

# *Belief & Belonging*

*The spiritual and pastoral role of Catholic  
chaplains for Catholic prisoners*



Gerard Lemos

Researched and published by Lemos&Crane

© Lemos&Crane 2016

[www.lemosandcrane.co.uk](http://www.lemosandcrane.co.uk)

Lemos&Crane has researched high profile social issues since 1994 including homelessness; social housing management; people with learning disabilities; prisoners and ex-offenders; literacy; hate crimes; and financial inclusion.

Design: Tom Keates-Miles / Mick Keates Design

# *H.E. Cardinal Vincent Nichols*

*Belief and Belonging* addresses a difficult and sensitive subject with great understanding. This report outlines the work that the Church does with those who are often outside the margins of society. The work of prison chaplains reminds us of the Church's mission of accompaniment and invites us to share God's genuine mercy. Just as Jesus reached out to sinners, we too, following His example must also reach out and show forgiveness.

As well as addressing the spiritual needs of prisoners, *Belief and Belonging* recognises the valuable practical role that prison chaplains perform. My sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this report, including the 332 prisoners and 17 prison chaplains. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Mgr Roger Reader, Catholic Bishops' Prisons Adviser and HMPS/NOMS Catholic Faith Adviser and thank him for his part in this project and his continued work in prisons.

HE Cardinal Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster

# Contents

H.E. Cardinal Vincent Nichols	ii	5. Obstacles and barriers	42
Acknowledgements	iv	Practical and logistical problems	43
Foreword by Bishop Richard Moth	v	Scheduling and timetabling issues	43
Summary	1	Prisoners not being let out of their cells	43
		Chapel not being called	43
1. Introduction	5	Problems with 'the list'	44
Aims of the research	6	Catholic prisoners being mocked	44
Methodology and sample	8	Attitudes of some prison staff	45
Structure of the report	11		
		6. Conclusions	46
2. Spiritual and religious beliefs and practices of Catholic prisoners	12	Recommendations for chaplains	47
Personal religious histories	13		
Mass	14	Appendix: research questionnaire	50
Difficulties with attending Mass	16		
Benefits of coming to chapel	18	Tables	
Private prayer	19	1: Participating prisons/young offender institutions	10
Shared prayer	22	2: Age of respondents	11
Religious objects	23	3: Gender of respondents	11
Practice and deepening of faith	26	4: Religious histories of respondents	13
Baptism and confirmation	29	5: Impact of attending Mass	15
		6: Benefits of coming to chapel	18
3. Pastoral role of chaplains	30	7: Impact of private prayer	20
Pastoral support alongside religious practice	30	8: Benefits of shared prayer	22
Pastoral care	31	9: Religious objects kept by prisoners	24
Trust	32	10: Ways in which prisoners feel chaplains help them to practice or learn about their faith	27
		11: Ways in which prisoners would like their faith deepened	28
4. Moving on from crime	37	12: Most helpful assistance given by chaplains	31
Bereavement, comfort and consolation	38	13: Ways chaplains build trust	33
Maintaining contact and connections with the family	38	14: Practical problems in getting to chapel	42
Remorse and forgiveness	39		
Rehabilitation and resettlement	40		

# *Acknowledgements*

We are extremely grateful to the many people who have been involved in this project. In particular our thanks go to Monsignor Roger Reader, Catholic Bishops' Prisons Adviser and HMPS/NOMS Catholic Faith Adviser, for his help, knowledge and perseverance in bringing this project to fruition.

We are especially indebted to each of the 332 prisoners who contributed their experiences, ideas and opinions by completing our questionnaire. Thanks, too, to the 17 participating Catholic prison chaplains without whom we would not have been able to carry out this research.

Finally, our thanks go to Mark Woodruff and The Jerusalem Trust. They have been generous funders and enthusiastic supporters of this work since its inception.

My personal thanks go to Sarah Frankenburg and Sandy Chidley who assisted me with the research at Lemos&Crane, which is an independent organisation not affiliated to any faith or religious group.

Please note that unless otherwise stated, all references to chaplains and the chaplaincy in this document refer only to Catholic chaplains and the Catholic chaplaincy and references to prisoners refer only to prisoners who identify as Catholics.

Responsibility for the views expressed, and for any errors, remain with the author.

Gerard Lemos  
Lemos&Crane  
London, January 2016

# *Foreword*

## *by Bishop Richard Moth*

For people of faith serving prison sentences, the acknowledgement of their spiritual needs, their access to church services and opportunities for prayer and the deepening of their faith are vital elements in their welfare and rehabilitation.

This report, based on effective and well-considered research, testifies to the deeply-held faith of many in prison and to the often fruitful journey taken by those prisoners who re-engage with their relationship with God or discover that relationship for the first time. It is testimony, also, to the wonderful work carried out by chaplains and chaplaincy volunteers as they accompany those in their pastoral care.

No doubt, there will be aspects of this research that will resonate with all those involved in chaplaincy and, more broadly, all engaged in the care of management of prisoners.

My thanks go to all those who assisted in this research and responded to the questions put to them. Thanks go, also, to Mgr. Roger Reader who recognised the need for this project, to Mark Woodruff and The Jerusalem Trust, and to Lemos&Crane who conducted the work and completed this fine report.

I am sure it will prove useful to all engaged in the management of our prisons, to those serving in prison chaplaincy and, thereby, to the prisoners in their pastoral care.

Bishop Richard Moth  
Liaison Bishop for Prisons

## Summary

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales supported by The Jerusalem Trust, one of The Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts, commissioned Lemos&Crane to explore Catholic prisoners' experience of the Catholic chaplaincy and their views on ways in which the Catholic chaplaincy service could be improved. The findings will be used for feedback, training and practice development for chaplains.

The teaching of the Catholic Church points to the importance of religious ministry in prison. Similarly the government's rules and expectations of prison life are that religion has a legitimate place in the lives of prisoners. The purpose of this research is to seek out and record the views of Catholic prisoners themselves about the role of their faith in their life and their future and the extent or otherwise to which Catholic chaplains contribute. References to chaplains and prisoners throughout refer to Catholics only, unless otherwise stated.

### Aims of the research

Our research sought answers to the following questions:

- Did prisoners believe in or practice the Catholic faith before coming into prison?
- In general, how do prisoners feel about opportunities to practice their faith in prison?
- What role does private and shared prayer play in prisoners' lives?
- What role does attending Mass, receiving sacraments or religious objects play in the lives of prisoners?
- What do prisoners with personal experience of Catholicism before coming to prison see as the benefits of engaging with the chaplaincy?
- Do prisoners who have engaged with the chaplaincy feel there are any risks, downsides or disadvantages of engaging with the chaplaincy?
- Are there any barriers/obstacles for prisoners in engaging with chaplains?
- What practical or other steps could be taken to address any barriers or obstacles?
- In the eyes of prisoners, what have been the most effective ways of chaplains building and sustaining trusting relationships with prisoners?
- Do prisoners feel there are other ways chaplains could help prisoners practice or deepen their faith and strengthen their religious beliefs?

- Are there other ways prisoners feel chaplains could play a role in improving outcomes for prisoners, either while in prison or in rehabilitation?
- In the eyes of prisoners, have chaplains been able to help when prisoners are experiencing specific difficulties?

## Methodology

This research is focused exclusively on prisoners who identify as Catholic and seeks their views about their experiences of chaplaincy service and ways in which it could be improved. While the research included a substantial number of the prisoners in different types of establishment it did not seek to establish a statistically representative sample of prisoners. From the total of 17 participating prisons and young offender institutions 332 responses were received from all categories of prisons, men's and women's as well as young offender institutions (YOIs). References to prisoners include offenders from all those types of establishment.

The chaplains of the participating prisons and YOIs distributed the questionnaires (approved by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) National Research Committee) to all prisoners who identified as Catholic on reception into the prison. Prisoners were asked to complete the questionnaires by themselves. Participating in the survey was anonymous and voluntary, and it was made clear that respondents could choose not to answer any particular question, or not to complete the questionnaire without explanation. Support from a neutral person was also available for those with literacy difficulties. It was made clear that all questionnaires would be treated anonymously in analysis and writing up findings. Chaplains were also available to discuss any issues about the survey with participants. Chaplains were also responsible for collecting the completed questionnaires in sealed envelopes and returning them to Lemos&Crane.

The responses on key themes in the questionnaire (e.g. attendance at Mass, private prayer, shared prayer, religious objects) were counted by numbers of respondents. The frequency of mentions of sub-themes in free text responses (e.g. spiritual guidance, peace of mind, reflecting on offence and forgiveness, connection to family) was analysed by counting the number of times key words and synonyms for analogous concepts were mentioned.

## Spiritual and religious beliefs and practices of Catholic prisoners

Many prisoners who responded to this survey grew up as Catholics and took part in Catholic life with their families long before they came to prison, including by being baptised, coming from observant Catholic families, attending a Catholic primary or secondary school and attending Church (82 per cent, 129 of 157 respondents).

Attending Mass plays a central part in Catholic life. This is reflected in the views of prisoners who responded; 76 per cent (218 of 288 respondents) stated they try to attend Mass regularly in prison. Attending Mass is seen as important, among other reasons, because it makes people feel more positive; brings feelings of calm and peace; brings people closer to God and/or their faith; gives them strength or hope and helps them to cope. Prisoners identify a number of benefits of attending chapel including feeling closer to God and their faith; fellowship with other Catholics; a sense of comfort and acceptance. For a small number of prisoners attendance at Mass in the chapel is a distraction from the routines of day-to-day prison life.



The overwhelming majority (88 per cent, 264 of 300 respondents) engaged in private prayer. The reasons given for private prayer included strength to cope with prison life; getting closer to God and their faith; a sense of space and calm; feeling more positive; a chance to pray for their families; a sense of belonging and combating loneliness, coming to terms with the past and being forgiven for their wrongdoing.

A smaller proportion than those that prayed privately engaged in shared prayer (48 per cent, 143 of 297 respondents). Their reasons included fellowship and a sense of belonging; feeling better generally; coming closer to God and seeking spiritual guidance; help to cope and deriving strength and feelings of peace and calm.

A large majority had religious objects (87 per cent, 273 of 314 respondents). These objects included rosaries, religious pictures, bibles, crucifixes and prayer booklets and cards. Religious objects were seen as important aids to prayer; visible evidence of religious belief; reminders of a Catholic way of life; sentimental attachment to presents from family or other significant people and reminders of relationships with people on the outside. Religious objects can also be a source of comfort and familiarity or seen as a form of spiritual protection.

A similarly large majority (86 per cent, 240 of 279 respondents) felt that the chaplains helped them to learn more or to practise their faith. The most commonly expressed form of this assistance was through talking about and teaching matters of faith and belief. Other reasons given were openness, availability and willingness to listen; study groups and other group activities; attendance at Mass and generally through regular contact. A small number of prisoners mentioned valuing receiving religious literature from the chaplain. A substantial group of prisoners wanted the chaplain's support in receiving the sacraments of the Catholic Church, including baptism and confirmation.

## Pastoral support from chaplains

As well as spiritual support, prisoners also reported that chaplains played an important role in pastoral support. Prisoners valued chaplains being available to talk things through or just listen as well as practical and personal support from chaplains. Help with maintaining contact with families was also mentioned by prisoners as a valued pastoral support. Practical and emotional support in times of family bereavement was also valued. Some prisoners also commented that the chaplain could play a valuable role in preparation for release, including connecting them to Catholic communities outside the prison.

