

Prison Chaplaincy Training Workshop

Vocational and Personal Development

25 November 2011

9.30am - 3.30pm

Methodist Church Skills Centre
Kingharman Rd. Brookfields
Freetown - Sierra Leone

Prison Chaplaincy Training Workshop

“Vocational and Professional Development”

Friday 25 November 2011

MCSL Skills Training Centre, CCSL Compound,
Kingharman Road, Brookfields, Freetown

Programme

09.30	Registration
09.45	Prayers and Welcome
10.00	Session One Introduction and Definition of Programme
10.15	Refreshments
10.30	Session Two Presentation and Analysis of Training Handbook
12.00	Session Three Analysis and Recommendations 1
13.00	Lunch Break
13.30	Session Four Analysis and Recommendations 2
14.30	Session Five Plenary Discussion
15.00	Closing Courtesies

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Prison Chaplaincy Training: Vocational and Professional Development

Introduction

The theme of this training workshop, 'Professional and Vocational Development', has been carefully chosen. The use of the word 'professional' distinguishes between those who are officers of the Sierra Leone Prison Service (SLPS) and those who visit a prison, as representatives of a specific faith community, in order to offer spiritual support to prisoners and prison staff. Such visitors do have a significant role but their training and responsibilities are different. The use of the word 'vocational' is also important. The initial idea was to include the word 'pastoral' in the title. It is a word that many of the Christian chaplains would acknowledge and accept but a word that is less recognised by Muslim chaplains. But it is a word that you will find in a number of the articles as its appropriateness in the care of prisoners and prison staff cannot be ignored. The word 'vocational' is however more inclusive as the Sierra Leone Prison Chaplaincy Service is committed to a system that honours religious and spiritual freedom, and the development of its staff should reflect acceptance and tolerance of differing faiths and spiritualities. It is also 'vocational', in that all the current officers serving as chaplains, identify their faith in God and seek to honour God in their lives as individual Muslims or Christians. A more detailed examination of 'professional' and 'vocational' will follow below but it is important to see that the inclusive, multi-faith aspect of the training is implicit in all of the material even when reference is being made specifically to Islam or Christianity.

Vocation

Irrespective of which faith group a chaplain may belong to, the sense of calling to the work of being a chaplain is essential for purposeful commitment to the work that has to be carried out. Many of the chaplains in SLPS, started their work experience of prison service as an officer, and from this experience came the call to something more than just be an officer. The word 'vocation' comes from the Latin word 'vocare' which means 'calling'. There is the sense that their calling led them to the desire to take care and be involved with the whole lives of the people found within the institution. That there is no aspect of a person's life which can be separate from their commitment to God and God's love, and that is to be expressed through their calling to be a chaplain. Because of the nature of their work chaplains will never be able to fully quantify the influence for good they have had, and especially the disasters and critical incidents avoided, that comes about as a result of the commitment and dedication they have to their work.

Chaplains fulfil their calling by listening empathetically to inmates and prison officers, to those agitated by situations often beyond their control and enabling both groups to know that as men and women, chaplains are dedicated to offering God's love to all who are living or working in prison.

Who Is a Professional, Qualified Chaplain?

Professional, qualified chaplains, because of their specialised knowledge and extended training, provide religious and pastoral services to imprisoned persons of all faiths, in an institution. They are called to such work and compensated (paid). In Sierra Leone most of the chaplains are called whilst serving as officers.

Professional chaplains have extensive knowledge of the faith affiliations of their inmates, and they work to provide for the religious needs of those persons. However the professional goes beyond his or her own faith group to find faith group representatives in the community who are qualified and willing to minister to those of that faith in the institution.

Professionals also have extensive knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the various religions represented in the offender population. If, for example, there are adherents of minority religions eg Hinduism or Judaism in the Sierra Leone population, as there no doubt are, but the chaplain knows little about any religion except his or her own, that chaplain will be ill-equipped to coordinate with volunteer providers for ministry to that population.

This reaching out beyond one's own faith group to provide for ministry to the needs of all the offenders in any prison is the essence of Rule 63 (2) to provide for the "free exercise" of religion. It is an activity which is best provided by professionals who are compensated by the State rather than those who are not compensated for this ministry by their own faith group.

Volunteers, or specific faith chaplains, who are compensated by their own faith group, provide valuable and necessary ministry. However, by virtue of their faith-group allegiance and compensation, they would normally have a primary obligation, to address and promote the interests of their particular faith group. Professional, State supplied, SLPS chaplains have no such obligation to promote the interests of one faith group over another. In fact, the obligation is the opposite—to treat all faiths and members of all faith groups without favouritism as part of the duty.

Professional chaplains exemplify by their conduct, speech and ministry, the highest standards of a correctional institution. The chaplain should be someone that anyone in the institution may look up to and say, "There is a real professional," in addition to being a godly person.

What do Professional Chaplains do?

How does the work of a professional chaplain differ from volunteer ministers or imams who serve in institutions across the country from time to time? Are professional chaplains necessary to the good order and functioning of the SLPS? Or, may volunteers do just as good a job as professionals?

Pastoral care is an essential aspect of the work of a chaplain. The professional correctional chaplain is one who has been trained, not only as a person who can lead a faith group in prayer, in the study of holy scripture or sacred texts, but is able to exercise interpersonal human relationship skills, able to offer counselling, teach the skills necessary for problem-solving and how to work at managing one's life and relationships.

People working in prisons are in a specialised and challenging environment, where successful ministry to offenders requires specialised training. Ministers and good intentioned volunteers who have not gone through any training are not able as good a job as intensely-trained professionals. Having a mature faith and good intentions is not sufficient.

Professional chaplains, trained in handling critical and traumatic incidents, have a ministry of presence and intervention in the prison system that is needed to help prevent the escalation of such incidents into bigger, potentially more violent, situations.

Professional chaplains also provide much encouragement to offenders about what might be described as 'calling them to their faith'. Most people, including offenders, have some awareness of a higher power, the divine, the holy, the Creator, the Almighty. They have strayed away from honouring that power in their lives. Chaplains can redirect their hearts toward honouring that power, showing the value of peace and love, over strife, fighting, violence and hate. This is not just pie in the sky by and bye, and nice-sounding words. How people think and live dramatically affects their quality of life here and now, as well as that of all their relationships. For those offenders who follow the precepts of their faith when they are released from the institution, and are influenced by their positive life direction change, chaplains will have facilitated a safer society.

Professional correctional chaplains are visible and available to the institutional staff as their chaplain. It is a common myth that chaplains are only in the institution for the offenders. It is recognised that all who work in correctional institutions, administrative and security staff have great needs, including spiritual needs. The ministry of presence and intervention during their times of need goes far not only in helping them in their distress but also in creating the relationships which are necessary to facilitate a smooth-running, constitutionally sound, programme which is helpful to all.

Conclusion

Professional correctional chaplains have first and foremost been called by God to this work. They have received specialised training to provide effective ministry in the challenging environment of correctional institutions. They are a vital link between community volunteer resources and agency administrative personnel, to ensure that the religious needs of all offenders are provided for. Using a state-supplied professional chaplaincy team is the best guarantee of providing a constitutional programme which will help reduce litigation. The trained professional chaplain becomes a safety valve, through listening and pro-social intervention, providing a calming ministry of presence in potentially explosive situations. Finally, by linking the offender population with positive community resources, and through the redemptive work of changing inmates' hearts, minds and directions, the professional chaplain helps ex-offenders to stay out of prison, thus reducing the rate of recidivism.

Peter Clark
November 2011

The Sierra Leone Correctional Services Department

Correction Management Framework

(The following extracts are those that relate specifically and or uniquely to the work of chaplains, the chaplaincy and religious affairs)

It is very clear to anyone who works within The Sierra Leone Correctional Services Department (SLCSD) that it is a multi-faceted organisation , in which the people involved are inter-dependent upon one another. It is in working together that the SLCSD will be both professional and effective. However the aspect of Chaplaincy is the main focus for this particular training unit but of course it inevitably relates to many other features of work within the SLCSD.

As chaplaincy work in prison is inter-disciplinary, with Imams and Pastors being, teachers, preachers, counselors and responsible for religious services in the wider prison service community, there is need to see chaplaincy also connects with the work that is primarily the task of other colleagues too.

2.0 The Mission of the Department

The Mission Statement for the Department outlined in the strategic plan is:

Mission Statement

The Sierra Leone Correctional Services exists as part of an integrated justice system, to protect society by keeping prisoners in secure and humane conditions 0while encouraging and assisting offenders in their rehabilitation and re-integration.

To achieve the Department's mission statement a Correction Management System Framework has been approved within which organization reform will be undertaken.

3.0 Correction Management System

The Corrections Management System was approved by the Director of prisons in March 2008. To introduce new and improved management practices it provides for the security and Operations of correctional centres with five dedicated programs for

- Admission;
- Health and Behavior;
- Vocation and Education;
- Work and Industries; and
- Reintegration and Release of inmates into the community.

7.0 Role and Key Functions of Correctional Centres

The **Role and Key Functions of Corrections Centres** is as follows:

Role

The Role of Correctional Centres is to securely confine inmates in humane conditions, in order to protect staff and the community, whilst providing opportunity for their rehabilitation and release into society on completion of their sentence.

