with support and opportunities to free themselves from crime. It is also committed to building a national network of multi-faith community chaplaincy projects, allied to prison chaplaincies, which engage with people of faith and none. This process begins in prison before continuing through the gate and into the community.

It is of interest to acknowledge that the Swansea project, for example, is located within Swansea Prison and shares office accommodation with the prison chaplaincy; at Leeds it is located just outside the gate in prison service offices next to the Visitor Centre; the Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street, is the location of the Manchester project. The aforementioned 15 projects (there are differences between them) have core staff members comprising community chaplains, project managers, other support staff, and volunteers drawn from local communities without whom the projects could not function. To reiterate the primary task is to begin the process of building relationships with prisoners who request to avail themselves of community chaplaincy

6. Cuff, D. (2006) *National Chaplaincy Evaluation, Community Engagement Project*, Canada: CSC.

7. I acknowledge the assistance of David Emery during a research-based visit to Swansea in April 2011, who told me about the beginnings of community chaplaincy in England and Wales.

8. Clarke, C. (2005) *Where Next for Penal Policy?* London: Prison Reform Trust p.7.

involvement before they are released, followed by support which continues beyond the gate for a specified period of time<sup>9</sup>.

### Research Methodology

The genesis of recently conducted community chaplaincy research can be traced to an accumulation of factors which include:

- ❑ The aforementioned historical and contemporary association between religion, penalty, and the wider criminal justice system;
- ❑ The origins and rationale of community chaplaincy in Canada over thirty years ago, in addition to its subsequent migration and expansion in England and Wales, both of which are under-researched;
- ❑ The impetus provided by NOMS to facilitate competition between the public, private, and voluntary sectors, including encouragement given to faith communities;
- ❑ The political impetus provided by the election of a Conservative-Liberal coalition government in May 2010 which is committed to the 'Big Society', 'Rehabilitation Revolution', and therefore an enhanced role for third sector faith communities and the utilisation of volunteers in the criminal justice system.

Accordingly during the summer of 2010, in consultation with the Community Chaplaincy Association<sup>10</sup>, it was decided to visit 6 projects located at Low Newton (Durham), Leicester, Leeds, Manchester, Feltham, and Swansea. The purpose of these visits which occurred between the 2nd November 2010 and the 14th April 2011 was to acquire a qualitative understanding of, thus facilitating rich insights into, community chaplaincy. This was achieved by conducting a total of 22 interviews comprising community chaplains (N=10) and other staff made up of project managers, volunteer coordinators,

and other essential support workers (N=12). Even though this research pursued a number of pertinent issues with all 22 respondents, one specific question explored the relationship between community *and* prison chaplaincy with ten community chaplains. The interviews were recorded and subsequently analysed, and the findings appertaining to this discrete theme will now be illustrated by presenting data from all six locations visited.

### Relationship between community chaplaincy and prison chaplaincy

When exploring the relationship between the relatively new phenomenon of community chaplaincy which began in 2001, and prison chaplaincy which reaches back to the closing years of the 18th century, the interview data strike a positive tone. At *Leicester*, where community chaplaincy began in 2007, it was recounted that a 'good relationship' prevails between the two distinct groups of chaplains<sup>11</sup>. Moreover the continuum of care which commences inside the prison extends into the community following release. It was affirmed that prison chaplains do a good job and for the first time a prisoner could find 'somebody cares for them, they can actually connect with, and we want that to continue' which is when community chaplaincy has an important function in continuing

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the work beyond the institution. This positive encomium was reiterated when I visited *Low Newton* women's prison in the North-East region, which began during 2005-06, when it was confirmed that there is a good relationship between the prison chaplaincy team and community chaplaincy. At *Low Newton*, as at other projects, prison chaplaincy refers prisoners to community chaplaincy for support beyond the gate.

When turning to the situation at *Manchester*, again there is a positive relationship and it was clarified that community chaplaincy grew out of prison chaplaincy services and Manchester Churches Together in 2004. Additionally 'We get most of our referrals from chaplaincy in prison because they recognise that our work is valuable'. When the project began there may have been

9. Comprehensive research-informed data on community chaplaincy in Canada, England and Wales, is due to be published in an Evaluation Report towards the end of 2011.  
10. I am indebted to Kevin Armstrong, former Chair of the Community Chaplaincy Association, for supporting this research. I also acknowledge the encouragement of Clinks, and permission granted by NOMS to conduct this research.  
11. It is important to explain that at the Leicester project, as well as Manchester, community chaplaincy work is undertaken with ex-prisoners released from numerous prisons. The Leicester project: Leicester, Glen Parva, Stocken, Ashwell, Onley, Swinfin Hall, and Lincoln prisons; then Manchester: Styal, Buckley Hall, Forest Bank, Wymott, Risley, Swinfin Hall, and Manchester (formerly Strangeways).

some scepticism, but no longer. 'They (prison chaplaincy) may not fully understand what we do, but community chaplaincy is trusted' to work with prisoners who have served less than 12 months as well as more serious offenders released on licence to probation services.