## Trust in chaplains

A very large majority of prisoners who responded said they trusted the chaplain (94 per cent, 267 of 284 respondents). The reasons given for this trust included honesty, being friendly and easy to talk to, respecting confidentiality, being no-judgmental and treating prisoners respectfully as well as the spiritual and pastoral support that prisoners reported receiving.

## Barriers and obstacles for prisoners in attending religious services or engaging with the chaplaincy

Just under a quarter of respondents (24 per cent, 68 of 280 respondents) had experienced practical or logistical problems in getting to chapel or engaging with the chaplaincy. These problems included not being let out of their cells; clashes with other activities on their timetable; chapel not being called; issues with a prisoner being on the list and staffing issues. Some prisoners had also been mocked by other

prisoners and some respondents commented prison staff had not displayed wholly positive attitudes towards a prisoner's religious beliefs.

## Recommendations for chaplains

- Ensure that all Catholic prisoners are properly recorded on the list.
- Make secular staff on wings aware of the importance to Catholic prisoners of attending Mass and engaging with the chaplaincy.
- Logistical and other obstacles need to be overcome even though they often stem from factors that neither prisoners nor staff fully control, such as staff shortages or security concerns.
- Clashes with other activities important to prisoners need to be managed and avoided where possible.
- More flexibility about when Mass is said and where may also make it easier for prisoners to attend and avoid some of the logistical difficulties and clashes. Similarly flexibility about timing and location of other chaplaincy activities would help overcome barriers and obstacles.
- Special effort may be needed to ensure vulnerable prisoners can participate in religious life and other prisoners do not stand in their way, literally or through hostility.
- Help prisoners to deepen their faith and practice through supporting private and shared prayer as well as study groups.
- Offering prisoners the sacraments of the Church, including baptism, renewal of baptismal vows, communion, confirmation and confession.
- Supporting prisoners in maintaining connections to family members and family life.
- Offering pastoral and spiritual support in time of bereavement or other emotional crises.
- Being willing to discuss openly Catholic concepts of sin in relation to prisoners' offences, remorse that prisoners may feel and empathy with their victims. In discussions with prisoners and the guidance they offer chaplains can also link prisoners' wish for forgiveness to the Catholic doctrine of absolution from sin through confession.

# 1

## Introduction

*"I have a special relationship with people in prisons, deprived of their freedom. I have always been very attached to them, precisely because of my awareness of being a sinner. Every time I go through the gates into a prison to celebrate Mass or for a visit, I always think: Why them and not me? I should be here. I deserve to be here. Their fall could have been mine. I do not feel superior to the people who stand before me. And so I repeat and pray: Why him and not me? It might seem shocking, but I derive consolation from Peter: he betrayed Jesus, and even so he was chosen."*  
Pope Francis<sup>1</sup>

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales supported by The Jerusalem Trust, one of The Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts, commissioned Lemos&Crane to explore Catholic prisoners' experience of the Catholic chaplaincy and their views on ways in which the Catholic chaplaincy service could be improved so that the findings from this present research could be used for feedback, training and practice development for chaplains.

Lemos&Crane, an independent social research firm established in 1994, has previously researched and published about prisons and prisoners (see generally, [www.lemosancrane.co.uk/prisoneractionnet](http://www.lemosancrane.co.uk/prisoneractionnet) and in particular, *The Good Prison: Conscience, crime and punishment* by Gerard Lemos published in 2014<sup>2</sup>). Lemos&Crane also researched and published *Lost and Found: faith and spirituality in the lives of homeless people* (2013)<sup>3</sup>.

As far back as the eighteenth century John Howard, an early Anglican prison reformer, noted with satisfaction the presence of chapels and chaplains in almost all prisons<sup>4</sup>. Catholic chaplains, in common with chaplains of other religions, are a longstanding presence in prisons. An internal survey undertaken with young offenders attending Catholic chapel services at Feltham YO1 in 2012 and 2013 found that 73 per cent (79 out of 108 respondents) responded positively to the question, Do you think that coming to church will help you not to reoffend when you get out?. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales wished to explore the experience of chaplaincy of a larger number of prisoners in a bigger group of prison establishments beyond Feltham. In particular, the Catholic bishops wanted to explore the impact of chaplains on Catholic prisoners' lives; the role of prayer in their lives; attending Mass and receiving Sacraments; keeping religious objects; any benefits or downsides for prisoners of engaging

---

1. Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*. Bluebird Books, 2016

2. Lemos, G. 2014 *The Good Prison: Conscience, crime and punishment*. London, Lemos&Crane

3. Gravell, C. 2013 *Lost and Found: Faith and spirituality in the lives of homeless people*. London, Lemos&Crane

4. Howard, J. 1973 *The State of Prisons in England and Wales*. Patterson Smith

with Catholic chaplains; barriers or obstacles to engage with chaplains or activities organised by chaplains as well as ways to overcome them; ways of building trust and sustaining relationships between chaplains and prisoners; other ways that chaplains could support prisoners in their faith (for example, when prisoners are experiencing difficulties).

Some may worry that Catholic (and other) chaplains seek only to proselytise on behalf of their faith or to attract new converts among prisoners, who may be vulnerable or confused and therefore especially susceptible. In other words, chaplains have a hidden agenda which is not connected to the welfare of the prisoners or their best interests. Others may feel that religion has little resonance in a secular age and, as far as prisoners are concerned, makes little or no difference either to the experience of being in prison or to the chances of successful rehabilitation. This research is not concerned with either proving or disproving these general opinions, however widely held.

The starting point for the research is that the teaching of the Catholic Church points to the importance of religious ministry in prison. Similarly the government's official rules and expectations of prison life are that religion has a legitimate place in the lives of prisoners. The confluence of religious doctrine and official regulation finds form in the presence and practice of chaplains in prison. The specific purpose of this research is to seek out and record the views of Catholic prisoners themselves about the role of their faith in their life and their future and the extent or otherwise to which Catholic chaplains contribute or detract.

This survey will hopefully provide the government's National Offender Management Service (NOMS) with a better understanding of Catholic prisoners' experience of the Catholic chaplaincy and their views on its delivery and impact during their time in prison. The research will also hopefully help the Catholic chaplaincy generally as well as individual chaplains to share good practice and learn from each others' experience to improve their own practice and the chaplaincy service generally across the prison estate and NOMS.

The research is concerned with prisoners for whom Catholic faith and chaplaincy is already a part of their life, and did not involve prisoners of any other faith. This research is not in any way intended to promote, or denigrate, the Catholic faith. All references to chaplains in this document, unless otherwise stated, refer only to Catholic chaplains and references to prisoners only to Catholic prisoners.

## Aims of the research

- Specifically, the aims of the research were to seek responses to the following questions (for the complete version, see the questionnaire reproduced in the Appendix):
- Did prisoners believe in or practice the Catholic faith before coming into prison?
- In general, how do prisoners feel about opportunities to practice their faith in prison?
- What role does private and shared prayer play in prisoners' lives?
- What role does attending Mass, receiving sacraments or religious objects play in the lives of prisoners?
- What do prisoners with personal experience of Catholicism before coming to prison see as the benefits of engaging with the chaplaincy?
- Do prisoners who have engaged with the chaplaincy feel there are any risks, downsides or disadvantages of engaging with the chaplaincy?

- Are there any barriers/obstacles for prisoners in engaging with chaplains?
- What practical or other steps could be taken to address any barriers or obstacles?
- In the eyes of prisoners, what have been the most effective ways that chaplains build and sustain trusting relationships with prisoners?
- Do prisoners think there are other ways chaplains could help prisoners practice or deepen their faith and strengthen their religious beliefs?
- Are there other ways prisoners feel chaplains could play a role in improving outcomes for prisoners, either while in prison or in rehabilitation?
- In the eyes of prisoners, have chaplains been able to help when prisoners are experiencing specific difficulties?

In terms of previous research on related matters, the Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies published in 2011 *The Role and Contribution of a Multi-Faith Prison Chaplaincy to the Contemporary Prison Service*, a report based on research conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Justice Prison Chaplaincy Service. This particular research focused on identifying the role of multi-faith chaplaincy for various members of the prison community and how these roles have developed and changed over time. They noted that: 'a diverse cross-section of the prison population of various faiths, and indeed of no faith, values the presence and contribution of prison chaplaincy'<sup>5</sup>.

More fully, they also concluded: 'The role of the prison chaplain is not confined to the provision of religious services; extending to a central role in the provision of support services for prisoners, and in some cases staff, especially for those in crisis....The prison chaplaincy space is a valued and cherished safe location within the prison; providing a crucial support mechanism for the vulnerable, and those struggling to manage the demands of incarceration....Chaplains and the chaplaincy service need to articulate the way in which their humanitarian role is an integral part of their work as faith practitioners. This is important in the light of a difference of perception of the pastoral role of chaplains; with chaplains more likely to present their whole role in terms of religion; prison officers and prisoners more likely to highlight the humanitarian value of the role.'<sup>6</sup>

This previous research is an important context for the present study as it points to the general significance of chaplains in prison and in prisoners' lives; their pastoral as well as spiritual role; the importance of drawing a distinction between the custodial role and the pastoral support offered by chaplains while embedding their efforts within the wider prison regime and journey to rehabilitation. These are all themes encountered in our research as related to the Catholic chaplaincy.

## The Catholic Church and prison policy

The official attitude of the Catholic Church in England and Wales to the whole issue of prisons and criminal justice was set out in 2004 by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England in Wales in *A Place of Redemption: A Christian approach to punishment and prisons*<sup>7</sup>. The primary focus of the report is on 'the present state of the nation's prisons.'<sup>8</sup> The report addresses this from a wide perspective. It comments on sentencing, alternatives to custody, prison numbers, the need to support victims and reduce the fear of crime, the experiences of women prisoners, the problems of drugs and mental health among prisoners,

---

5. Todd, A. and Tipton, L. 2011 *The Role and Contribution of a Multi-Faith Prison Chaplaincy to the Contemporary Prison Service Cardiff*, Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies. p. 3

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2004 A Place of Redemption: A Christian approach to punishment and prisons*. Burns and Oats

8. *Ibid.* p. 10

restorative justice and changing social attitudes among other subjects. But the overwhelming emphasis of the report is on the quality of mercy offered to prisoners and the contribution which can make to their rehabilitation, or to put it in more Catholic language, their redemption. The link between mercy and redemption is at the heart of Catholic teaching and represents the philosophical and theological bedrock of the report.