Key Functions

Key Functions of Correctional Centers include:

- Receive and process inmates ensuring that they are to be **lawfully detained** in accordance with a warrant from the courts;
- Search inmates and secure their property;
- Undertake **Family tracing and advise family/embassies** of the location of inmates
- Provide access for private consultations with **legal counsel and consular representatives**;
- Provide for **safety and security of inmates in humane conditions** within Centres;
- Provide **security** for the lawful detention **of inmates who pose a threat to safety and security** of officers, their families and the community;
- Conduct **security classifications** all inmate to identify those that pose a threat to the safety and good order of Centres, staff and families and to identify those that are suitable to participate in programmes;
- Provide transport and security for **inmate escort** for activities and appearances at court;
- Provide **opportunities for inmates to participate in activities including** rehabilitation activities, worship, meaningful education, work and industry programmes
- Provide opportunities for **family visits and eventual reunion** and reintegration within the community;
- Establish transparent processes to handle **complaints and discipline**;
- Provide for **counselling services and rehabilitation** of inmate;
- Facilitate **recreation activities** and contact with the outside world;
- Provide **administrative and logistic support services** to ensure the efficient function of correctional Centres for security and rehabilitation, including electricity supplies, medical Centres, food and rations, potable drinking water and transport;
- Provide **administrative services for staff** including staff medical Centres, staff uniform and quarters, inmates clothing and uniforms, resources and services, salaries and allowances, welfare and support;
- Provide for **welfare of inmates**, access to families, religious and moral support.

Welfare and Religious Affairs Branch

Role

To support the effective operations of SL Correctional Services through developing policy and strategies to provide welfare and religious services for staff and inmates in custody that contribute for recruitment, training and staff development through forecasting staff requirement for planning human resource needs for the service.

Key functions

The key Functions for Welfare and Religious Affairs Branch is to:

- Support establishment of strategies for corrections regimes and welfare schemes for Corrections Officers and inmates.
- Supervise and monitor operations of welfare schemes including the Women's Association, Credit Union and counseling service for family bereavement;
- Develop policies and programmes for Chaplaincy, religious affairs and staff counseling;
- Supervising the welfare activities for the service;
- Providing policy guidelines for welfare organizations within the department and external agencies to support welfare and other activities;
- Coordinate of provision of welfare and religious service support to correctional institutions through the Director of Operations.

17.0 Religious Support to Inmates and Correctional Centres

17.1 Preamble

Inmates are entitled to practice the religion of their choice and be provided access to the appropriate materials in order to do so.

17.2 Purpose

To outline procedures for the provision of religious support to correctional centre

17.3 Procedure

- Admitting Officers are to ensure that Inmate' religious beliefs, if any, are recorded in the relevant Correctional Centre registers and the Inmate's file during the admissions process.

- Inmate may practice the religion of their choice individually, or as a group if the Officer in Charge of Correctional Centre considers that it does not affect the security and good order of the Centre.
- Inmate are permitted to have access to articles, religious books and any other religious artefacts, icons or materials necessary for the practice of their religion, providing it does not affect the security and good order of the Correctional Centre.
- Special dietary needs of Inmate whose religion stipulates particular requirements will be recognized (refer Correctional Centre Procedure 6).
- With the written approval of the Head of the Correctional Centers, non-government organizations may visit the Correctional Centre to give religious advice and support to inmates or conduct religious services. The frequency and purpose of such visits are to be agreed beforehand by the National Correctional Centre and the organization. A copy of the approval is to be forwarded to the Officer in Charge of the specific Correctional Centre.
- The Officer in Charge of Correctional Centre will invite priests to conduct religious ceremonies for Inmates particularly during Muslims and Christian religious holidays or national religious festivals.
- Inmate must not to be compelled to receive religious teachings or advice against their will.

Welfare & Religious Affairs Branch

Duty Statement: Manager, Welfare & Religious Affairs Branch

Reporting Line: Manager, Welfare & Religious Affairs Branch reports to the Director of Human Resources Directorate.

- Coordinating with religious institution for service support for religious counseling for staff and support to inmate in institutions;
- Coordinating arrangements with Human Resources to ensure payment of salaries for staff who are absent on sick, bereavement or other leave;

Health & Counseling Services Branch

Duty Statement: Manager, Health and Counseling Services Branch

Reporting Line: Manager, Health and Counseling Services Branch reports to the Director of Human Resources Directorate.

Duty Statement: Manager Health and Counseling Services Branch
The Manager, Health and Counseling Services Branch is responsible for:

- Supporting the Security and Operations Directorate to developing of policy and guidelines to staff and manage corrections functions for the establishment of rehabilitation services within correctional centres;
- Supporting the Operations Directorate to developing of policy and guideline to staff and manage the operation of health and medical services within correctional centres.
- Developing non-clinical manuals to guide inmate rehabilitation and health/medical staff in the management of rehabilitation and health/medical services;
- Establishing and maintaining confidential health and medical records system for those who are authorised, or have been given authorisation to access them.

**PRISON CHAPLAINCY TRAINING
GUIDED SELF ASSESSMENT**

1 How many years have you served the prison service? _____

2 List the different places and prisons you have served in?

3 a State how your rank has changed during your years of service

3 b Describe how your role has changed since you started as a chaplain?

3 c Explain how your attitude to prisoners has changed during the years of your service?

3 d Explain how your attitude to your profession has changed during the years of your service

7 a Which part of your work is very difficult to do well?

7 b Which parts of your work do you feel you could improve on?

8 How would your closest colleague assess your performance in the Chaplaincy team?

Underline one of the following:

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Unsatisfactory

9 How would the Regional Commander assess your performance as an officer in the

Chaplaincy Team? Underline one of the following:

Excellent Very Good Good Fair Unsatisfactory

13 If you had the opportunity to tell the Director what the Chaplaincy Department needs most, what would you say?

14 If you had the opportunity to tell the President what the Prison Service needs most, what would you say?

15 What would you like to be doing in 2-3 years time?

The Development of the Role of Prison Chaplains

The Core competencies related to the chaplaincy role include:

- 1 Faith and Theological understanding
- 2 Spiritual Leadership
- 3 Pastoral care
- 4 Communication and language skills
- 5 Commitment to equality and respect for others
- 6 Understanding of the values and ways of working un Sierra Leone's Prison Service
- 7 Commitment to personal and professional development
- 8 Protecting vulnerable individuals

1. Faith requirements

Chaplains should be able to provide effective theological and spiritual advice and guidance. To do so, it is important that they are able to demonstrate comprehensive knowledge, and be a credible representative of their faith or spirituality.

Benchmarks for faith requirements could include:

Being a committed member of their faith community e.g. regular with prayer; has a demonstrable awareness of their obligations.

- Attainment of a relevant educational background/qualification or relevant experience that is recognised by a theological institution or university and which equates to degree level or its equivalent.
- Formal endorsement from a particular faith community.
- Understanding of different traditions within a faith.

2 Spiritual leadership

Prisoners and staff look to chaplains as a source of spiritual guidance and leadership.

Benchmarks for spiritual leadership could include:

- Ability to arrange or lead worship and organise teaching groups.
- Willingness to provide opportunities for spiritual development for different traditions within a faith.
- Willingness to be a resource to both staff and service users.
- Commitment to collaborative working as part of a multi-faith and diverse team.
- Ability to take on the role of mediator or provide appropriate guidance on mediation in issues of tension between service users, staff and institutions.
- Ability to be a point of reference for staff and management in matters of religious and/or spiritual care and support.
- Ability to advocate the spiritual and religious needs of prisoners, staff to the management team.
- Ability to apply ethical principles to issues and to take advice and convey this to management staff.

3 Pastoral care

All chaplains will be called on to provide a service of care, counselling and support on spiritual, emotional and religious issues. They will generally have responsibility towards the personal and social wellbeing of those who come to them and will need to be capable of dealing with a wide range of issues in challenging and difficult circumstances.

Benchmarks of effective pastoral care could include:

- Commitment to providing pastoral care to members of all religious tradition or none, including staff, with the same commitment as if they were members of his or her own tradition.
- Understanding and respect for diversity within a faith and between faiths.
- Understanding of problems which may be experienced by wider sections of the prison community e.g. violence/abuse, sodomy forced services, gambling, alcohol, use of narcotics, mental health issues and ability to respond with empathy and sensitivity, referring on to other appropriate personnel or prison authority.
- Ability to work with other faith chaplains and support services within the prison and community to deliver pastoral care.
- Understanding of the nature and limits of confidentiality of individual staff and prisoners and a commitment to respecting the confidential nature of privileged information of an individual or the institution.
- Ability to demonstrate good listening skills and empathise and connect with all staff and prisoners.
- Ability to demonstrate willingness and commitment in the provision of pastoral care.

4 Communication

The chaplaincy role requires the ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of people in different and often difficult, circumstances. To deliver an excellent service of advice, care and guidance demands both communication skills and an understanding of communication techniques.

Benchmarks of both could include:

- Ability to speak English and Krio to a level that allows easy understanding.
- Ability to communicate effectively with colleagues, prisoners and the general public, using different styles of communication as appropriate.
- Ability to summarise written or verbal information and present written comments clearly.
- Ability to disseminate information effectively and efficiently.
- Ability to be a positive influence on others and create acceptance and support for ideas.
- Multi-lingual skills to aid communication with those with limited language skills and ability.
- Ability to use counselling skills effectively.
- Ability to use reflective communication skills which may include listening and posing reflective questions to prisoners and staff.

- Ability to communicate across different groups of people with a variety of backgrounds e.g. young adults and the very old, those with mental health issues and physical disabilities.
- An understanding of the potential impact of different contexts and cultures on any communication.
- Knowledge of different communication techniques relevant to different circumstances e.g. breaking bad news or exploring difficult issues.
- Understanding of different methods and electronic mediums for communication
- Ability to be able to play a constructive role in conflict resolution when it arises.