During my visit to Leeds (West Yorkshire Community Chaplaincy Project) it was stated that 'It's good. The chaplains in the prison, not the current ones but previous incumbents, were involved in setting up this community chaplaincy project in the first place (in 2005). So they set it up because they were concerned about the under 12 month prisoners constantly returning to prison and seeing the same old faces over and over again. So it is very good and they refer people to us; there's a lot of communication'. Interestingly the relationship 'has changed a lot over the years. It's gone through a cycle from being absolutely rooted in the prison chaplaincy and getting referrals from chaplaincy, to a more distant relationship. But now coming back to a close relationship where we have a member of the prison chaplaincy on the community chaplaincy board'. Community chaplaincy also participates with prison chaplaincy staff in running groups for prisoners within Leeds prison.

At Feltham Young Offender Institution where community chaplaincy began in 2005, there are good relations with prison chaplaincy staff. Again, as other projects, the former emerged out of initiatives precipitated by the latter. Finally at Swansea there have been close links between prison and community chaplaincy since the latter began in 2001. This is manifested in shared office accommodation inside the prison which I observed, and the comment was expressed that there is 'a positive and empowering relationship'. They may not agree on everything, but 'we are there for one another'. Accordingly the dominant impression gleaned from visiting these six locations is that the relationship between community chaplaincy and prison-based chaplaincy is overwhelmingly positive.

## Discussion and conclusion

Ten years ago a joint thematic inspection by HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation expressed concern at re-offending rates following release from prison institutions, and also acknowledged that resettlement was fraught with complexities<sup>12</sup>. Even though it was much too early for the Inspectorate report to incorporate community chaplaincy projects (because the first began in

2001), at paragraph 3.5 it is noted that non-governmental organisations, prison chaplaincies, prison visitors, and different faith traditions have made a significant contribution to resettlement. Similar concerns over recidivism and resettlement were reinforced the following year<sup>13</sup>. Subsequently the National Offender Management Service, after 2003-04, fostered a closer working relationship between prisons and probation conducive to reducing recidivism. Nevertheless it should be acknowledged that not only has the prison population doubled since 1993, but reoffending rates for short-term prisoners of less than 12 months have increased from 58 per cent in 2000 to 61 per cent in 2008<sup>14</sup>. Therefore recidivism and resettlement remain areas of concern for criminal justice organisations and governmental penal policy makers, which maintains an interest in the *religious question*.

Even though the accumulated evidence on the relationship between religion, faith-orientation, delinquency, and crime must be treated with caution, the contribution of religion to reducing re-offending amongst ex-prisoners must not be summarily dismissed as irrelevant. Notwithstanding the comprehensively critical review of the research literature by Aos et al.,<sup>15</sup> religion has value within prison<sup>16</sup>; faith-based interventions can conduce to rehabilitation if coupled with substance abuse treatment, educational and employment services, and the principles of What Works<sup>17</sup>. There is also some evidence that prison chaplains can positively influence post-release outcomes<sup>18</sup>.

Accordingly a case can be built and an argument advanced for the development and expansion of community chaplaincy, closely aligned to prison chaplaincy, with a view to making a positive contribution to an important feature of penal policy: reducing recidivism amongst ex-prisoners beyond their release from custody. This research-based article has produced some empirical data to illustrate a positive relationship between prison chaplaincies and community chaplaincies, specifically in six locations of England and Wales. Therefore the position is advanced that there is scope to develop this relationship for the mutual enrichment of both groups of chaplaincies within prison establishments; the benefit of prisoners beyond the gate; to enhance the continuum of care and support; and the effective contribution to government policies for criminal justice. This is also an area which offers a fruitful research agenda for prison and community chaplaincy to consider.

12. HMI Prisons (2001) *Through the Gate: A Joint thematic review by HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation*, London: HMIP.

13. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*, London: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

14. Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders*, London: Ministry of Justice.

15. Aos, S., Miller, M. And Drake, E. (2006) *Evidence-Based Adult Corrections Programs: What Works and What Does Not*, Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute of Public Policy, 1-19.

16. O'Connor, T.P. and Perreyclear, M. (2002) 'Prisoner Religion in Action and its influence on Offender Rehabilitation', *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 35, 3, 11-33.

17. McKean, L. and Ransford, C. (2004) 'Current Strategies for Reducing Recidivism', *Centre for Impact Research*, Chicago.

18. Sundt, J.L., Dammer, H.R. and Cullen, F.T. (2002) 'The role of the Prison Chaplain in Rehabilitation', *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 35, 3, 59-86.