The report is a statement of the Church's views and policy rooted in Catholic belief and theology and is intended as a challenge, certainly to the prison system but also to the Catholic Church itself. The analysis and conclusions of *A Place of Redemption* have not been superseded by other Church pronouncements since its publication in 2004: 'Our task – as bishops, as a Christian community and as a wider society – is to do the same for those who have become prisoners of crime, or the fear of crime, and also for those who locked away inside our prisons. It is up to us to ensure that the prison service offers the continuing opportunities for transformation when the moment comes that the prisoner is prepared to embark on the journey of change. That no matter how hopeless their situation may appear to be, we must never give up on anyone. And that every place can be a place of redemption.'<sup>9</sup>

The Church's report is clearly expressed in the language of penal and social policy, drawing as well on the concepts close to the heart of Catholic religious teaching: 'True justice must provide a positive outcome for the victim, for society and the offender. It must give every opportunity for criminals to come to terms with what they have done, to recognise their own guilt and to acknowledge the need for remorse and penitence. In atoning for their past they recognise the human dignity of their victims and they also help to redeem themselves. It must be possible, within such a system, for an offender to make different choices from those that they have hitherto made. And the system must make it possible for the transformation to take place, and be assisted, at every point during the offender's sentence and life thereafter.'<sup>10</sup>

Such a clarion call is set out as a challenge to the prison system but it also serves as a call to action for Catholic chaplains who might reasonably ask themselves: "To what extent does both my religious and professional practice currently meet these ambitions?" The Church's report is also unsparing in its criticisms of the Catholic Church: 'There needs to be a change in attitudes with the Catholic Church towards those in prison. As a Church we have to acknowledge that concern for those in prison is – despite it being one of the baldest of Jesus' commands as to how his followers are to serve him – is not at present high up on the agenda of many Christians. On this we all need to examine our consciences... Our Christian anthropology insists that the innate dignity and worth of each person is not negotiable. Jesus invites us to see Him in the marginalised, alienated and rejected. Thereby He calls us always to extend His Kingdom of mercy and compassion. That call requires us to commit ourselves to a pursuit of justice which is always within the horizon of grace ...The image of God comes to its glory in each one of us. Through justice and mercy, hope and forgiveness, no one is beyond the reach of God's purpose. The possibility of change is ever-present. Society should never give up on any individual, for every place is a place of redemption.'<sup>11</sup> A commitment to the pursuit of 'justice and mercy, hope and forgiveness' might be considered lodestars especially for Catholic prison chaplains.

## Methodology and sample

This research is focused exclusively on those prisoners who identify as Catholic and aims to seek their views about their experiences of chaplaincy and ways in which it could be improved. The research is not intended to represent the views of the prison population as a whole. While the research included a

---

9. *Ibid.* p. 100

10. *Ibid.* p. 1

11. *Ibid.* p. 4-5

substantial number of prisoners in different types of establishment (see Table 1), the research does not seek to establish a statistically representative sample of prisoners in different types of institutions.

Following approval by NOMS, the questionnaire was piloted with a small number of prisoners. The revised questionnaire (reproduced in the Appendix) was then distributed to Catholic chaplains from participating institutions across the prison estate in England, including male and female adult prisons in all categories, as well as young offenders' institutions and an Immigration Removal Centre. The Table 1 below shows in which institutions participating chaplains and prisoners were based.

The chaplains of the participating penal institutions distributed the questionnaires to all prisoners and offenders who identified as Catholic on reception into the prison. Eighteen per cent (ie, 15,565 of the 86,193-strong prisoner population in England and Wales) were identified as Catholic on arrival in prison as at June 2015. We hoped to receive at least 10 per cent of the prisoners who identify as Catholic in each participating prison and institution and this target was achieved by all the participating prisons and young offender institutions in Table 1.

Having been distributed by the chaplains, prisoners were asked to complete the questionnaires by themselves. Participating in the survey was anonymous and voluntary, and it was made clear that respondents could choose not to answer any particular question, or not to complete the questionnaire without being obliged to give an explanation. Support from a neutral person was also available for those with literacy difficulties. It was made clear that all questionnaires would be treated as anonymous in analysis and writing up findings. Chaplains were also responsible for collecting the completed questionnaires in sealed envelopes and returning them to Lemos&Crane.

Chaplains were also available to discuss any issues about the survey with participants – after the completion of the questionnaire – or anything that participation in the research prompted the respondents to consider or which they wished to discuss. Chaplains were advised that some participants might wish to discuss their thoughts or experiences further.

The responses were coded for key themes and then the frequency of mentions of key themes was analysed by identifying and counting key words and synonyms for analogous concepts. Frequently recurring sub-themes within key themes were also identified and coded from a more in-depth analysis of responses. Frequency of key themes and sub-themes are reported quantitatively in this report with quotes used anonymously to illustrate key themes and sub-themes. Many prisoners who completed the survey skipped individual questions or left answers blank. These blanks have been discounted from the total of respondents given in brackets throughout. References to 'respondents' therefore relate to total number of people who responded to that question. Where a particular topic may have occurred in more than one answer, we have counted the number of times it was mentioned. We therefore refer to total of mentions for those topics, rather than the number of individuals who responded on that topic.

## The sample

From the total of 17 participating prisons and young offender institutions 332 responses were received and Table 1 shows the contribution from each penal institution.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPATING PRISONS/YOUNG OFFENDER INSTITUTIONS

Prison/YOI and Location	Prison Categories <sup>12</sup> and Gender	Respondents
HMP and YOI Bronzefield, Sussex	Multiple (adults and young offenders, female)	9
HMYOI Deerbolt, County Durham	Young offenders C (18-21 yrs, male)	8
HMP Drake Hall, Staffordshire	Closed (female)	21
HMP Elmley (Sheppey cluster), Kent	B and C (male)	24
HMP and YOI Feltham, London	Young offenders (15-18 yrs / 18-21 yrs, male)	30
HMP Frankland, County Durham	A and B (male)	35
HMP Guys Marsh, Dorset	C (male)	2
HMP Highdown, Surrey	B (male)	46
HMP Isle of Wight (cluster)	B (male)	17
HMP and YOI Low Newton, County Durham	Closed (adults and young offenders, female)	15
HMP Lowdham Grange, Nottinghamshire	B (male)	12
HMP and YOI Moorland, South Yorkshire	C (adults and young offenders, male)	43
HMP and YOI Portland, Dorset	C (adults and young offenders, male)	12
HMP and YOI Swinfen Hall, Staffordshire	C (adults and young offenders, male)	23
HMP Thameside, London	B (male)	10
HMP Wealstun, West Yorkshire	C (male)	15
HMP Winchester, Hampshire	C (male)	10

12. ADULTS - Category A: Where there is a significant risk that the prisoner would harm someone outside prison and/or try to escape.

Category B: Where prevention from escaping is significant. Category C: Where prisoners are at low risk of escaping but cannot be trusted in an open prison. Category D: Where prisoners can be trusted in an open prison.

YOUNG OFFENDERS - Restricted Status: Where a young offender is at risk and should be kept in a safe part of the young offender institution. Closed Conditions: Where a young offender although less at risk is still not safe to be in an open young offender institution. Open Conditions: Where a young offender is trusted enough to be in an open young offender institution. (Prison Reform Trust Prison Life Accessed on 02/09/15 <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/PIB%20extract%20-%20Prison%20life.pdf>)



The age range and gender of respondents are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

TABLE 2: AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Age group	Number	Percentage
15 – 20	57	17
21 – 30	73	22
31 – 40	74	22
41 – 50	58	17
51 – 60	36	11
61 – 70	15	5
71 – 80	4	1
Undisclosed	15	5
Total	332	100

TABLE 3: GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	45	14
Male	287	86
Total	332	100

### Structure of this report

The remainder of this report is in five parts: (2) spiritual and religious beliefs and practices of Catholic prisoners, which covers the chaplain’s role in spiritual care and provision for prisoners; (3) the pastoral role of chaplains, which covers the chaplain’s role in pastoral provision and their contribution to rehabilitation; (4) moving on from crime, which covers the role of Catholic chaplains in supporting prisoners in moving on from prison; (5) obstacles and barriers, which covers the chaplain’s role in rehabilitation, restoration and remorse. The concluding part (6) lays out key findings and draws the general recommendations from the study.

# 2

## *Spiritual and religious beliefs and practices of Catholic prisoners*

The first and foremost role of chaplains in prison is to support prisoners in nurturing their spirituality and their religious beliefs as well as practising and deepening their faith, should that be an individual prisoner's choice. As far as Catholic teaching is concerned, belief and practice are inextricably intertwined, in particular through attendance at Mass and prayer. People who have grown up in the Catholic faith, including many of the prisoners in this survey, will be fully aware of those two central aspects of Catholic life. Doctrine will be understood and interpreted differently by individuals, but the importance of good conscience, atonement for sins and belief in Jesus Christ as God made man will be universal among Catholics.

*"Yes, I am full of remorse for what I did and attending Mass has helped me open my mind to all the mistakes I made. It has brought me back closer to God where I once was. I found peace and forgiveness I didn't think I could have back."*

In theory every prisoner who identifies themselves as a Catholic is put in touch with the chaplain though, as discussed later, for a minority of prisoners there seem to be some problems with this. The chaplain must then contact and support that person if that is what they want without, of course, pressing unwanted attention on prisoners or seeking to influence them unduly, by proselytising or in any other way. The rules for prisons make this quite clear, 'A chaplain must not visit a prisoner against their will nor subject a prisoner to unwanted or unsolicited persuasion to change their religious affiliation.'<sup>13</sup> No respondents to this survey expressed concerns or anxieties about the risks of unwanted proselytising or pressure by chaplains.

---

13. Ministry of Justice 2011 Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners. PSI (Prison Service Instruction) 51, 2011, 12.3, Ministry of Justice

## Personal religious histories

Many prisoners who responded to this survey grew up as Catholics and took part in Catholic life with their families long before they came to prison and Table 4 sets out key aspects of their shared personal religious histories. 82 per cent (129 of 157 respondents) had attended Catholic Church before entering prison while only eight per cent (27 of 360 mentions) never attended Catholic Church before entering prison. 78 per cent (238 of 305 of respondents to this question) have been baptised. 74 per cent (236 of 317 respondents) have family that attend Catholic Church. 72 per cent (217 of 301 of respondents) have made their Communion. 62 per cent (183 of 293 respondents) have been confirmed. 49 per cent (150 of 308 respondents) went to a Catholic primary school. 39 per cent (122 of 310 respondents) went to a Catholic secondary school. 29 per cent (106 of 360 mentions) attended Catholic Church sometimes while 18 per cent (64 of 360 mentions) attended Catholic Church most weeks.

TABLE 4: RELIGIOUS HISTORIES OF RESPONDENTS

	Percentage of respondents
Respondents who have been baptised	78
Respondents with family members regularly attending Catholic Church	74
Respondents who have made their Communion	72
Respondents who have been confirmed	62
Respondents who attended Catholic primary school	49
Respondents who attended Catholic secondary school	39

The pattern here of reduced observance as people become adults and get older, with greater independent choice and diminished family influence, is entirely typical of Catholics in Britain. It has given rise to the concept of 'cultural Catholics' (a concept applied also to other religions). These are people who identify themselves as members of a particular faith because of their upbringing and to some extent their own beliefs. They still see themselves as connected to the faith of their upbringing and do not identify themselves as agnostic or as an atheist, but their day-to-day involvement with their faith is limited and attenuated. Such an identity is a commonly noted way of seeing oneself in post-modern societies with highly developed notions of individuality, choice and self-expression. Tradition, compliance and deference enjoy less adherence than they once did, nevertheless people do not want to break the threads entirely that connect them to their cultural and community traditions and to their personal and family background.

