

Community Chaplaincy and Faith

Positioning paper

Community Chaplaincy projects are faith-based organisations that work with people in prison. They support them through the gate upon release, and during those first critical days, weeks, months (and beyond) back in the community. They do not seek to duplicate other projects and initiatives but to complement existing provision working with a multi-disciplinary and multi-faith approach.

The foundations of **Community Chaplaincy** are derived from faith-based principles, and projects appreciate unequivocally the value of faith and faith communities in an individual's life.

Community Chaplaincy projects seek to provide holistic support for people, that is; practical, emotional, relational, developmental, social and spiritual. Projects work with people of all faiths and none. It is not zealous outreach, although it will respond to those who wish to explore and develop their faith, whatever faith that may be.

Community Chaplaincy engages with the lives of many people in our society who are in deep trouble; disaffected, judged in the popular press, depressed and anxious, affected by troubled family relationships, or suffering from drug misuse issues. In short, already in prison. Our society's culture is not one that encourages long term relationships, delayed gratifications, civic responsibility, personal depth or self respect. It is inevitable that many people fall foul of the law and find themselves in prison.

Community Chaplaincy is a focus for harnessing the extensive resources of Faith Communities to work in partnership with others in the community response to the challenge of law and order issues. Such resources enable projects to support those most at need with often complex and multiple requirements.

How faith informs the work of Community Chaplaincy

The bases of penal detention are traditionally retribution, deterrence and reform. The late William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, explored these principles in *The Ethics of Penal Action*:

"...it is true that though retribution is the most fundamental element in penal action and deterrence for practical reasons the most indispensable, yet the reformatory element is not only the most valuable in the sympathy which it exhibits and the effects which it produces but is also that which alone confers on the other two the full quality of justice".

In other words, it is only when there is opportunity for change, transformation, renewal and restoration that justice is fully served in the detention of prisoners.

It is faith that informs and motivates the work of Community Chaplaincy – faith in the story of human renewal, and faith in human beings, that whatever they have done, there is something that remains, a seed of a new day, a new life.

We believe that the opportunity to move on should be offered to all who offend. There is no future for our society in endless payback or vengeance. The Buddha captured this very succinctly two and half thousand years ago:

*"In this world, hate never yet dispelled hate.
Only love dispels hate.
This is the law,
Ancient and inexhaustible"
(Dhammapada)*

Faith encourages us to look beyond the outward appearance and social norms and consider the person, without judging. Furthermore, faith has the capacity to challenge preconceptions and attitudes within our communities:

'God does not look upon your bodies and appearances, He looks upon your hearts and your deeds'
Prophet Muhammad

We see the example of Jesus who never gave up on people. He took risks to be with them. He offered radical forgiveness in ways that disturbed the moral balance and norms of society. He challenged many kinds of status quo which themselves created injustice and exclusion.

From the underpinning faith principles of Community Chaplaincy emerges the need to respond compassionately to those who are in prison;

When a man has compassion for others, God has compassion for him
The Talmud

Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners and those who are ill treated as if you yourselves were suffering
Hebrews 13.3 - The Bible

Faith communities have a crucial role to play in helping those who have been in prison to settle back into the local community. They can provide long-term stability and invaluable support to those in need through common principles and beliefs;

Hope for both victims and ex-offenders. Most, if not all faiths carry a message of hope that things can be better in the future. Sometimes our role is holding onto hope for those who cannot yet hold it for themselves. For all it is about inspiring hope whilst providing the support needed to fulfil that which is hoped for.

Love, unconditional love, compassion and kindness that goes the extra mile but does not count the cost.

Belief in the intrinsic uniqueness of someone who (often) does not believe in themselves.

Forgiveness - Holding on to the fact that there is the possibility of restoration and a new start for anyone, regardless of what they have done.

Restoration of Relationships - Demonstrating and modelling caring, consistent and stable relationships. Mending family ties. Showing people that they matter and are valuable through unconditional relationships.

Walking alongside as a companion on a journey, when one stumbles there is another to help them up, and on with the journey.

The faith ethos of Community Chaplaincy provides a firm foundation for the work that we do, a motivation for doing it, and ultimately, a profound benefit for those we work with.