5 Equality

Chaplains have an important role in ensuring institutions are able to respond appropriately and sensitively to the diversity of the communities that they serve.

To do this effectively, it is important they are able to ensure equal treatment for all and demonstrate respect for the beliefs and practices of others.

Benchmarks of commitment to equality could include:

5.1 Treating others equally

- Ability to be non-judgemental; with commitment to fulfilling the chaplaincy role without discrimination of any kind –age, tribe, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability.
- Willingness to refer individuals to alternative support services in a compassionate way where issues arise which are difficult to reconcile with core principles of their faith.
- Knowledge, or is willing to develop knowledge and ensure the implementation of equal opportunities policies and procedures.

5.2 Respect for the beliefs and practices of others

- Commitment to respecting the rights of individuals to their beliefs and practices, especially those under his/her responsibility, and to refrain from imposing own viewpoint.

5.3 Maintaining contact with wider faith groups, local and national

- Commitment to the fostering of good relations and the involvement of his/her faith community with other faiths and the wider community.

6 Knowledge of systems, procedures and policies

The chaplaincy role is complex and requires the ability to act as an interface between prison authorities and prisoners, the institution and the staff and support services. To provide an effective service of care within the specific institutional context requires a clear understanding of wider systems, procedures and policies.

Benchmarks of knowledge of systems, procedures and policies could include:

- Knowledge and understanding of the institution's purpose and values.
- Knowledge of other support services and resources (internal and external), including advocacy and interpreting services, which may be able to assist service users and staff.

- Knowledge, or is willing to develop knowledge and ensure the implementation of, the legislation, policies and procedures that affect health and safety at work and security of premises, people and equipment, including legislation about disability and data protection.
- Understanding of policies concerning confidentiality of information.
- Knowledge, or is willing to develop knowledge, of the institution's reporting procedures resulting in effective liaison between the chaplaincy team, the management and also between staff and service users.

7. Personal and professional development

Chaplaincy within society and the public sector is becoming increasingly professionalised. In this context, a commitment to personal and professional development is crucial to the chaplaincy role within the prison service. It helps ensure individuals develop their expertise and ability to deliver the best possible standards of care to prisoners and staff. Through their spiritual and professional expertise, chaplains also have a valuable contribution to make to the development of others.

Benchmarks of personal and professional development could include:

7.1 Personal development

- Awareness of own learning needs and interests and how to address these.
- Commitment to continually working to improve personal skills, knowledge and practice.
- Ability to work well with superiors, and agree a regularly reviewed personal development plan.
- Knowledge, or willingness to develop knowledge, of available courses, events and training facilities within faith and educational institutions.

7.2 Development of others

- Ability to provide professional support for staff members and departmental colleagues.
- Ability to contribute to the induction and training of others and their evaluation.

8. Protecting vulnerable individuals

Prison Chaplains are frequently called upon to offer support to individuals in vulnerable situations with those experiencing trauma, sickness or bereavement. It is important that they are able to protect these individuals, particularly those in a situation where they may be exploited by others. Training and support in these areas is essential.

Benchmarks of ability to protect vulnerable individuals could include:

- Ability to recognise how and where vulnerable individuals may be exploited by others.
- Understanding the referral process to support vulnerable individuals and protect them from harm.
- Ability to provide spiritual support and advice to those who seek comfort.

In some cases, it may also be relevant to consider:

- Ability to recognise ideologies that are non-conducive to national security, whether expressed by individuals or groups.
- Commitment to supporting, including providing theological support to, individuals who may be vulnerable to these arguments.

PRISON, PRIVACY and CONFIDENTIALITY

Prisons are busy places, with people pushed closely together, either as inmates or as colleagues, so that privacy and confidentiality are not easy to establish. In this kind of environment it is important to know what confidentiality is, and how it can and cannot function. For example, some ministers/imams respect the confidentiality of information given by inmates, but with four notable exceptions. They make sure that inmates know of these rules when they are being counselled. These exceptions are indicated in the conversation that follows:

“I am pleased you have asked to have a conversation with me and I want you to know that what you say to me will be private and confidential, but not if:

- *you tell me that you are going to harm yourself*
- *you tell me that you are going to harm someone else*
- *you tell me something that threatens the safety and security of the institution*
- *you tell me something that threatens the safety and security of the community*

In all of these cases I would consider it my responsibility to inform others.”

For chaplains, professional confidentiality carries with it responsibilities to those who might be seriously affected by their withholding information. It is therefore important to recognize the difference between confidentiality and secrecy especially as secrecy and deception are very much a part of crime and criminality.

One purpose of confidentiality, in the religious setting for Imams, pastors and priests, is to provide a safe place for inmates to share and understand their own suffering, without the intrusion of those who have no reason or right to know. Such confidentiality is positive and can contribute to a person’s recovery, including when a person has been abused. Whereas secrecy, especially of abuse, may only lead to further acts of abuse. It is therefore important for a chaplain to avoid being drawn into secrecy as opposed to confidentiality, as it will only perpetuate or worsen a very serious matter.

When the Chaplain is uncertain of what action, if any, should be taken, consulting another colleague does not have to include disclosing names. Chaplains should not agree to keep information confidential or secret, prior to the information being given.

It is not uncommon for prisoners who are vulnerable, to give the impression of appearing strong and invincible, without a legitimate reason for doing so. In some cases, they speak of having information. Information is power and therefore there can have as much influence in withholding information as in sharing it. When information is given to gain advantage or to hurt people, and it is withheld, it is secret information. When information is given and it not disclosed to heal or to protect someone, it is confidential information.

A Provisional List of Guidelines

1. All forms of gossip and slander should not be permitted and Chaplains should not gossip or slander anyone, nor receive gossip or slander from another party.
2. Chaplains should not agree to unconditionally maintain information in confidence since to do so would possibly require them to disobey the codes of the prison service, the love of God, the commands of Christ or the Teaching of the Prophet.
3. Pastors, counsellors and other involved parties must be free to consult with others (e.g., other ministers, imams or counsellors), when necessary, in order to gain insight and help in resolving problems.
4. If a chaplain receives information that may prove harmful to the person giving the information, or harmful to others, it is their obligation to reveal or use that information in order to prevent such harmful or unjust affects. Examples of such situations are these:
 - a. A person reveals plans to commit suicide.
 - b. A person indicates that they plan to commit a crime or an immoral act such as theft, adultery, abortion, deceit, etc.
5. If a chaplain receives information from a third party regarding a crime or conflict; it may be necessary to reveal the source of the information in order to provide help and protection for that person.
6. In cases involving a judicial action, (e.g. church, a mosque, a civil or a criminal court), the Chaplain may find it necessary to reveal information in order to facilitate a righteous and just judgment in the matter.

Group Exercise

1. How do the descriptions of confidentiality and secrecy match your own experiences in prison chaplaincy work?
2. Discuss the whole article and make suggestions as to how it can be improved, amended or extended.

Crossing the Gap: Multi-Religious Prison Chaplaincy Training

Gaps and spaces between two positions, two ideas, two beliefs or even two perceptions of 'fact and reality' are common. In the prison service, where much of the activity is hidden from view, the gaps can often be very wide. Here is a list of some of 'the gaps' which you might easily recognise but perhaps you can think of a few more that are not included:

- The gap between the public's expectation of what 'a term in prison' will involve and what the Sierra Leone Prison and Correctional Services is able to provide.
- The gap between what the S L Prison and Correctional Services (SLPCS) provides and what should be available to both prisoners and staff.
- The gap between international bodies' expectations of the SLPCS and what is found in the nation's prisons.
- The gap between what prisoners experience in prison and what they want and need for rehabilitation into society.
- The gap between the aspirations of prison staff and the pay and condition they receive.
- The gap between what the SLPCS once offered and what it provides today.
- The gap between the capacity of prison workshops and educational programmes and what they could potentially produce and offer.
- The gap between where a prisoner wants to be living emotionally and ethically and where they really are.
- The gap between a prisoner's emotional suffering and the freedom that chaplains see they could have whilst still in confinement.
- The gap between those who intend to use time in prison to rehabilitate and re-form their lives and those who have no desire to do so.
- The gap between those prisoners who have power and those they subjugate.
- The gap between the faith of a Christian prisoner and that of a Muslim prisoner.

- The gap between those prisoners who practise a specific faith and those who do not
- The gap between chaplains who practise a specific faith and officers who do not practise a specific faith.
- The gap between chaplains' current competencies and their potential abilities.
- The gap between the ministry of Muslim chaplains and Christian chaplains
- The gap between what Muslim chaplains and Christian chaplains could provide for staff and prisoners and what they are able to provide.
- The gap between the voluntary sector's active participation in the life of a prison and their potential involvement as service providers in education and health services
- The gap between the relationship of a Jamat or Mosque and their Muslim brother and sisters in prison.
- The gap between the relationship of a chapel or church and their Christian sisters brother in prison.
- The gap between Christian institutions such as CCSL, and the S L Prison and Correctional Services
- The gap between Islamic institutions and the S L Prison and Correctional Services

The gap need not always been seen as problematic but one of differences, however the question as to whether that difference serves the aim and purposes of the Sierra Leone Prison and Correctional Services and benefits both the prisoners and staff is of major importance.

Exercise

- What are the gaps that concern you most and how would you want to see them made smaller or eliminated altogether?
- How would you propose to cross the gaps?