## Mass

Worshipping together is a key feature of many religions. In particular the faithful of many religions are enjoined to common prayer on the Sabbath, as it is known in the Jewish tradition, a special day for prayer every week distinct from other days of week and to be kept holy. Oliver Sacks, the neurologist and writer of Jewish heritage, just before he died described observing the Sabbath as, ‘a stopped world, a time outside time’<sup>14</sup>. The importance of this is recognised by the Ministry of Justice, ‘Prisoners have the opportunity for corporate worship or meditation for one hour per week’<sup>15</sup>. For Catholics, although there are several forms of shared worship, attendance at Mass, especially on Sunday, is seen as central to Catholic life, ‘the source and summit of Christian life’<sup>16</sup>. The Mass was instituted by Jesus Christ himself at the Last Supper. This is commemorated every time Mass is said. Mass has deep religious, social and cultural roots, having been said in Britain alone more or less in its current form for hundreds of years.<sup>17</sup> The Catholic Church sees the Mass (or the Eucharist) as the centrepiece of the religious life of believers, ‘The other Sacraments and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and the work of the apostolate, are bound up in the Eucharist [Mass] and are oriented towards it.’<sup>18</sup>

Those who have had a Catholic upbringing or experienced any Catholic religious teaching will certainly be very aware of the primary significance of attending Mass in the Catholic way of life. This is reflected in this research; 76 per cent (218 of 288 respondents) stated that they try to attend Mass regularly. The following comments reflect the central importance of attending Mass to these particular prisoners. It is clearly important for a variety of religious and emotional reasons.

*“I have never missed a single Mass since I entered custody and my whole week is based on that service. It is my lifeline and entering the chapel is the one time you forget you are in prison. It allows you peace, to worship, to sing and praise...It renews, refreshes and revives your spirit. It is my favourite time of each week.”*

*“Coming to prison has made me feel that I no longer belong to society. I feel an outcast and had been remorseful ever since and still am. Attending Mass gives me the feeling of belonging and being part of a small community. It gives me the feeling of salvation.”*

---

14. ‘Sabbath’, Oliver Sacks, *New York Times*, August 14 2015

15. Ministry of Justice 2011 Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners, PSI (Prison Service Instructions) 51/2011, 4, Ministry of Justice

16. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 2, Section 2, Chapter 1, Article 3, para. 1324

17. Strong, Roy, *A Little History of the English Country Church*, Vintage, 2007, p48

18. *Ibid.*

TABLE 5: IMPACT OF ATTENDING MASS

	Percentage
Happiness/uplifting/positive/feel better	19
Peace/calm/relax	18
Close to God/faith	15
Strength/hope/cope	13
Forgiveness/reflection on sins	8
Social/friends/belonging	5
No/not sure	5
Relieve stress	3
Self-improvement	2
Routine	2
Other	9

Note: n = 242

A substantial group (19 per cent, 47 of 242 mentions) mentioned the benefits that attending Mass has on boosting their spirits and make them feel more positive. Only five per cent (13 of 242 mentions) said that attending Mass had little or no impact on their experience of prison.

*“I find it a great source of rebalancing and preparing for the coming week, while also offloading all the baggage from the previous week by having all sins forgiven.”*

Mass is also a time to think about moving forward, strengthening sense of purpose and thinking positively about the future, helping to move towards positive outcomes such as reducing reoffending behaviour in the future.

*“Mass has increased my faith and outlook on life and will help in my risk of not offending in the future.”*

For some Mass brought a sense of peace, calm and relaxation (18 per cent, 44 of 242 mentions) into the lives of prisoners.

*“Coming to Mass gives me peace and comfort, it helps me to think about my actions and what I should be doing.”*

Attendance at Mass is seen for some as an important way of connecting with God, and being closer to God (15 per cent, 37 of 242 mentions), creating a time, space and a place to contemplate what it means to be in touch with God and to benefit from God's presence in their lives.

*“Going to Mass gives me the time to get closer to God and it is peaceful time making my relationship with God stronger.”*

*“It has given me a new life with the Church I had forgotten. It has given me a new relationship with God.”*

Attending Mass and other services can provide strength and hope to help some cope with pressures in prison (13 per cent, 31 of 242 mentions).

*“It helps me to find strength to carry on with sentence, gives me hope that can be change and there is still good people in the world.”*

*“It makes my jail easier. Takes my mind away from everyday burdens.”*

These two people comment that attending mass helps them to deal with suicidal feelings.

*“It makes me think twice when I feel I want to kill myself sometimes.”*

*“Yes, because it's helps me from killing myself.”*

Mass also represented an opportunity for some to reflect on their previous behaviour and the forgiveness of sins (8 per cent, 20 of 242 mentions).

*“A good time for reflection and to face up to one's sins.”*

*“Helped me to know about forgiveness and being forgiven.”*

## Difficulties with attending Mass

Of the 24 per cent of those (70 of 288 respondents) who do not attend Mass regularly the main reasons given were a lack of time or problems with scheduling attendance at Mass with other activities (24 per cent, 16 of 67 mentions), rather than a lack of interest or desire. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter 5 (on obstacles and barriers). This respondent feels acutely the loss of not being able to attend Mass.

*“Missing out on Mass does leave me lost and deserted in faith, gives me a severe impact of prison sympathy to my religion and leaves me feeling religiously unpurposed. This is the reason I can't attend Mass due to work, education, which the prison seems to let take presidency [...]”*

Some feel they face an invidious choice between staying in regular contact with their families and practising their faith.

*“Stop going because most weekend banged up so when do get out need shower and phone family.”*

*“Because I can only get on the phone at that time.”*

Some prisoners also face dilemmas between work and practising their faith.

*“I was attending regularly then I started to work on Fridays so I could get the chance to attend.”*

*“Because I work full time in the kitchen.”*

*“Job prevents me.”*

*“Work.”*

Some prisoners who regard themselves as Catholics have lost their faith (14 per cent, 9 out of 67 mentions). A few also expressed concerns about the atmosphere in the chapel during Mass (seven per cent, five of 67 mentions) and the attitudes of other prisoners towards Mass-goers (nine per cent, six of 67 mentions).

*“I don't feel comfortable around other prisoners that just come to get out of their cells and have no interest in faith and muck around.”*

This vulnerable prisoner (VP) also had particular concerns about attendance at Mass.

*“I am currently a VP and Mass takes place at the same time as normal prisoners. This does not create a welcoming environment. Why not do a separate Mass straight after?”*

Other concerns mentioned include difficulties with other prisoners.

*“Problems with other prisoners on other wings.”*

One group (nine per cent, 6 out of 67 mentions) mentioned that they were unsure how to approach Catholicism and the chaplaincy.

*“Because I've never been I feel as though I'd be a type of fraud as I don't know what I believe in.”*

*“I'm not an actual Catholic, I'd feel embarrassed to admit this, but I'd like to be baptised and confirmed.”*

## Benefits of coming to chapel

TABLE 6: BENEFITS OF COMING TO CHAPEL

	Percentage of respondents
Closer to God/in touch with faith/spirituality	22
Belonging/solidarity/socialise/fellowship	14
General positivity/feel better/enjoyment	14
Comfort/relax/peace/acceptance	9
Religious reasons/confession/forgiveness/Communion	8
Family reasons	8
Strength/coping/hope	6
Time to reflect/think/pray	5
Distraction from prison/something to do/get out of cell	5
No/none/not sure	3
Other	5

Note n = 333

The most frequently mentioned benefit of attending chapel was an opportunity to practise their faith and be closer to God (22 per cent, 74 of 333 mentions)

*“[Coming to chapel] gives me a chance to be a Catholic.”*

*“We are blessed with the opportunity to attend the same Mass that our Christian brothers and sisters are attending all over the world. You know in your heart you are in God’s presence and he is with you to strengthen you for what lies ahead. I receive a blessing each time, blessed by God.”*

Attending chapel provides a sense of fellowship and social interaction away from the cell and wing. This was mentioned by a significant group of prisoners (14 per cent, 48 of 333 mentions).

*“I get to sing and pray and see my brothers and if I have a problem they would pray for me and I will pray for them too it works both ways. Its like a big family we are.”*

*“I love the fellowship and once I am there I feel free.”*

*“By going to chapel it helps me keep on the right path and it gives me time for fellowship.”*



For these, attending chapel makes them feel better and more positive generally (14 per cent, 46 of 333 mentions):

*“Helps me feel better about life, to be thankful for all the things I have been blessed with. To be positive about life and attitude on life. I enjoy so much doing the readings and being able to have people listening to me while I am speaking the words from the Bible.”*

*“It makes me feel spiritual, at ease, motivates me to do good, and helps me with my faith.”*

Others pointed to the general benefits of calm, peace of mind and acceptance (9 per cent, 29 of 333 mentions), as this comment reflects:

*“The benefits of going to chapel in prison is very much. It is important to be able to go to church here, too, and it so good for the spirit and the soul. I feel relieved afterwards.”*

The opportunity to pray for their family was seen by others as a benefit of attending the chapel (27 of 333 mentions).

*“I can pray for my nan especially and my family and I can pray that I can help people while I’m in here.”*

*“I pray to God for my family.”*

Some wanted the opportunity to pray and reflect (15 of 333 mentions):

*“I do go to Catholic/Christian chapel to find one or 1 1/2 hours of pure solace and be in spirit to the Almighty Lord, Christ my Jesus and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.”*

Getting out of their cell, being distracted from prison life or doing something more normal was also seen by some as a benefit of attending chapel (5 per cent, 18 of 333 mentions), as these quotes illustrate:

*“Chapel in prison is a special place because it takes your mind out of the norm of prison life. It is a place of serenity for me, a place where God is obviously found because of silence.”*

*“The benefits are the fellowship with others, get out of my cell and do something different and have a close time with God.”*

*“A chapel, anywhere, is a formal place of worship and the opportunity for other worshippers to interact and, with collective intent, share a common experience in His name: this is accentuated in such a place but essentially provides normality in an alien environment.”*

When asked if there was any downside to attending chapel one prisoner replied:

*“No unless you count not having enough time for fellowship after Mass.”*

## Private prayer

In the Catholic tradition, as well as attendance at Mass and participating in the other Sacraments, private prayer is seen as an essential element in a faithful life. It is the way that Catholics articulate and affirm a personal relationship with God, seek His blessings, petition God for forgiveness or seek to intercede with Him for other people. Prayer can also be offered in thanksgiving or in praise of God. Prayer can either be vocal, a form of meditation or contemplation: ‘They have in common the recollection of the heart.’<sup>19</sup>

---

19. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 4, Section 1, Chapter 3, Article 1, para. 2721

*“Private prayer is something I partake in as the first thing I do when I wake, the last thing before I sleep and often at times throughout the day. I am still a young Christian and as I grow / mature in my faith, I realise more and more deeply the importance, the power and the need for private prayer. Like any positive relationship, communication is key and prayer gives me that through the Holy Spirit.”*

Prayer has a variety of meanings both to individual Catholics and to people of other religious traditions, but, like meditation, in all traditions and meanings prayer has the potential to create a space for reflection between an individual and their problems and may therefore alleviate some of the hardship of prison life. Both faith and prayer may assuage loneliness felt by many in prison by creating an abstract but meaningful connection to a wider mystical universe as well as to a bigger faith community both inside and outside the prison. Private prayer can also be practised individually, alone or in a group, in the chapel or elsewhere, and with or without the presence of the chaplain, thereby avoiding some of the difficulties already adumbrated about attendance at Mass.

TABLE 7: IMPACT OF PRIVATE PRAYER

	Percentage
Coping/hope/safety/general help/strength	23
Closer to God/faith	15
Peace/calm/relax/relief	12
Nothing/not sure	11
Happiness/positivity/feel better	9
Family	8
Right track/moving on/change ways	6
Sense of belonging/someone listening/relieve loneliness	5
Come to terms with past/forgiveness	4
Other	8

Note: n = 274

The overwhelming majority (88 per cent of respondents, 264 of 300) engaged in private prayer. Over a fifth of people who mentioned private prayer (23 per cent, 64 of 274 mentions), said that it gave them the strength to cope with prison life:

*“I can't really describe it but I will say that my spiritual life is the most important part of my life in prison. I structure my day, as far as possible around my personal, spiritual commitments, which are mainly self-*

*imposed, not part of the prison regime.”*

*“Helps me through my sentence.”*

*“Prayer keeps me having hope and faith.”*

*“Prayer is of the utmost importance – especially as a method of ‘coping’ by a conversation with our Lord on a daily basis.”*

Others felt that it afforded some feeling of safety or protection:

*“Private prayer gives one hope in a place that is full of despair.”*

This prisoner says private prayer helps to stop him self-harming:

*“It help me get through the day without self-harming.”*

Fifteen per cent (40 of 274 mentions) commented that private prayer helped to bring them closer to God and their faith, playing an integral role in maintaining their connection to God.

*“Yes, it helps me connect with God.”*

*“Yes, while I am in prayer, I know I am not alone even though I have sinned He is still there for me.”*

12 per cent (32 of 274 mentions) also mentioned that private prayer helps bring them a sense of peace and calm.

*“I pray privately and have learnt to pray to be thankful for all things in my life rather than praying when in need. It makes me a lot calmer which in turn makes me take everything in my [stride] in jail life. It makes me think a lot more of others when praying for other people.”*

*“Praying always makes me feel relaxed and helps me to come to terms with the wrong things I have done in my life.”*

Others use private prayer to keep them close to their family in their own mind (eight per cent, 22 of 274 mentions).

*“It does impact on me because private prayers bring me closer to God and also close to my family.”*

*“Yes am by myself given thanks for life and the beautiful family I have.”*

Some prisoners pray that their families may be safe and protected:

*“Makes me feel as if my loved ones are being watched over.”*

*“When I pray I pray for my family and it lets me think they are safe.”*

*“All the time most nights I pray to God to look over my kids.”*

Private prayer plays a role in building upon reflections about sin, remorse and forgiveness that may form part of prisoners’ thoughts and regrets about their past (four per cent 10 of 274 mentions).

*“Yes, it ... gives me hope and makes me feel closer to God, it makes me believe I can change and I like to repent.”*

It also helped this prisoner think about the victims of their crime:

*“Yes I apologise to all my victims and others that I have hurt. It also helps me to move on with my life.”*

Another prisoner, however, does not find the consolation they seek from prayer and saying the Rosary:

*“I have prayed a few times (the Rosary prayer) but I just haven’t felt nothing from it.”*

This prisoner seems to feel strongly that private prayer is made more difficult by overcrowding in cells and unwanted mixing of religions.

*“Prisoners can’t pray alone, they are in cells designed for one, but squashed like sardines in cells with two men in a one man space, there is no privacy to pray. Religion mix is not taken into consideration in cells.”*

## Shared prayer

As well as private prayer the Catholic faith also emphasises the importance of praying together, in places of worship, with religious objects or at shrines.

*“We are able to experience shared prayer through Mass, through other services, in our Bible study group and on other occasions where we come together to meditate on God’s Word. It has a positive impact on all concerned, because each person is encouraged by his Christian brothers and sisters to continue on their journey of faith. To know they are not alone as we are all on together in Christ and when two or more of us come together in prayer, God is in our midst.”*

A smaller proportion than those that prayed privately, just under half of respondents to a question about shared prayer (48 per cent, 143 of 297 respondents), said that they participated in it. While this is still a substantial proportion, many noted that they participated in shared prayer perhaps indirectly, such as at Mass or at their study groups.

TABLE 8: BENEFITS OF SHARED PRAYER

	Percentage
Fellowship/belonging/solidarity/socialising/company	36
General help/feel better	17
Nothing/no	11
Closer to God/spiritual guidance/faith	11
Coping/strength/safety	9
Peace/relax/calm	4
Accepted/wanted	3
Other	8

Note: n=123

The most common benefit mentioned for the practice of shared prayer was a sense of belonging and fellowship with fellow Catholic prisoners (36 per cent, 44 of 123 mentions).

*“Shared prayer not only benefits myself but helps those struggling or finding things hard to cope with.”*

*“It makes me feel closer to my fellow prisoners.”*

*“It makes me feel I belong. I feel a part of something greater than myself.”*

*“This is important for me as it makes me feel that I’m not alone in my journey. I feel free to express my inner feelings and thoughts among fellow prisoners without prejudice.”*

*“It’s good to know there are other people with me that share the same beliefs and values as me.”*

17 per cent (21 of 123 mentions) commented on shared prayer making them feel better and providing general help to cope with prison life.

*“I find the experience quite uplifting and has helped me through some hard times.”*

*“Makes me feel better and helps my companions.”*

Eleven per cent (14 of 123 mentions) mentioned that shared prayer both increased their faith and brought them closer to God.

*“Increased my faith in God by seeking and being together with others.”*

*“Yes, brings me closer with Jesus and improve my knowledge of the bible and Christianity overall.”*

There is some demand from prisoners for more opportunities to engage in shared prayer. When asked, ‘In what way do you feel the Catholic chaplain helps you to practice or learn about your faith?’ 14 per cent (44 of 322 mentions) referred to study groups, group work, prayer groups and bible groups. When asked, ‘Are there other ways the Catholic chaplain to help you to practice and learn more about your faith?’ 28 per cent (71 of 253 mentions) said study groups (bible, prayer, Rosary, religious education) or group work.

*“Prayer groups would be good, and popular.”*

*“I think it would be brilliant if we were given that opportunity.”*

*“Would like to start bible study ASAP.”*

*“Offer more bible study groups and longer relaxation groups. Relaxation and release of tension helps to free your mind and deepen your thoughts.”*

## Religious objects

In a sparse and sometimes de-personalised and desolate environment such as a prison cell meaningful personal objects, including religious ones, can have a special importance for prisoners.

*“They bring a sense of normality, of reverence and spirituality – allowing for greater depth of worship and meditation.”*

Religious objects such as rosaries, pictures and medals are seen as important aids to prayer as well as having significance in themselves as objects of attachment and commitment to belief. Some also invest

religious objects with the power to protect them or to ward off evil, not an uncommon belief among Catholics. 87 per cent (273 of 314) of respondents to this question kept a religious item in their cell, so it is clear that the presence of religious objects is especially highly regarded.

TABLE 9: RELIGIOUS OBJECTS KEPT BY PRISONERS

	Percentage
Rosary	35
Religious pictures	22
Bible	18
Crucifix/cross	9
Prayer booklets/cards	6
Other religious literature	5
Other	5

Note: n = 612

Rosary beads are a popular physical aid to prayer. Saying the Rosary and using Rosary beads as a tangible symbol and aid goes back many centuries in Catholic tradition. The Rosary is a series of prayers about important ‘mysteries’ of Catholic belief and practice taken from the life of Jesus and Mary as told in the New Testament. Praying the Rosary also involves repeating the Hail Mary prayer so it is a form of incantation as well as personal meditation which is widely practised, often daily, in Catholic homes and families. The Rosary is also often said as a family and is therefore also a way of bringing families together in shared belief and religious devotion. Its association with devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary gives the Rosary a special place in Catholic life. Children are often given Rosary beads as presents on special religious occasions in their lives such as their First Communion or Confirmation and are encouraged to treat their Rosary beads with great care and respect as sacred objects. Many prisoners who had Catholic upbringings will be mindful of these meanings and associations of the Rosary. So it is unsurprising that by far the most popular religious object to be kept by prisoners is a Rosary (35 per cent, 213 of 612 mentions).

*“The Rosary is there for my prayers, I pray when I feel all alone, I pray for my fiancé and my family. Keeping religious objects is how I was brought up and makes me feel secure that God is watching over my cell when I’m not there, and with the one I wear I feel that he watches over me in all the things I do.”*

*“My Rosary beads help me with prayer and the pictures help me to focus and remind me in time of need that God’s love is never ending.”*

*“I pray The Rosary every night before bed and when I wake up in the morning. I believe this has and still is helping me cope in my time here.”*

Other popular religious objects kept by prisoners in their cell included religious pictures, crucifixes and bibles. Prisoners also kept prayer books, cards and other religious literature. These objects are first and foremost aids to prayer; they also, however, have a symbolic and talismanic significance. Their physical presence is a reminder, as well as evidence to others, of religious belief.

*“The reason I keep these objects is because they keep me focused at prayer times and they are a source of blessings.”*

*“They give me focus for my private prayer and are a constant reminder of the way I should behave towards others and what was sacrificed on our behalf.”*

They also serve as useful prompts to prayer and as guides to faith.

*“These items help to remind me of my religion and to pray.”*

*“It reminds me that I’m Catholic and what is expected of me.”*

*“To help me practice my faith.”*

*“A tangible reminder of my faith. An outward expression of the place Christ has in my life. Comfort.”*

*“I can’t explain why but it reminds me that I have faith.”*

Occasionally an object may have a special relevance due to its particular role in childhood, such as the cross or crucifix, which plays a large role in the upbringing of a Catholic.

*“As a boy they have been part of my life. A way of life, born and bred a Catholic: man and boy.”*

One reason religious objects have special significance is they were often presents from significant people and therefore have a powerful emotional charge as well as religious significance. Since prisoners are cut off most of the time from family members and other important people to whom they have powerful emotional attachments, these objects are reminders of, and tangible connections to intangible relationships.

*“Because that was a gift from my mother.”*

*“I choose to keep these items as most are from family.”*

The objects perform a role in providing comfort and familiarity to the prisoner.

*“Comfort; familiarity - objects that have been around me all my life.”*

*“They give me comfort, and positioned around my cell they inspire me to hope and regular prayer.”*

There is a long tradition in the Catholic Church, going back more than a thousand years, of investing religious objects with ‘magical’ powers of protection. From the time of the establishment of Catholicism in Britain, religious objects were always felt to have a part to play in warding off evil, imagined or real.

*“I always feel protected, that no evil can come to me.”*

*“Primarily I put them in my room and keep these objects for my own comfort and strength. My Rosaries go everywhere with me and help me feel safe and protected.”*

*“Makes me feel more calm and relaxed and the feeling that God is watching over me.”*

*“Because it helps me to believe I am not alone and my family are there to support me.”*

Some feel that these objects can exert protective powers over their loved ones also. This makes the religious objects a link to family, helping bring family life into prison cells and connecting religious prisoners with their loved ones.

*“So God can watch over all my family members.”*

## Practice and deepening of faith

Faith for most people is conceived of as a spiritual journey, not just a once and for all discovery, revelation or event. This is a strong emphasis in Catholic teaching.