The African Prison: a Case Study.

The BBC's Francis Ngwa Niba describe the harsh realities of prison life after a rare visit by a journalist to a Cameroonian jail.

I went to Buea Central Prison in south-west Cameroon when inmates on death row, petty criminals and young offenders crowded into the jail's courtyard to flex their muscles for their weekly sports break.

Like many jails across Africa it is overcrowded, housing more than 300 prisoners in old stone colonial buildings - more than double its intended capacity.

"Prison life is very very hard," says Ngangue Alaine, who was sentenced to death for armed robbery.

The prisoners say they receive a daily food ration which can be anything from uncooked rice to six green bananas.

"The food we are given, even a bird will not survive on it," Mr Alaine says, adding that on days he can afford it, he has to buy kerosene to cook his ration.

Some enterprising inmates run small craft businesses to earn money for their survival, using guards to get raw material from outside prison and then selling their products.

Others rely on their relatives, although many find their families abandon them when they are sentenced.

Witchcraft

The lone female prisoner I met, 47-year-old Jenny Moki, said she was lucky enough to get regular visits from her husband and daughters.

Jailed more than a year ago, the grey-haired former beer seller says she has another eight months to serve for witchcraft.

"My neighbour accused me of using witchcraft to lure customers drinking at her bar to buy from me instead," she says.

"One thing led to another, I had a fight with her son, wounded him and while detained, I was asked to sign a document saying I would be held responsible if any of her relatives fell ill or died.

"I refused to sign the document, was taken to court and was sentenced."

While she says conditions have not been good, they have not been as bad as she imagined.

Until recently the prison had no toilet facilities, but a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), Help Out, has built some basic ablution areas.

As one prison guard told me, the NGO's intervention has influenced other areas of life.

"Formerly we used to put stubborn prisoners in chains; we used to suspend their legs up some days," he says.

"But now with the human rights system we've reduced all these sanctions."



He dismissed accusations that inmates are treated inhumanely.

"Compared to other prisons in Cameroon our prisoners are well fed. They have around 1kg of food every day. We in Buea take very good care of them."

Changes

The iron beds the prisoners sleep on today are the same beds the first occupants slept on 80 years ago.

But the 13 young offenders I met - some playing table tennis during my visit - no longer sleep in the same dormitories as other inmates.

"We discovered that young offenders were lumped into the same wards with hardened criminals and we thought this was not proper," Help Out's Clarkson Obasi says.

"We then decided to construct a separate section for them.

"We never miss an opportunity to tell prison officials that basic rights still must be respected and things are gradually improving."

Those on death row often have their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, as President Paul Biya opposes the death penalty and no public executions have been held during his 24 years in office.

Eka Fabian, a Nigerian originally sentenced to death in 1983 for armed robbery, is set to be released in three years time. Reflecting on his 26 years inside, he advises people to think twice before crossing the law.

"Stay straight and don't commit any crimes. You might not survive prison life if you are caught and sentenced," he says.

Not all Africa's 60 nations have identical prison systems and not all those being held in prison experience the same conditions. However it worth remembering that more than one million Africans live in prisons across the continent and that more than 90% of them are young men.

Just as there is no such thing as a typical prison, there is unlikely to be a typical prisoner. Nevertheless what prisoners encounter in prison is usually one of inadequate food, hygiene and accommodation and an absence of reformative/educational opportunities. All such

problems are generally a result of gross overcrowding and drastic underfunding which lead to prison conditions being an additional punishment to that of serving a custodial sentence. People are placed in prison and confinement as a punishment and not to be punished.

In the following descriptive report by Francis Ngwa Niba, we find evidence of numerous problems that are replicated in prisons across Africa, This report will therefore serve as a general case study for analysis and reflection of prison life in general. This is intended to assist your critical evaluation of the chaplain's role in the prison community and as a service to all who live and work within it. It is not intended that you should see Beau Central Prison as being typical of the Sierra Leone prison system but to assist you to be able to identify 'generic' problems in African prison systems.

Instructions and Questions

Read the case study carefully before examining and completing the questions below.

- 1a** Make a comprehensive list of all the different issues included in Niba's description of Beau Central Prison.
- 1b** Identify the two or three most serious issues and if they are real problems what would you consider as being possible ways to reduce or eliminate the difficulties?
- 2** Are there any similarities between what you have read of Beau Central Prison and experienced in Sierra Leone ?
- 3** Was there anything in Niba's report, that shocked or surprised you? If so explain what it was and your personal reaction involved
- 4.** Why do you think Mr Alaine's opinion on the inadequate food, was disputed by the 'prison guard'?
- 5.** Two examples are given of the ways in which an NGO has changed the conditions of the prison. Does that indicate that the Cameroonian prison service are failing in their duty.

Explain your answer.

- 6.** What would you see as your role as Chaplain in a place like Beau Central Prison?
- 7.** Give your opinion on capital punishment and the use of the death sentence.

So who are the prisoners?

Anyone who enters prison for the first time, will find themselves asking questions as they try to make sense of the very demanding environment. The question may well include, “Who are these men and women?” and “Why are they here?”

It is particularly important that any new chaplain is able to identify who prisoners are and what has led them to be imprisoned. The following typology is intended to assist finding answers to some of the questions.

Each inmate is a unique person. God loves each one and is not willing that any should perish. There is no “typical” inmate in God’s sight, but there are some common characteristics that may help the new chaplain to understand the majority of the prisoners.

As an experienced chaplain please read the following typology and you can add other characteristics that are missing from the list.

Education: Often, the educational level of inmates is low and illiteracy rates are very high.

Home environment: Inmates often come from homes where there was abuse, divorce, little supervision, and no discipline.

Vocational training: Many inmates have little or no vocational training. They may have been unsuccessful at obtaining or maintaining employment or labored at low paying jobs.

Self-image: Inmates often have low self-image because society, friends, or family or clan have rejected them.

Emotional profile: Many inmates suffer from guilt because of what they have done or have put their families through. Depression, hopelessness, and hostility are common.

Social responsibility: Inmates sometimes have a limited sense of social responsibility. They may feel no remorse for their crime or that they got a “bad break” from the system by coming to prison.

Common Offenses: Four specific crimes account for the reason the majority of people are serving prison sentences in most countries, including Sierra Leone: these are: robbery, burglary, violence/murder, and drug/narcotic violations. Other common reasons for incarceration are sexual offenses, kidnapping, assault, embezzlement, forgery, and fraud.

Adopted Roles: Inmates also assume various roles in prison that the new chaplain needs to be aware of.

Dis-rupters: may come to a Bible or Quran classes as earnest students and then disrupt by asking unanswerable questions. They may try to pour out scandalous stories about the church and ministers, the mosque and the imams or turn testimony time into a complaint session.

Perennial seekers: respond to every altar call due to a lack of understanding of what conversion is all about, a desire to please you, or because they have lived like a sinner since they last responded. Continue to receive them warmly when they respond and pray with them. When they are eventually secure in their relationship with God and really understand conversion, they will change.

Manipulators; are those who may be charming and agreeable, but try to use you to accomplish their own purposes.

Institutionalized inmates are those who have been confined for a lengthy period of time and have difficulty functioning apart from an institutional setting. If they return to prison after paroling, don't be discouraged. They may be sincere in their confession of the Lord but just need more skills for adjusting to life outside.

These characteristics are not true of all inmates. Some are very educated and held high paying jobs. Some came from good homes and supportive families. Some are sincere seekers, desiring to learn about God. These general characteristics are based on numerous studies of the majority of prison inmates.

It is important, to remember to view each inmate not as they were, or even as they are but to see them as men and women of God that they will become when they encounter a meaningful faith in the God of Abraham.

Are some really innocent?

Many inmates maintain their innocence. For some who are actually guilty, this can be an escape mechanism. They cannot face what they did, so they rationalize or blame others. And some inmates who maintain their innocence actually are innocent! There have been many cases where inmates were released from prison after it was proven--beyond a doubt--that they were wrongly convicted. This applies to former death row inmates also. Chaplains are not called upon to judge the guilt or innocence of an inmate but to minister God's love to them.

Always remember . . .

there are great men and women of faith on both sides of the prison wall.

Finding Islamic Faith in a United States Prison By Dawud Burgess

While numerous letters have been written about prisons, and many theories abound on what the prison experience is like, very few of us know first hand what it is like to live inside a prison cell and to understand what it means to be a Muslim whilst 'doing time', or indeed what it means when a prisoner converts to Islam while behind bars.

To do so we need to understand what happens inside so many of the prisons in the U.S.A prison, for the most part, is a place where some of the worst people in society are allowed to victimize each other. Firstly, things that are frowned upon in the free world are common occurrences in this place of pure hatred and segregation. Drug use, homosexuality, gang violence and racism are no longer vices, but simply a way to survive. While a man locked up for rape is shunned by society, an inmate who rapes another is often looked up to or feared. Fights, stabbings and harassment from the correctional officers happen everyday in prisons across the nation.

At the same time, of all places in America, it is in the prisons that you can find some of the strongest and most knowledgeable Muslims. Here, you will find men who stand up against the norms of the prison culture to practice a completely alien path. They leave behind the state of ignorance which had plagued them to embark upon the road to true guidance. As stated in the Holy Qur'an, "And Allah guides those whom He wills, and lets go astray whom He wills (6:88)."