*“[The chaplain] was placed in my life to help me grow and mature in all aspects of my Christian faith. I am a young Christian and was self-taught until entering custody and [the chaplain] has opened my heart and mind through the spirit to so many truths. The most important part for me is her example of living out her message, practising what she preaches and showing us her Christian faith in action. She goes above and beyond for God’s glory with services, rosary services, stations, journey through faith courses, meditations, scripture readings and so much more.”*

Catholics are encouraged to do more than just hold on to their beliefs and practice their faith ritualistically or by rote without further reflection or inquiry. The revealed truth of the faith derives from lifelong prayer and worship; it is not imprinted or indelible. Catholics are enjoined to deepen both their belief and practice throughout their lives. Learning about your faith and your life as a believer is seen as a lifelong quest. Similarly, the search for good conscience and atonement for sins, is seen as something that must be re-visited regularly throughout life. Unsurprisingly, prisoners in this survey talked a good deal about seeing their crime as sins, the remorse they feel and ways in which they might seek forgiveness. This, in Catholic terms, could all be described as part of the continuing search for good conscience. Part of the practice of any faith are periods of doubt, disbelief or anger that God has let you down. Uncertainty and faith are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent. Catholic prisoners will certainly feel that from time to time and chaplains will be a source of guidance and support in those moments of self-questioning.

Not only helping a prisoner to practice their faith but also to deepen their faith is a fundamental part of the spiritual aspect of the chaplain’s role. The presence of the chaplaincy in prison helps to keep prisoners engaged in the Catholic religion through practice of faith and provision of the Sacraments, but the chaplain should also see their role as developing and deepening the faith of prisoners. A greater understanding of the Catholic faith and a greater engagement with religion while in prison can deter, ‘individual-level criminal behaviour through the threat of supernatural sanctions and promotes normative behaviour through the promise of supernatural reward.’<sup>20</sup>

86 per cent (240 of 279) of respondents to this question said the chaplain helps them to learn more about or to practice their faith. Principally by talking, explaining and teaching (29 per cent, 93 of 322 mentions), openness, support and availability (16 per cent, 52 of 322 mentions), group work and study groups (14 per cent, 44 of 322 mentions), spiritual guidance and supporting a connection to God (12 per cent, 38 of 322 mentions), and religious services such as Mass (10 per cent, 33 of 322 mentions).

*“If I have questions they explain it and that help me maintain my faith.”*

*“They do different practices each week, teach you about psalms and readings of the bible in a friendly, kind, approachable manner, they don’t judge prisoners, being with a person of the cloth makes you feel closer to God so makes you know God can forgive, they teach you about Mary, Jesus, God etc.”*

---

20. Baier, C.J., and Wright, B.R.E. 2001 ‘If you love me, keep my commandments: A meta analysis of the effect of religion on crime’ *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 38(1), p. 4



TABLE 10: WAYS PRISONERS FEEL THAT CHAPLAINS HELP THEM TO PRACTICE OR LEARN ABOUT THEIR FAITH

	Percentage
Talking/ explain religion and faith/teaching	29
Openness / support / availability / listening/ friendliness	16
Study groups / group work / prayer group / bible group	14
Spiritual guidance/ support /connection to God	12
Religious service/Mass	10
Regular contact	7
Providing religious literature	3
Connects teachings to everyday life	2
Other	8

Note: n = 322

Study groups are seen as an important way of strengthening and deepening faith, and (as was highlighted above with shared prayer) study groups of all kinds may help a prisoner by allowing a time and space to worship and be together with fellow Catholics.

*“The Bible study group is so good to bring people closer to the Lord and begin or further their journey in Faith. By having Mass on Friday and a service on Sunday this gives us an extra chance to worship. For the Bible study we did stations of the cross and I hadn’t done this since I was a child, wow, I enjoyed doing it again and remembering my childhood when I was closer to God, by doing it again brought me closer again, so thankful for that.”*

*“[The chaplain] has been invaluable to my new found relationship with God. I have learned all I had forgotten as a child and gained a lot more knowledge at religious studies.”*

*“Belonging to a group. Allows me to ask for forgiveness.”*

*“His interpretation of the scriptures is real to life and easy to understand.”*

When asked about other ways the chaplain could help prisoners learn and practice more about their faith the response was more polarised with 40 per cent (100 of 243 mentions) stating either nothing or that what is currently being done is sufficient.

*“Not really. Just knowing I can always go and be welcome if I need to is more than enough.”*

*“[The chaplain] does a great job and makes us feel he is very accessible, so I can’t imagine how to improve the service [here].”*

Just over half of respondents of those who answered the question stated that they would like the chaplain to assist them with deepening their faith (52 per cent, 142 of 272). Again study groups were mentioned as the main route to the deepening of faith (23 per cent, 47 of 200 mentions). 28 per cent (71 of 243 mentions) suggested study groups and group work as a welcome further addition to chaplaincy services.

*“Yes! Definitely with more Bible studies and other study groups and events.”*

*“Bible study - an informal meeting with other Catholics.”*

*“I would like to be invited to a study group.”*

*“Offer more bible study groups and longer relaxation groups. Relaxation and release of tension helps to free your mind and deepen your thoughts.”*

Some recognised that their chaplain is already fully stretched but still recognised the need for greater interaction, particularly for new prisoners.

*“I think our chaplain (Catholic) has a big enough job as it is, she really needs more help. There is other chaplains but not Catholic ones, God help her, it would be great to have more Bible studies for the new girls becoming Catholics especially but it’s too much for one person on her own [the chaplain] is a saint of a woman.”*

*“Study groups, prayer meetings and so forth would be a bonus - but, I suspect, very difficult practically.”*

For some prisoners their faith is a more intimate and individual pursuit, in preference to groups:

*“I would like something like a one to one on a regular basis. I can’t express myself in groups.”*

TABLE II: WAYS IN WHICH PRISONERS WOULD LIKE THEIR FAITH DEEPENED

	Percentage
Study groups (e.g. bible, prayer, rosary groups)	23
Baptism and re-baptism	20
Confirmation	17
Nothing/sufficient/done already	13
Help increase understanding/learn more about religious practices/bring closer to God	10
Communion	1
Choir	1
Other	13

Note: n = 200

## Baptism and confirmation

A number of prisoners have not been baptised (22 per cent, 67 of 305 respondents). Many wished to deepen their faith through the sacrament of Baptism (18 per cent, 39 of 200 mentions). As baptism is the first step to formal admission to the Catholic Church and a rite of passage for all Catholics, some of those who had not yet been baptised or were unsure if they have been baptised, would like to undergo this sacrament.

*“I’ve always wanted a baptism but I don’t know who to go to about this.”*

*“I am currently seeing [the chaplain] once a week in preparation for my baptism and confirmation.”*

Although it is impossible to be baptised twice, some wished to be ‘re-baptised’.

*“I would like to believe in my faith again and be re-baptised, as over the years I have lost my faith and my trust in it.”*

A service in which the prisoner could renew their baptismal vows might be appropriate. Another important rite of passage in a Catholic life is Confirmation, which recognises and celebrates the transition to an adult commitment to the faith. 17 per cent (35 of 200 mentions) stated that they would like to be confirmed into the Catholic faith.

*“Confirmation into the Catholic Church.”*

A minority stated that they either would not like to deepen their faith or that what was being done is currently sufficient (13 per cent, 26 of 200 mentions). This was either due to age or because their faith had already been formalised.

*“I am 65 and Catholic already my whole life, I don’t need to deepen my faith. My faith is deep modern and rich!”*

*“[The chaplain] provides excellent support - purely from a personal perspective: I suspect others may require more formal aspects (such as confirmation preparation for example) but he does much already to deepen faith.”*

*“I don’t need because I have been baptised, had communion and have been confirmed.”*

The chaplain’s primary role is supporting prisoners in the practice of their faith. For Catholic prisoners, most of whom were Catholics before they came to prison and come from Catholic families, observance of their faith means attendance at Mass, support with private and shared prayer, venerating religious objects and support in deepening their beliefs and the practice of their faith. Supporting prisoners in the observance of their faith in these ways is the first and last responsibility of chaplains. It is clear from the responses to this survey that Catholic prisoners place great store on continuing and deepening their religious beliefs and the practice of their faith. They welcome and value the support of chaplains in this. The responses to this survey strongly validate the core religious function of the chaplaincy, not just the pastoral role, important though that is as discussed in the next section of this report.

Prisoners also see practising their faith as a way of both escaping from and coping with life in prison. Prayer and faith also creates opportunities for reflection on their offences and their past and thinking about their future in the language of religion (sin, remorse, penance and so on) alongside the language of the law and society (offence, sentence, punishment and so on). Prayer and practice of faith is also deeply intertwined in prisoners’ minds and emotions with connections to family outside prison. Maintaining and strengthening these family ties are fundamental building blocks in desisting permanently from crime after leaving prison.

# 3

## *Pastoral role of chaplains*

The first and most important duty of the chaplain is to support prisoners in the practice of their faith. Over and above that, the special role of the chaplain – being part of but distinct from the prison authorities – means that encounters, conversations and relationships with chaplains can range far wider than just matters of religious belief and practice. Many prisoners made it clear that chaplains played an important role especially in helping them to cope with the particular strangeness and some of the difficulties of prison life. Many, when they come into prison for the first time particularly, feel confused and frightened, and sometimes despairing. Some become depressed, or even self-harming or suicidal. While the prison authorities are primarily responsible for responding effectively to these concerns and challenges, the chaplain can, through their pastoral role, assist with helping new prisoners to overcome their initial concerns and the anxieties and depression that sometimes follow. Chaplains are also a port of call for prisoners who are troubled by what might be going on in the prison, such as problems with their relationships with other inmates (bullying, for example) or staff. Prisoners also seek out the opportunity to talk to the chaplain about events outside the prison, for example with their family, which may be troubling them but which they may not feel they can influence.

### **Pastoral support alongside religious practice**

The support that chaplains offer is often a blend of the spiritual and the pastoral, sometimes with blurred distinctions between the two. The benefits of the spiritual support offered by chaplains was the most frequently mentioned benefit (26 per cent, 57 of 222 mentions), followed closely by being there to talk things through or simply listen (23 per cent, 51 of 222 mentions). Prisoners also highlighted a variety of other kinds of personal and practical support (22 per cent, 49 of 222 mentions) and help with contacting families or other close ones (11 per cent, 25 of 222).

This respondent reflects on their fears when they came to prison and how the chaplain welcomed them and gave them ‘the feeling of stability’.

*“I am a naturalised British citizen and coming to prison which is my first time is all alien to me and knowing that it can be a violent environment and possibly feel that I will be discriminated upon or bullied. [The chaplain] made me feel welcome and gave me the feeling of stability and someone who I could talk to at any time. [The chaplain] is very approachable and accommodating not just to me but to everyone of us here. We all value him highly.”*

## Pastoral care

TABLE 12: MOST HELPFUL ASSISTANCE GIVEN BY CHAPLAINS

	Percentage
Prayer/blessing/lighting candles/spiritual support	26
Talking/listening/being there	23
General help/guidance/support	22
Help with contacting family/girlfriend	11
Not judging/being treated as human/welcome	4.5
Baptism/confession/communion	4
Sentence/hearing/probation/parole	4
Bereavement/assistance with funeral arrangements/attendance	3
Other	3
Total	100

Note: n=222

These comments stress the importance of the chaplain's general approach to their pastoral duties, being approachable, welcoming and friendly.

*"He is very approachable, down to earth, and shows a clear understanding of the tribulations faced by inmates."*

*"He always welcomes you and makes you feel loved and important."*

*"Made me feel wanted I don't get that a lot."*

*"Of course, [the chaplain] is always here for us."*

This comment mentions a number of qualities that might be thought essential in pastoral care: the personal contact; trustworthiness; confidentiality; fulfilling promises; being honest.

*"They talk one to one, come across trustworthy, would never talk about personal things in public and for me anything and everything that has been promised or explained to me through the church has turned out to happen, they don't over promise or exaggerate they talk truth"*

This respondent highlights listening, counselling, empathy and a willingness to act as an advocate.

*“Excellent listening, counselling and ‘spiritual’ training skills - empathy, with a realistic undertone and complete confidentiality, only acting in support on my behalf when requested and with excellent commitment.”*

Chaplains are also someone to talk to:

*“Yes, it was a time of solace where I could talk to someone in confidence not associated with prison.”*

This prisoner noted a more general feeling of being helped through difficult periods.

*“It helps me to get through the stressful times in prison.”*

This respondent values the feeling of being respected by the chaplain and makes an interesting observation about the importance (to them at least) of not constantly reminding people that they are prisoners during Mass.

*“Respecting us! - Thank you. Also not bringing too much about being in prison into the service... (hardly doing that).”*

## Trust

The overwhelming majority (94 per cent, 267 out of 284 respondents) said they trust the chaplain.

*“Her personality is such that one can trust in her, and in the very first day when I came into the prison she came to my cell and we were talking, it was important because I was devastated getting into prison and she encouraged me. Also she supplied me with the Holy Bible in my own language which was very kind of her and many times she came to our spur, and asked how we are. (Not only me but everyone).”*

*“I trust any way. I’m Catholic, and chaplain help... everybody connect.”*

*“If you could not trust them how could you trust?”*

The feeling that chaplains trust them in turn is also important to prisoners.

*“His smile and his very self puts you at ease, he trusts us so why should not trust him.”*

This respondent ascribes the trust he attaches to the chaplain to his upbringing and the attitudes that were inculcated in him towards priests.

*“I was brought up always to respect and trust my priest.”*

The ways in which chaplains had built trust, as reported by prisoners, included guidance, help and understanding given (15 per cent, 49 of 328 mentions); being a generally good, friendly and caring person (13 per cent, 43 of 328 mentions); listening and talking (12 per cent, 40 of 328 mentions); respecting confidentiality and being trustworthy (12 per cent, 38 of 328 mentions) being accessible and easy to talk to (11 per cent, 37 of 328 mentions); and being a spiritual guide or role model (9 per cent, 31 of 328 mentions)

TABLE 13: WAYS CHAPLAINS BUILD TRUST

	Percentage
Guidance / general help/support/understanding	15
General good person / friendly/being a friend/caring	13
Listening / talking/being there	12
Confidentiality / trustworthy	12
Available/accessible/easy to talk to	11
Spiritual support / religious role model/dedication/ provision of religious services	9
Honest/genuine	6
Non-judgmental / treated as human/ treated respectfully	5
Visits / presence on wing; dinner hall/ personal contact	5
Inherent trust (also due to belief)	4
Length of imprisonment	2
Trust shown by chaplain	2
Other	3

Note:  $n = 328$

Being listened to and understood with kindness is associated in these prisoners' minds with their ability to sustain their faith and their religious practice, by for example going to confession.

*"Just being understanding, kind, listened and helped me remain positive and use my faith and reassured me to believe in my faith and true enough things worked themselves out."*

*"Just listened to what I had to say and took my confession as well showed compassion that is so lacking in [prison]."*

*"Really listening to me instead of just nodding OK. Making me feel as a valued individual and keeping my faith going. Re-instating some lost values and beliefs."*

*"[The chaplain is] always willing to listen and help and you can talk to them as your friends."*

Prisoners overwhelmingly feel, correctly, that society has judged them and formed an opinion of them which they will need to work hard to change. A key element of gaining the trust of prisoners seems to be the non-judgmental approach of the chaplaincy toward them, as these comments note.

*“Just by being nice and not by judging.”*

*“As they don’t judge you like certain officers do.”*

*“Whilst talking about sensitive issues not being judged. Being helped to see there is a positive light (no matter how small) way forward.”*

*“Because he doesn’t judge.”*

An important aspect of being trusted by prisoners is the feeling that the chaplain can be relied on to maintain the confidentiality of what prisoners tell them. This is clearly seen as important.

*“She don’t repeat what I tell her and I can talk to her about the problems I am having with an officer.”*

*“He has kept family problems confidential.”*

The confidentiality of the sacrament of confession has a particular significance for Catholics as this respondent notes.

*“Privacy and confidentiality of confessional.”*

This response emphasises the importance of the chaplain being honest and straightforward about the prisoner’s crime, while not being overly judgmental

*“He is honest with me. Tells me if I’m out of order - expects me to challenge past behaviour - accepts my past without giving me a hard time.”*

As well as valuing honesty, trustworthiness, time and a sense of being looked after, this respondent also recognises that the chaplain can play an informal role of advocacy for prisoners within the more formal aspects of the system. They also note the link to the family, an important aspect

*“He’s always honest and trustworthy. He has time for everyone and ALWAYS looks out for his flock. He speaks up for us at sentence plan meetings and took time to meet my mum on a visit.”*

Similarly for this respondent,

*“I think that once you get to know [the chaplain], you get to know someone who is honest, true to his word and nothing is too much trouble. I have a very high regard and opinion of him and he does so much for us in helping rebuild our lives and makes us feel that we can start again and that there is forgiveness.”*

Some prisoners face real personal challenges with mental health problems and possibly self-harm. These two prisoners commented that contact with the chaplain helped them to cope with these more severe and worrying problems.

*“Helping to stay focused and be focused and try my best not to go downhill with depression.”*

*“Yes, I have self-harm issues and it helps to have someone to talk to.”*

Some highlight the fact that they feel they do not know the chaplain well enough and so the opportunity for a trusting relationship has not yet materialised, or the relationship has not yet been fully developed.

*“Not really spoken yet so couldn’t say.”*

*“Don’t know him well enough yet.”*



*“I do not know him at all. He has not introduced himself to me, as far as I can remember.”*

*“I don’t know him as a person to talk to. Again if he was to go to the wings more often just to talk to anyone for no reason just to be seen then maybe prisoners would ask for his help and guidance.”*

This respondent comments on gaps in the availability of chaplains.

*“[My prison] went through problems of getting a priest for long periods of time and getting confession was very problematic. I have also noticed a huge decrease in a Catholic representative being available through the week around the prison.”*

And this prisoner would like to see more of the chaplain on the wing:

*“They should come on the wings more often.”*

Chaplains and the chaplaincy provide vital support and help in prison for prisoners, with 58 per cent (176 of 304 respondents) of prisoners going to their chaplain with a specific problem or at a difficult time. Chaplains may be able to offer practical help.

*“Yes, definitely. [The chaplain] gave me an appointment and a movement slip and I went to meet to talk to her.”*

Of this group who went to the chaplain for particular help only two per cent (five of 205 mentions) found that going to the chaplain did not help. The majority of those who mentioned it (64 per cent, 69 of 106 mentions) felt that the help the chaplain gave was sufficient and that they couldn’t have done anything differently. Most found that the chaplain’s presence was enough, with many highlighting not only visiting the chaplain but being able to visit the chaplain as very important.

*“Sometimes just going to the chapel is enough to help and I know I could talk to [the chaplain] about anything if I needed to.”*

Some felt that more support was needed, however, either in the form of counselling, further contact with the chaplain or more personal support.

*“Counselling and further appointments may have been at more help. I am aware father hasn’t much time, lots to do and others to see.”*

There are very few instances of a total absence of trust being reported between the chaplain and prisoners. So much so that when prisoners were asked for reasons as to why they may not trust the chaplain, if that was indeed the case, the majority (78 per cent, 93 of 120 mentions) took this as an opportunity to either restate their trust in the chaplain or reject the question outright. A small number of prisoners including this one, however, feel wronged or let down in some way by the chaplain:

*“He told me lies, now he can’t be trusted. How could I receive a communion knowing I don’t trust the priest. It wouldn’t be right.”*

Clearly, the support that chaplains offer in prisoners’ religious belief and practice is very much intertwined with pastoral care. This places an important emphasis on the approach of the chaplain, that they are friendly and welcoming, are good listeners, can be trusted to maintain the confidentiality of the information given to them by prisoners and that they offer practical advice and guidance including

aspects of prison life that are proving difficult. It is also evidently important that chaplains are honest and straightforward about the help they can offer – and its limitations. Chaplains also gain the support and trust of prisoners by advocating for their interests within the prison regime. These pastoral approaches have special significance because of the challenges of prison life, which can sometimes be the source of fear, confusion, loneliness or a loss of hope or optimism. Chaplains, however, are not social workers, councillors, therapists or resettlement workers. Pastoral support by chaplains needs to be rooted in religious belief and commitment, not in the pursuit of general well-being for prisoners. Chaplains are contributors to, not architects of the well-being of prisoners: that responsibility lies on the entire prison community – and not on any individual, whether prisoner or staff.

# 4

## *Pastoral role of chaplains*

The importance of helping prisoners to maintain contact with their families, particularly partners and children, and the benefits that has in reducing reoffending are well-documented in the literature on desistance from crime.<sup>21</sup> The work of Sampson and Laub<sup>22</sup> in particular has been highly influential in drawing attention to the importance of family life for ex-offenders. It is clear from responses to this survey that prisoners see chaplains as an important conduit to staying in touch with their families and dealing with problems that may arise in the sometimes difficult and conflictual relationships between prisoners and their families. Family life has long been an important part of Catholic teaching. Family and community life are seen as the wellsprings of a life of faith and morality: 'The family is the original cell of social life. [...] Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honour God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.'<sup>23</sup>

The literature on desistance from crime also points to the importance of a strengthened sense of identity and a positive 'narrative' about the future in helping ex-offenders desist from crime.<sup>24,25</sup> Religious beliefs, as noted, often stretch back to childhood and upbringing, and therefore perhaps to a time before the crimes were committed. Religious belief and practice seems also to offer prisoners consolation and comfort in the inevitably difficult times during imprisonment as well as a sense of fellowship with other Catholic prisoners, combating feelings of isolation and separation while in prison. Catholic doctrine also stresses concepts that are closely aligned, if not wholly synonymous, with concepts in criminal justice. Catholics talk about sin, remorse, atonement, conscience and absolution. In criminal justice analogous concepts are crime, sentence, restorative justice, parole and release. Confession is obligatory for Catholics according to Catholic teaching. This is an opportunity for profound reflection on what you have done wrong and a place to seek a priest's guidance on how you may atone for your sins and seek God's blessing in your efforts to make amends as well as ultimately to gain absolution from sin. No wonder then

---

21. Ministry of Justice 2013 *Transforming Rehabilitation: a summary of evidence on reoffending*. Ministry of Justice Analytical Series. London, Ministry of Justice

22. Sampson, R. J. and Laub, J. H. 1995 (original publication 1993) *Crime in the making. Pathways and turning points through life*. Cambridge, Mass and London, U.K. Harvard University Press

23. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 4, para. 2207

24. Maruna, S. 2001 *Making Good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*. Washington USA, American Psychological Association

25. Farrall, S. and Calverley, A. 2006 *Understanding desistance from crime: Theoretical directions in resettlement and rehabilitation*. Open University Press, p. 180-188

that many prisoners saw confession as an important part of their journey following their imprisonment. Catholics are also encouraged in the liturgy of the Mass to reflect on and confess their sins. Again this is an opportunity for prisoners to reflect on and acknowledge their crime, not just to themselves, but in the eyes of the Church and to think about how they might make amends.