Many comment that it is amazing that Muslims who are incarcerated can take up the task of learning a new language and memorizing the Qur'an. In and of itself, this is not amazing -- what is amazing is the fact that many of the "free" Muslims are not doing the same thing. For the Muslims in prison, Islamic knowledge is a priority. For the Muslims who are free to study, Islamic knowledge is a hindrance and something that is left for the elderly. It is truly sad that the Muslims who are free in this society do not seek out scholars, yet for many incarcerated Muslims a scholar would be seen as a blessing from Allah.

It is in prison that groups of people come together simply for the pleasure of Allah, with no concerns of race and creed. To do so, they must battle not only the negative environment around them, but also a prison administration that often wants to destroy them. On the other hand, we have Muslims who are free to practice Islam as they wish, disregarding other Muslims or Islam as a whole, and divided by nationalism, race, ethnicity and cultural differences. Yet does not Allah say in the Qur'an, "We have created you into nations and tribes not that you may hate each other, but so you may know and love each other? (4:13)"

I became a Muslim inside of prison. It was not only the words of Allah that attracted me to Islam, but also the brotherhood that I saw. From the moment that I made it known that I wanted to learn more about Islam, I was welcomed. Normally, this would not need to be mentioned, except for the fact that I am a white American who was entering a predominantly African-American community. This was something that was looked upon unfavorably by both sides, to say the least. Yet these same men took me in as one of their own, risking their lives to teach me about Islam.

I wish I could say the same about how I was treated when I walked into a mosque for the first time. I was stared at, ignored, and betrayed. I had to wonder if the Qur'an I had been reading was actually a whole different book. When I left the prison and those brothers who had become my family, I was sad. I know that I would not see most of them again in this life. I left there making a promise, that I would not forget what I had learned. I haven't. Often I am reminded of those bars and the brothers that I left behind. The saddest part of leaving prison was entering a community of Muslims where most people have a chip on their shoulder. While I read verses of Qur'an about brotherhood and unity, what I saw in many a case was a look of pure hatred when a "brother" looked into my face, if he even bothered.

In a way, I had expected such treatment. While I was locked up, I had written many letters to mosques trying to get Islamic literature. More often than not, I would not even get a response. I had been unable to understand this considering the Qur'anic verses regarding treatment of those who have migrated to Islam. With all the knowledge and resources at hand, those who were free ignored my pleas for help. When I was released, I came to find out that many others like me had gone through the same thing.

For some reason, people who were raised as Muslims by their parents cannot figure out that there are many hardships that come with separating oneself from the beliefs of one's parents. Those who are locked up are often abandoned by their family and friends. Worst of all, when they are released, these people who fought for their Islamic identity find themselves shunned by the free Muslim community.

As Muslims, we have no right to look down on anyone. It is an injustice to the Muslim *Ummah* (global Muslim community) and to Islam as a whole to isolate or ignore any person just because of where he is from or who his parents are. I did not choose the religion of my parents. None of us chose the land in which we are born or the color of our skin. These matters are from Allah, the Creator of all things. Do any of us know better than the One who has created us?

We as Muslims have the duty to form a unified Ummah. We cannot truly call ourselves Muslims, or say that we love each other, if we separate ourselves from each other. In the relationship between those who are imprisoned and those who are not, as Muslims, we must come together. Not only is it important that communities visit the Muslims in prison, they must also form a support system within the community that can give these new Muslims a chance to re-enter society after their release. After all that Muslims must battle in prison to simply be Muslim, it is not right for them to have to fight for the respect of their brethren.

As to those who are imprisoned, learn as much as you can and stick together. Learn from and love each other. You can succeed but you must strive continuously to move forward -- never retreat, never surrender. Ignore all of the people who say anything negative, and never give up hope in the strength and mercy of Allah.

<http://www.jannah.org/articles/behindbars.html>

*Article from Al-Talib: The Muslim Newsmagazine at UCLA, July 1999, p. 21.

*Reprinted at Path to Jannah with permission.

Islamic Counselling and Prison Chaplaincy

The Muslim community in confined communities including prisons faces a number of specific challenges which may be different to forces experienced in mainstream society. The cultures of crime and the presence of weapons, guns, alcohol, and drugs associated with criminality that the prisoner has experienced is no longer present but still they are desired by those who have been removed from the everyday tasks of creating families, raising children, and supporting friends and neighbours.

God has given us tools to solve our community problems, by using the Quran and Sunnah. In addition, Islamic counselling emphasizes spiritual solutions, based on love and fear of Allah (SWA) and the duty to fulfil our responsibility as the servants of Allah (SWA) on this earth.

The principles of Islamic counselling are the following: confidentiality, trust, respect, recognizing the difference between arbitration and counselling, loving what is good for other people, making peace between people, concern about Muslim affairs, good listening habits, understanding others' cultures, the partnership between Imams and professionals, awareness of the law of the land, and the ultimate goal of connecting people with Allah (SWA) and offering spiritual solutions to them. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is our model and example in showing compassion about others' concerns. It was reported that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was a good listener. Allah (SWA) has described his patience in listening to others in the Holy Quran:

Allah (SWA) has described his patience in listening to others in the Holy Quran:

Sura 9 - At-Tawba [Repentance, Dispensation] Verse 61-61:

هُوَ وَيَقُولُونَ النَّبِيُّ يُؤْدُونَ الَّذِينَ وَمِنْهُمْ ۖ
وَيُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ يُؤْمِنُ لَكُمْ خَيْرٌ أَدْنُ قُلْ أَدْنُ
وَالَّذِينَ مِنْكُمْ آمَنُوا لِلَّذِينَ وَرَحْمَةً لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
أَلَيْمٌ عَذَابٌ لَهُمُ اللَّهُ رَسُولٌ يُؤْدُونَ

Sura 9 - At-Tawba [Repentance, Dispensation] Verse 61-61:

61. Among them are men who molest the Prophet and say, "He is (all) ear." Say, "He listens to what is best for you: he believes in Allah, has faith in the Believers, and is a Mercy to those of you who believe." But those who molest the Messenger will have a grievous penalty.

Sura 58 - Al-Mujadila [She that Disputeth, The Pleading Woman] Verse 1-1:

1. زَوْجَهَا فِي نُجَادِكَ الَّتِي قَوْلَ اللَّهِ سَمِعَ قَدْ
إِنَّ تَحَاوُرَكُمْ يَسْمَعُ وَاللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَتَشْتَكِي
بَصِيرٌ سَمِيعٌ اللَّهُ

Sura 58 - Al-Mujadila [She that Disputeth, The Pleading Woman] Verse 1-1:

1. Allah has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to Allah: and Allah (always) hears the arguments between both sides among you: for Allah hears and sees (all things).

Quran reminds us that in any form of counselling, or private talks, Allah (SWA) is present and hears what we are saying.

Sura 58 - Al-Mujadila [She that Disputeth, The Pleading Woman] Verse 7-7:

7. وَمَا السَّمَاوَاتِ فِي مَا يَعْلَمُ اللَّهُ أَنْ تَرَ أَلْمَ
إِلَّا ثَلَاثَةٌ نَجْوَى مِنْ يَكُونُ مَا الْأَرْضِ فِي
وَلَا سَادِسُهُمْ هُوَ إِلَّا خَمْسَةٌ وَلَا رَابِعُهُمْ هُوَ
مَا أَيْنَ مَعَهُمْ هُوَ إِلَّا أَكْثَرَ وَلَا ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَدْنَى
إِنَّ الْقِيَامَةَ يَوْمَ عَمِلُوا بِمَا تُهْمِينَبِّئْتُمْ كَانُوا
عَلِيمٌ شَيْءٍ بِكُلِّ اللَّهُ

Sura 58 - Al-Mujadila [She that Disputeth, The Pleading Woman] Verse 7-7:

7. Seest thou not that Allah doth know (all) that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret consultation between three, but He makes the fourth among them, - Nor between five but He makes the sixth,- nor between fewer nor more, but He is in their midst, wheresoever they be: In the end will He tell them the truth of their conduct, on the Day of Judgment. For Allah has full knowledge of all things.

The Quran also teaches us that the private talk in our counselling is to help others to be righteous and to be obedient to Allah.

Sura 58 - Al-Mujadila [She that Disputeth, The Pleading Woman] Verse 9-9:

تَتَنَاجَوُا فَلَا تَنَاجَيْتُمْ إِذَا آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ أُيُّهَا يَا ٩
وَتَتَنَاجَوُا الرَّسُولَ وَمَعْصِيَةَ وَالْعُدْوَانَ بِالْإِثْمِ
إِلَيْهِ الَّذِي اللَّهُ وَاتَّقُوا وَالنَّفْوَى بِالْبِرِّ
تُحْشَرُونَ

Sura 58 - Al-Mujadila [She that Disputeth, The Pleading Woman] Verse 9-9:

9. O ye who believe! When ye hold secret counsel, do it not for iniquity and hostility, and disobedience to the Prophet; but do it for righteousness and self-restraint; and fear Allah, to Whom ye shall be brought back.

Any effort that we make in bringing people together is considered sadaqah, and Allah (SWA) will reward us for it, insha'Allah.

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the issue of prisons in Islam from the beginning of Islam till the Abbasid period. It also deals with the most famous Islamic prisons, the life of the prisoners, and their treatment by their jailors. The article reveals the sanitary conditions of the prisons, and the various ways of torturing the prisoners by the Abbasid Caliphs, who devised different ways to torture their prisoners. The article also makes a comparison between the treatment of the prisoners of war during the days of Muhammad and the treatment of Moslem prisoners. It shows that non-Moslem prisoners of war were treated in a better way than Moslem prisoners.

THE PRISON AT THE BEGINNING OF ISLAM

At the beginning of Islam the concept of 'prison' meant hindering the prisoner and preventing him from controlling his own life and mixing with other people. When the Islamic empire expanded during the reign of caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab (634_644 AD) and the insertion of new administrative rules and systems, caliph Omar decided to found prisons. Thus, he bought a house from Safwan Ibn 'Umayya al-Jumahi (d. 661 AD) for four thousand dirhams and turned it into a prison in Mecca .

Apparently, this house was not a prison in the real sense of the word. It was a place that hinders or confines the movement of the prisoners. In fact, the prison substituted the person's house or the mosque. The first one who built a prison in Islam was Ali Ibn Abu Talib (d. 661AD). Two prisons were built during his period, Nafi' and al-Makhis. During the reign of the first Umayyad caliph, Mu'awiya b. Abu Sufyan (661_680 AD), the prisons were organized and provided with guards. One of the most famous prisons in Islam was al-Dimas, which was built by al-Hajjaj b. Yusuf al-Thaqafi (d.714 AD). This prison had no roof to protect its inmates from the heat of the sun during the summer or rain during the winter , and it was called 'al- Dimas' because of its deep darkness and wilderness. It was located in the city of Wasit. Jahdar, the thief who was imprisoned in al-Dimas, said the following lines of poetry:

- 1) The nights helped me to survive the Dimas and the lion, and therefore they did me an undoubted favour
- 2) They set me free from the manacles, sending out from the horror of the prison the brave and watchful man (i.e. the prisoner)
- 3) As if its innate (prisoner) resurrected his soul, where the poison moved in his body.

The second famous prison was called 'Arim. It was a cold and dark prison that was mentioned by Kuthayyir 'Azza (d. 723 AD), when 'Abdullah b. al-Zubayr imprisoned al-Hasan b. Muhammed b. al-Hanafiyya. Kuthayyir said the following lines of poetry:

Tuhaddithu man laqayta annaka 'aa'ithun
Bal al-'aa'ithu al-mathloomu fi sijni 'Arim

Translation:

You tell someone who you meet that you need protection, but (in reality) the one who needs protection is the persecuted one in the prison of 'Arim.

Abdullah b. al-Zubayr imprisoned his brother 'Amr in this jail, and imprisoned also the poet 'Abu Sakhr al-Hudhali (d. 700 AD).

The third famous prison was called al-Mitbaq, which was built by the second Abbasid caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur (754_775 AD) between the two walls of Baghdad. It was a very wide prison that included subterranean vault and dark cellars. Other prisons were mentioned in the resources such as al-Mutraf, where al-Hallaj's body was burned on its wall after he was crucified in 922 A; the new prison in Baghdad , and the prison of Dawwar in Yamam and other places.

It seems that some caliphs and leaders used to build prisons in their palaces. For example, caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur built a prison for 'Abdullah b. Ali in his palace (11). Similarly, Sa'd b. Abu Waqqas (d. 675 AD) built a prison in his palace called al-'Udhayb for Abu Mihjan al-Thaqafi (d. 650 AD). Some caliphs were imprisoning others with their servants and girls. For example, caliph al-Mu'tasim (833_842 AD) imprisoned Muhammad b. al- Qassem (d. after 834 AD) with his sevant Masrur in a subterranean vault that was similar to a well, and he nearly died there. When al-Mu'tassim knew about that, he ordered the jailors to take him out and imprison him in Bustan Musa in al-Mu'tassim's house. It seems that Islamic prisons were not strongly built, well guarded, and watched. Therefore, we read about many attempts to break the locks of the doors or to make holes in the walls. We read also about the escape of many prisoners and even attempts to kill the jailor himself.

SUPPORTING AND FEEDING THE PRISONERS

Caliph Ali b. Abu Talib put rules for supporting the prisoners. They say that if the prisoner had money, he should spend it on himself while he is in prison, but if he had no money, Bayt al-Mal (The Treasury of the State) should buy him food, bread, and clothes in summer and in winter. The Umayyad caliph 'Umar b. 'Abdul 'Aziz (717_720 AD) ordered that prisoners should be given support from the charity. Sometimes, the prisoners were going out with their guards (with handcuffed hands) to beg. They were crying in the streets 'Starvation!' 'Starvation!' but jailors were taking most of what the prisoners managed to collect. Those who were not crying or begging were punished more severely by their jailors.

Perhaps the first person that put down fixed rules for supporting the prisoners was judge Abu Yusuf Ya'qub b. Ibrahim (d. 798 AD). He did that after caliph Harun al-Rashid (786_809 AD) demanded that. He allocated fixed monthly salaries to be paid for the prisoners. He had a registration book for those who deserve such salary. He also allocated payments for clothes, which consisted of a shirt and a cloth in winter and a wide garment in summer. He also added a head veil for women in order to avoid them going out in handcuffs to ask for charity .

It seems that salaries were not stable. Harun al-Rashid once asked the jailors: How much did you allocate for Yahya b. 'Abdullah b. al-Hasan al- Talibi (d. 796 AD). They answered: Four loaves, and eight pounds of water. He decreased that to a half and then to a quarter .

According to the sources, the government used to allocate budgets for prisons and prisoners. For example, the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tadhid-billah (892_902) allocated 1500 dinars from the government budget to be paid monthly for the expenses of prisons and the food for prisoners and their provisions . Reliable and loyal people administered the prisons. Finally, the supervision of the prisons of the state was put in the hands of the judge.

THE TREATMENT OF THE PRISONERS

The prisoners used to be handcuffed by different kinds of handcuffs and manacles. Sometimes, an iron link was added to the handcuffs and tied to the back. Ali b. Abu Talib (656_661 AD) allowed those who wanted to attend the Friday prayer to do so and return to the prison after the prayer ended . The Umayyad caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Aziz ordered his governors to allow the Moslem prisoners to be relieved of their handcuffs during the praying time . In the year 700 AD, he wrote to his governors ordering them not to handcuff the prisoners. The sick and the disabled prisoners were given some sanitary and health care by examining them or giving them medicine and preparing special food for them.

It is mentioned that at the beginning of the tenth century, doctors were appointed to take care of the prisoners. They were going into the prisons and giving the prisoners medicine and drinks. The prisoners' parents and friends were allowed to visit their prisoners in distant periods and generally on holidays and feasts. The prisoners were allowed also to read and write. For example, Ibrahim al-Musili learned how to write and read in prison.

THE CONDITIONS OF THE PRISONS

The prison rooms were dark, wet, and stinking. One could hear the prisoners' cries and complaints about starvation, nakedness, lice, darkness, bats, and insects. One day, al-Hajjaj b. Yusuf rode his horse and went out to pray the Friday prayer. He heard some noise and asked: What is this? He was told that the prisoners were making noise and complaining about their plight. He looked in their direction and said: "Begone therein and speak not unto me". Al- Hajjaj was letting the prisoners eat the animals' manure and drink water mixed with salt and ashes .

When the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (813_833) heard about the riots of some prisoners in al-Mitbaq, he rode out and went to them and ordered to bring four of them and beheaded them .Thus, we see that the prisoners were facing starvation, nakedness, and threats of death. They were forced to do unpaid labour and work in digging canals and building and other kinds of hard labour. When they finished, they were returned to the prison handcuffed. Some of them were prevented from taking the charity that was given to them by people or by their visitors. Their handcuffs were sometimes doubled. Besides, some of them were thrown into prison without limiting their period of imprisonment. Their food was limited to bread and water. Their dress was only a rough woolen garment called *jib* (a long outer garment with wide sleeves).

The prisoners were tortured in their cells. Special methods of torturing were devised. For example, Muhammed b. 'Abdallah al-Zayyat, the minister of caliph al-Mu'tasim (833_842 AD) invented a wide iron furnace with sharp nails on its edge directed towards its inside, in which he was torturing the 'Keepers of the Register" who were required to pay some

money. If the tortured one moves inside the furnace (because of its heat), the iron nails would pierce his body, which would pain them extremely. It is quite ironic that when caliph al-Mutawakkil arrested his minister Muhammed b. 'Abdullah al-Zayyat, he ordered that he be tortured in the furnace for forty days. Finally, he died in it. Al-Hajjaj also invented different methods of torturing in his prison called al- Dimas.

The Umayyad poet Jarir b. 'Atiyya al-Khatfi (d. 728 AD) described the ways of torture in al-Dimas when he addressed caliph Suliman b. 'Abdul Malik (715_717 AD) saying:

- 1) Ajarta mina al-mazalimi kulla nafsin wa 'addayta al-lathi 'ahida larasulu
- 2) Wa yad'uka al-mukallafi b'ada juhadin wa 'aanin qad 'adarra bihi al-kubulu
- 3) Wa ma zalat mu'alaqatun bi thadyin bi thi al-Dimasi aw rajulun qatilu
- 4) Farrajta al-hamma wa-alhalaqati 'anhum fa 'ahya al-nasa waalbalada al-mahulu

Translation:

- 1) You protected a soul from its grievances, and you fulfilled what the prophet assigned
- 2) The charged one calls you after an effort and the sufferer calls you after the handcuffs hurt him.
- 3) The breast or the legs of a murdered man are still hanging in al- Dimas
- 4) You relieved their oppression and their handcuffs, so you gave life to people and a passing country Al-Hajjaj ordered to bring Fayruz Husayn, who used to torture the prisoner by tying him to cracked Persian reed and dragging him till the reed tore his body apart. Then he would wet him with salt and vinegar.

This kind of torture is not strange to al-Hajjaj, who was known of his cruelty. Al-Hajjaj used to imprison women and men together. The sources mention that fifty thousand men and thirty thousand women, (of whom sixteen thousand were naked) died in his prisons.

We also read that the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tadid (892_902 AD) was well-known for his cruelty with the prisoners. When he got angry with the leader or any man, he would order his men to dig a hole for him in his presence. Then he would hang down his head into the hole to the middle of his body. His other half would appear above the earth, and the prisoner would remain hanging half-covered till his soul went out.

Prisons and Prisoners in the Bible

by Christopher Marshall

Adapted for use in West Africa by Peter Clark.

Introduction

Life in any prison and not just in Africa, usually imposes many restrictions but also it also provides opportunities too. One of these includes time for reading and reading the Bible. Even those who know something of the Bible, find that in prison they have more time to learn more of the experiences of God's people and those who have shaped the Christian faith. Getting to know these Biblical figures in greater detail can also involve getting to know one self better too This is therefore a bible study in which we will examine biblical characters what prison life was like in the past but also what it represents now. We will also consider what it is to be imprisoned and how that affects a person's relationship with God.

1. THE WHO'S WHO OF BIBLICAL PRISONERS

There are dozens of references to prisons and prisoners in the Bible— from Joseph's imprisonment in Genesis 37 to Satan's imprisonment in Revelation 20. Many of great characters of the biblical story experienced periods of imprisonment they include, Joseph, Samson, Jeremiah, Micaiah, Zedekiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Silas, Paul, Epaphras, Aristarchus, Junia, and even Jesus himself. He was held in custody between his arrest and execution, and then, in death, was imprisoned in a guarded tomb. But probably the most renowned prisoner of them all was the apostle Paul, who was in prison so many times he could be called a recidivist. He certainly knew a lot of the Roman prison system.

Before his conversion, Paul was someone who imprisoned other people. He locked up countless Christian believers, both male and female, and on occasions cast his judicial vote for their execution. After his conversion, the imprisoner became the imprisoned, an experience which so influenced Paul's identity that he could refer to himself as a "prisoner of Jesus Christ". In 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of enduring numerous "afflictions, hardships, calamities beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger".

The book of Acts records Paul being locked up on three occasions, at Philippi, Caesarea, and Rome. Later Christian tradition speaks of him being imprisoned on at least seven occasions. Paul was not alone in this experience. Peter and John were also frequently thrown into jail, and, like Paul, they too were sometimes released from jail by divine intervention. The early church was actually led by a people regarded as criminals by the authorities and God was involved in their many escapes!

In examining this biblical material for guidance on a Christian perspective on prisons, we must always keep in mind that imprisonment served a different function in biblical times than it does in modern liberal democracies like Sierra Leone today. Society at the time of Jesus was also very different, with political powers using a different range of punitive options for those in authority. Yet there are still some significant things we can learn from the Bible that is pertinent to our nation and the way people are governed. We can identify four aspects of the biblical evidence which have much to teach us today.

2. IMPRISONMENT WAS A CAUSE OF GREAT SUFFERING

In the ancient world prisons were usually underground dungeons or empty cisterns or wells, or pits in ground. They were dark and miserable places. Jeremiah was put in “a cistern house” for many days. When he was released for interrogation, he begged not to be returned to his cell fearing he would die there. Micaiah was put in prison on starvation rations of bread and water. (1 Kings 22:27; 2 Chron. 18:26.) The psalmist speaks of “prisoners in misery and in irons”, (Ps. 107:10.) captives who “groan” and are “doomed to die”. (Pss. 79:11; 102:20.) Job considers Sheol to be preferable to imprisonment, for at least there “the prisoners are at ease together [and] do not hear the voice of the taskmaster”. (Job 3:18.)

Things were no better in New Testament times. With few exceptions, prisons in the Roman period were dark, disease-ridden and overcrowded places. It was common for prisoners to die in custody, either from disease or starvation, (Matt. 25:36.) brutal torture, (Matt. 18:34; Heb. 13:3, cf. Jer. 52:11; 2 Chron. 16:10) execution, (Mark 6:14-29). or suicide (Phil 1:19-24). Imprisonment is commonly described by ancient authors as a fate worse than death; even the thought of being in prison was appalling.

Modern day prisons are very rarely comfortable places. Certainly prisons today might be more humane but the gross overcrowding in most African prison probably means that in terms of physical condition they are still a source of great suffering as they were in Biblical times. All prisons, the worst and the best are warehouses of pain where hurt and hurting people are made to suffer further hurt through the forced deprivation of freedom, the loss of autonomy and dignity, and prolonged isolation from the people who care for them most. It is precisely because imprisonment hurts that we use it as a punishment in the first place. Punishment is, by definition, painful and locking people up is the favoured form of administering punitive pain today. Prison hurts because it contradicts our humanity. We are made as free creatures in the image of a freedom-loving God. To take that freedom away from people is to exercise an awesome responsibility because it strikes at the heart of human dignity and identity. So the first thing the biblical record invites us to recognise is the exquisite pain imposed by imprisonment, and why it hurts so much, and thus it invites us to use great caution in using it.

3. IMPRISONMENT IN BIBLICAL TIMES WAS AN INSTRUMENT OF OPPRESSION MORE THAN AN INSTRUMENT OF JUSTICE

Prison is not prescribed as a criminal sanction in Old Testament law.¹ Prisons were later introduced into Israel, perhaps under foreign influence. Yet a number of factors deterred Israel from making excessive use of them:

- Prison systems have historically grown up alongside the development of standing armies and military establishments (which also fulfilled police duties). Israel was late in developing a formalised military structure, and so jails were also late in being established.
- Biblical law favoured restitution over retribution. Restitution was a way of setting wrongs right and expressing repentance towards God. Imprisonment of wrongdoers does nothing to facilitate restitution or repair.

- Israel had a strong sense of communal responsibility for obedience to the covenant, and resisted individual scape-goating. When individuals did wrong, the people as a whole, and even the land itself, bore the consequences. “For Israel, the fullest response to crime was not the isolated punishment of an individual lawbreaker but the repentance of the entire nation”. 2
- Israel’s experience of imprisonment in Egypt made an indelible mark on her national memory, and consequently on her social policy. Israel never forgot the bitterness of slavery, nor God’s action of setting her free from servitude. Israel therefore never used enslavement as a form of criminal punishment. (Exod. 22:1-3). She did still practise a form of slavery, but never felt easy doing so, and covenant law built into the institution several limitations and humanitarian protections. Indeed in many ways Hebrew slavery was a more humane institution than modern imprisonment, for slaves were at least permitted to participate in normal family and community life.

While prolonged imprisonment was not used in biblical times as a form of criminal punishment, it was still used for political and military ends. It was a way of silencing noisy prophets who voiced criticism of the reigning king or gave him unwelcome advice. It was a means of keeping defeated enemies under control, or detaining people accused of disloyalty. (Gen. 39:20; 40:1-22; 2 Kings 17:4.) It was a way of holding individuals before selling them into slavery, or putting prisoners of war to servitude. (Gen.37:24,) It could be used to prevent debtors from absconding, with the torments inflicted upon them in custody being an added incentive for their families to ransom them from bondage. (Matt. 5:23-26; 18:30.)

In the New Testament prison often serves as an instrument of religious persecution. See Acts 5:18, 21, 23; 16:19-40; 23:10ff; Col. 4:3; 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:23-28; Eph. 3:1; Philem. 1, 9; 2 Tim. 1:8; Rev. 2:20. Prisoners in the Bible are thus always depicted as the victims of injustice, and stories about prisoners are invariably told from the point of view of the prisoner, not from the perspective of those who did the imprisoning.

In many places today, prison still serves as an instrument of political oppression. There are hundreds of thousands of prisoners of conscience all over the world. The words of Lamentations 3:34-36 capture God’s awareness of such abuse, and therefore our responsibility also to be aware of it and protest against it: When all the prisoners of the land are crushed under foot, when human rights are perverted in the presence of the Most High, when one’s case is subverted — does the Lord not see it?

In many but not all democratic countries, prison is used not to silence political or religious opponents but to punish and deter criminal offending. This may be a necessary and legitimate use of prison (at least for the “dangerous few” who are a threat to others). But scripture’s consistent use of the negative aspect of imprisonment should alert us to the tendency of considering all prison systems are to oppress and abuse people in the name of some higher goal. This in turn should caution us against excessive reliance on imprisonment as a means of dealing with wrongdoing, since the power to imprison can so easily become a mechanism of oppression.

Even in many European democratic nations prisons are overpopulated with the poor and disadvantaged people. This underlines the fact that criminal justice cannot be neatly separated from social justice. It is no accident that those who are marginalised or disadvantaged or discriminated against in the larger social and economic order tend to be overrepresented in the prison system. So to concentrate all our energies on imprisoning people for longer and longer periods as an answer to crime diverts attention from the real causes of crime — which are as much to do with social circumstances as with individual wickedness. As already noted, biblical Israel placed a strong emphasis on communal responsibility for sin and wrongdoing, and resisted individual scape-goating. The opposite prevails today. We strongly emphasise individual freedom and personal responsibility when it comes to crime. We expel offenders from our midst, as though removing people who do bad things will somehow rid us of vice. It is true, of course, that individuals do choose to commit crimes and are accountable for their actions. But choices are shaped by the socio-economic context, and it is naïve, if not dishonest, to speak of crime solely in terms of personal free will. Under certain social conditions some people will turn to crime who in other social climates would remain law-abiding. In Sierra Leone, poverty, unemployment, racial inequality, social prejudice, family dysfunction and drug and alcohol abuse all have a role in fostering crime. It is crucial therefore to inquire what are the societal causes of, and collective responsibility for, crime. And not being content to divide individuals into categories of guilty and innocent, and throwing the guilty into jail. Society in Sierra Leone is also responsible for the creation of criminals and criminality, even when the individuals are still children. We are reminded of this in the African proverb ‘it is easier to raise a child than to repair and adult.’

It is also important to recognise that the law which criminals break is not a neutral transcription of absolute morality. It is an irrefutable fact that the law is predominantly reflective of the standpoint of the powerful, property owning, matriarchal African structure and that the justice system bears down more heavily on the poor and disadvantaged than on the rich and the powerful. The criminal justice system can oppress as well protect; it can persecute as well as punish. Once again, the alertness of the biblical tradition to this fact should caution against a naïve trust in the capacity of the cage to conquer sin.

4. IMPRISONMENT IS IDENTIFIED IN SCRIPTURE WITH THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF DEATH

In the light of the suffering caused by prisons and their capacity to crush the weak and oppress the poor, it is not surprising that imprisonment is often used in scripture as a metaphor for various forms of human distress. In fact, according to Lee Griffith there is a close association in scripture between imprisonment and the spirit of death itself. (This perhaps stems from the widespread use of cisterns and pits for jails, which were associated in the popular mind with entrance to the underworld.) Prison is not simply seen in the Bible as a social institution or material entity but as a spiritual reality, a kind of living death.

The Bible identifies the prison with the spirit and power of death. As such, the problem with prisons has nothing to do with the utilitarian criteria of deterrence. As such, the problem is not that prisons have failed to forestall violent criminality and murderous rampages; the problem is that prisons are identical in spirit to the violence and murder that they pretend to combat. The biblical discernment of the spirit of the prison demythologizes our pretences. Whenever we cage people, we are in reality fuelling and participating in the same spirit we claim to renounce. In the biblical understanding, the spirit of the prison is the

spirit of death. If Griffith is right, we ought not to be surprised at the failure of the prison system today. Plain common sense should tell us that we will never defeat violence by throwing violent people together in a violent environment, especially in light of what has been called “the contagious nature of criminality”. Prisons are self-defeating because they foster the very behaviour they purport to control. They generate the hatred and hostility they claim to correct. This is why, in the Bible, God’s solution is not to refine the prison system but to set prisoners free.

5. GOD WANTS TO SET PRISONERS FREE

We have seen that prisons in the Bible are usually part of a larger apparatus of injustice and oppression, an extension of the spirit of death. Because of this, biblical reflection on prison is uniformly negative. “Scripture records some of the worst crimes and most heinous violence the world has ever known”, Olson observes. “But nowhere in scripture do we find a divine endorsement of prisons”. “Never, ever, in any part of the Bible are prisons part of God’s way. Always they are used to oppress. Always they are an affront to the divine. There are no good prisons. None”. The flip side of this negative evaluation of prison is a repeated emphasis on God as a God who wants to set the captive free and to break the chains of bondage. (Deut. 7:8; 24:18; Pss 68:6; 79:11; 102:19-20; Micah 6:4; Zech. 9:11; Acts 5:19; 16:25-26; 1 Pet. 3:19; Rev. 2:10).

The psalmist speaks of a God who “looks down from his holy height, from heaven ... to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die”. Pss 102:19, cf. 79:11. The same God who “made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them”, the same God who “executes justice for the oppressed [and] gives food to the hungry” is also the God who “sets the prisoners free”.

As Israel languished in Babylonian exile, then fell under the sway of one pagan power after another, she came to view herself as a nation of prisoners in need of liberation.⁵² But they were, as Zechariah puts it, “prisoners of hope”, (Zech. 9:12) looking forward to the day when God would say to her, “I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit”. (Zech. 9:9) One of the striking tasks expected of the awaited Messiah was to “to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness”. (Isa. 42:6-7; cf. 61:1.) This is precisely the role Jesus claims for himself at the beginning of his ministry: He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”. (Luke 4:16-20.)

Jesus was not just talking here about a spiritual or psychological liberation for those imprisoned by sin and guilt; he was also talking about freeing people from the material structures and ideological systems which robbed them of freedom and dignity. Jesus’ entire ministry of feeding the hungry, healing the sick, forgiving the guilty, embracing the outsider, loving the enemy and confronting the oppressor was a fleshing out of his proclamation of release to the captives. Ironically it cost Jesus his own freedom and his own life to do so, with the convicted murderer Barabas being the first literal prisoner to benefit from it! (Mark 15:15; Matt. 27:26) But others followed, such as the inmates at Philippi who also had their chains struck off when Paul and Silas were freed by divine intervention.

How do those who inhabit our prisons today benefit from God's commitment to set the prisoner free? In *Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition*, the notion of "freedom" in the Bible is outlined as having both external and internal dimensions. In the Old Testament, freedom typically means freedom from external constraint (from poverty, debt, slavery, oppression, and military oppression). In the New Testament, freedom more often refers to an interior moral and spiritual freedom which the Christian gospel brings, a freedom from demons and despair, from sin and selfishness, from guilt and greed. The full experience of God's freedom must embrace *both* external *and* internal dimensions, although each can be experienced separately and neither is dependent on the other. What this means in practice is that those behind bars can still experience genuine moral and spiritual liberation even while they remain externally unfree.

This is the powerful truth that lies at the heart of the ministry to people in prison. But the same Lord who brings interior freedom also desires to see prisoners set free from their physical incarceration. This does not mean Christian prisoners should be encouraged to escape! But it *does* mean their fellow believers should work hard for their eventual release, and support them through their post-release adjustment, as the consummation of the freedom Christ brings. It also means Christians should oppose the practice of "real life sentences," for in biblical perspective room must always be left for mercy, repentance and restoration.

Key Elements in a Christian Response

A Christian response to the system of imprisonment and the prison system should include three key ideas:

- **CARE:**

The New Testament expressly calls on believers to demonstrate practical care for those in prison. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. (Heb.13:3.) In 2 Timothy, Paul expresses gratitude that Onesiphorus was not ashamed of his imprisonment, but eagerly searched him out in Rome to support him. Paul is so grateful for this act of compassion he prays that Onesiphorus "will find mercy from the Lord on that day".(2Tim 1:16-17.) Jesus also makes a connection between caring for prisoners now and the outcome of Final Judgment.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, *I was in prison and you visited me.*' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you *sick or in prison and visited you?*' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'.(Matt. 25:34-40) The verb "visiting" here probably means more than spending time with prisoners; it carries connotations of showing practical care for those in jail and acting, if possible, to redeem them from their plight.

The most striking feature of this passage is the way Jesus identifies himself with those in jail, so that those who care for prisoners actually encounter the anonymous presence of Christ. What Jesus was telling his disciples is that, if you want to meet God face to face, the nearest you are going to come to it on this planet is to look into the faces of your brothers and sisters — and especially your sisters and brothers who have been declared unrighteous, unclean, unacceptable. It is not that we find God there; it is that God finds us there. That is where our faith is nurtured and bears fruit. There where we expect to meet monsters, we meet God instead. The opportunity to serve God lies there among the prisoners who have been reckoned to be least deserving of any service at all. It is worth noting that the New Testament also displays a concern for the welfare of those who run prisons.

When the Philippian jailer was about to commit suicide after thinking his prisoners had escaped, “Paul shouted in a loud voice, ‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.’” As a result of Paul’s concern, the jailer underwent a dramatic conversion, not only receiving Christian baptism but even washing the wounds of his former prisoners and feeding them at his own table. (Acts 16:27-34.)

• **CRITIQUE:**

If we are to take the Bible’s consistently negative valuation of prisons seriously, it is imperative that Christians match their practical concern for those in jail with a public expression of concern for an increasing reliance on prison as a strategy for social control. Even if we cannot subscribe to a complete prison abolitionist agenda, the direction of biblical teaching, and the logic of God’s self-revelation as the One who sets prisoners free, should surely drive all Christians to stand against every attempt to expand the prison system.

• **COMMUNITY:**

The third element of a Christian position on prisons must be a commitment to the reintegration of released prisoners into “communities of care”. Concern for those behind bars must be accompanied by generous hospitality towards them when they have finished their sentences and face the struggle of re-entering an often suspicious and hostile community. People often defend prisons as a means by which offenders can “pay their debt to society”. But the metaphor fails. Not only does society foot the bill for imprisonment but ex-prisoners are never really discharged of their debt. They bear a seemingly ineradicable stigma of having been inside. In the eyes of society, a period of imprisonment serves to establish criminality as “an indelible ontological attribute”. What former prisoners need most is a community of people who truly understand both the grace and the discipline of forgiveness, a community that loves its “enemies” and welcomes strangers, a community that breaks down the dividing walls of hostility and preaches “peace to those who were far off”. (Eph. 2:14-17.) This is what Christ did, and this is what those who bear his name should also do.

Footnotes

1. There is only one place in the Bible where prison appears as a judicial sanction against illegal activity (Ezra 7:26). Even here prison is merely authorized by the Persian king Artaxerxes.
2. Griffith, *Fall of the Prison*, p93 *Biblical Perspectives on Prison Abolition* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans,)