So there are many aspects of the practice of chaplains that contribute either by analogy or more directly to building up those aspects of a prisoner's persona and attitudes which may act as protectors against reoffending in the future. As with pastoral support, this is not the primary purpose of chaplaincy but represents a considerable collateral benefit.

In this section of the report respondents' views are given on the help that chaplains offer with specific events such as bereavement and with supporting contact and communication with family. The questions of forgiveness and personal transformation are also considered.

## Bereavement, comfort and consolation

58 per cent (176 of 304 respondents) of prisoners came to their chaplain with a specific problem or at a difficult time.

*"[...] I cried through prayer, listened to everything that was said and left feeling a weight lifted, might sound mad but almost as though a new lease of life had been given, and I think if they see you upset they adapt what they say to help you and give guidance to how you feeling."*

25 per cent (52 of 205 mentions) highlighted that the chaplain had helped specifically with a family-related issue. A particularly troubling experience for prisoners is the death of a loved family member and the consequent bereavement while they are in prison and therefore out of regular touch.

*"She was there to comfort me when I lost my brother, she made all the appropriate calls to my family I did not feel alone, she done private prayers and lit candles and a Mass was said that week."*

*"My father passed away while I was in prison, I wanted to self harm myself but the priest spoke to me every day and he helped me a lot."*

*"When I lost my brother to cancer and the support I was given was tremendous."*

*"Family deaths ... it felt so much better being able to open up and talk about feelings etc."*

*"If someone in your family die you can go to the Catholic chaplain and they will help you to contact your family and light a candle and pray."*

It is not always possible for prisoners to attend family funerals – and more's the pity as this prisoner notes.

*"They helped me to prayer for my nan when I wasn't allowed to attend the funeral."*

## Maintaining contact and connections with the family

As well as offering support in times of trouble, pain or bereavement, chaplains play an important role in helping to maintain and strengthen family connections for prisoners.

*"[The chaplain] helped me with outside contact with family visitors when I arrived here ... displaced, deserted and cut off."*

*She was fantastic. She is loved, cherished, and well spoken between prisoners.”*

The chaplain helped this prisoner to cope with the difficulties of being apart from their family:

*“I have hard time being separated from my family and I get massive support from chaplain.”*

Or the chaplain can pray with the prisoner for the well-being of their family.

*“He provided prayers and blessings ... he has contacted family, sat on parole boards and written a report on my behalf.”*

Chaplains also contact the families of prisoners at times of particular or urgent distress.

*“When my family had a car accident on the way to the prison, they phoned my family.”*

When a prisoner needs reassurance about the well-being of their family, chaplains have also been able to help:

*“Ringing my girlfriend and finding out how her pregnancy was going and letting me know.”*

*“They can contact your parents to see if they are OK if you have no credit on your Pin phones.”*

*“Helped me to know my family was OK and coping, gave me support and friendship.”*

Chaplains have also provided practical support in making contact with the family.

*“Help me with phone calls to family and had a service of prayers for me and my family at bad times.”*

*“Help with my family ties.”*

This prisoner equates the support they receive from the chaplain as akin to the support of a family member.

*“In a very sad time for me a Catholic chaplain took time and sat with me and helped me like they was a member of my family. (Which was what was needed.)”*

## Remorse and forgiveness

Redemption from sin is at the heart of New Testament theology and seen as the essence of why God was made man in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church has clear, explicit teaching that seeks to apply the notion of redemption from sin to crime and to the future lives of prisoners: ‘For all to play their part in building the common good they must work, in the measure of their competence, to ensure that prisoners have the means to redeem themselves, both as individuals and in their relations to society.’<sup>26</sup>

This feeling that religious teaching may be an important part of the personal ‘transformation’ needed to move away from a life of crime, something also highlighted in the literature on desistance, is reflected in this person’s response.

*“I would like to see a religious group where the emphasis is on ‘transformation’, how we can turn one’s life around and start a new, no matter what one’s past has been.”*

---

26. Pope Saint John Paul II 2000, Jubilee Year Statement on Prisons, 4.

Catholic teaching and practice, in particular the sacrament of confession, emphasises the need for feelings of remorse about having committed sins and the possibility, if remorse is heartfelt, of forgiveness. Remorse leading to the chance of forgiveness in the eyes of God and the world can clearly be an important source of hope for prisoners, as reflected in these responses.

*“[The chaplain] helped me to know about forgiveness and being forgiven.”*

This respondent emphasises remorse.

*“A sense of remorse for what crime I’ve committed and feel forgiveness and love.”*

For this respondent, forgiveness in the eyes of God is emphasised.

*“Yes, reassurance that God loves us all and if we repent forgives us from all our sins.”*

Confession plays an important role for this prisoner in seeking forgiveness and feeling more positive.

*“I feel as though I have been forgiven, and when I went to confession I felt something lift from me.”*

This respondent highlights the need for what would be called in secular circles, victim empathy.

*“To pray for my victims for forgiveness, and to pray for my parents and family who I have disgraced.”*

## Rehabilitation and resettlement

The Ministry of Justice notes, ‘Community chaplaincies work alongside prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families, offering practical, social, relational and spiritual support within prison, through the gate and out in the community.’<sup>27</sup> The chaplaincy’s links to the wider community can prove invaluable in helping a prisoner resettle post-release. There is a clear desire for help and support following release, which Catholic parishes and communities could provide.

*“I would like a Catholic priest to prepare a (religious pathway) for believers like me. So as I come to the end of my sentence I have a religious pathway to follow, into the community and [integrate] with a religious group to share experiences.”*

*“[The chaplain] helps with rehabilitation by putting people in touch with Catholic services outside and places of worship.”*

*“I would like to see RC chaplain [...] help lifers to move forward to resettle in new areas.”*

In many of the responses quoted throughout this report the links between the chaplain’s role in supporting prisoners’ belief and practice, and dealing with feelings of remorse and seeking forgiveness, coming through a prison sentence psychologically and emotionally intact and unharmed, and maintaining contact both emotionally and materially with family - all these things have been seen by prisoners as all part of the chaplain’s work. These are all also important aspects of desistance from crime.

It is not the chaplain’s job per se to reduce reoffending but their contribution is clearly helpful. The best chance of the prison experience being both corrective and rehabilitative comes from the proper alignment of the values and practices of all the professionals who work in prison. Alongside their spiritual and pastoral roles chaplains will want to play their part in helping offenders permanently desist from crime. This means that a frank discussion about crime and sin and an enjoiner to victim and

---

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Justice 2011 Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners, PSI 51 / 2011, 21.1, Ministry of Justice

community empathy will be needed, not just a too ready willingness to absolve or forgive. Chaplains may feel an understandable sympathy with the plight of the prisoner and therefore keen to support them in the pursuit of forgiveness. Forgiveness, however, only exists as a consequence of understanding and 'owning' wrongdoing just as, as Catholics would say, absolution is only possible in the presence of genuine remorse for sin.

In addition to those psychological and emotional effects of encounters with the chaplain, there are also the practical benefits and fellowship that Catholic parishes and communities could offer returning prisoners who may well find re-entry to the outside world bewildering and perhaps even frightening, raising well-established risks of relapse into destructive behaviours and reoffending. It is therefore essential to see the chaplain's role as principally committed to spiritual support, but with a powerful recognition of the positive impact above and beyond that, both while offenders are in prison and in their return to community life on

# 5

## *Obstacles and barriers*

In this report the combined spiritual and pastoral benefits of the work of chaplains has been noted, as well as the potential impact of an effective chaplaincy on rehabilitation and desistance from crime. In that context, it is important to consider any practical or other obstacles to the work of the chaplains with prisoners and ways in which those barriers may be overcome. Despite 64 per cent (162 of 252) of respondents stating that there is no risk or disadvantage to attending chapel some mentioned obstacles and possible downsides.

### **Practical and logistical problems**

Just under a quarter (24 per cent, 68 of 280 respondents) mentioned that they experienced practical difficulties in getting to chapel.

TABLE 14: PRACTICAL PROBLEMS IN GETTING TO CHAPEL

	Percentage
Not being let out of cell	20
Scheduling/timetabling/time issues (esp. meds)	20
Chapel not being called	14
Issues with the list	13
Staffing issues/prison staff	9
Illness/physical disabilities	3
Decrease in availability of chaplain	1
Other	18

*Note: n = 95*



## Scheduling and timetabling issues

20 per cent (19 of 95) mentioned difficulties with scheduling and timetabling religious activities, which sometimes bump up against other important priorities for prisoners, such as medication.

*“Sometimes regime issues conflict with Mass (i.e. library, reception call up, medication).”*

*“I had to cancel a dental appointment to attend the Ash Wednesday service.”*

*“Due to the medication routine at weekends, I often miss Mass waiting for a nurse to arrive. Either medication routine or Mass time would need to change to resolve this.”*

*“Sometimes you can't get to church because your medication is not there as nurses are not on time, and I don't want to lose it at church.”*

Some prisoners offered some suggestions for how these problems could be avoided or overcome. These included increased communication between prison staff and prison chaplains, as well as improved awareness of the importance and need for regular contact between Catholic prisoners and the Catholic chaplain.

*“Allow prisoners who wish to attend Mass/services to get through queues e.g. for medication, or appointment. It is my priority, the officers seem not to care.”*

*“The prison staff could be made aware of the power to transform an individual from a life of wickedness to a life of peace and illumination and should encourage to attend Religious Service.”*

## Prisoners not being let out of their cells

20 per cent of prisoners who mentioned they had problems (19 of 95 mentions) said they had experienced difficulties with being let out of their cells.

*“Get us out of our cells to attend.”*

*“I was supposed to go last Sunday but they didn't pick me up.”*

*“I missed my first two opportunities to attend Mass as I was not released from my cell.”*

## Chapel not being called

14 per cent (13 of 95 mentioned) commented that chapel has not been called or they have not heard the call.

*“Don't hear the officers shout for RC chapel, I don't think they regard it as important to prisoners.”*

*“They don't inform you when they go so you miss it also people don't know about chapel.”*

*“Every single week Mass isn't called or we wait for up to 3/4 hour to get there ... also the hub are discouraging prisoners to attend bible study if we work”*

## Problems with ‘the list’

The religion of every prisoner is listed when they first enter prison and forms the basis of the roll call for religious services throughout the prison. 13 per cent (12 of 95) mentioned difficulties with the list of Catholic prisoners who are eligible for participating in religious activities.

*“The screws tell me I’m not on the list even though I’ve been attending for the past three years.”*

*“You shouldn’t have to put your name down to attend Mass or put your bell on to wait for an officer to come and get you... I’m registered RC. It would be better if they came and got you straight away at a set time every week. Other times there hasn’t been a priest to say Mass.”*

*“If your name’s not down they say you’re not getting in. This angers me as more often than not, when you’re a new reception you can’t get your name down for a while and this is usually the times you really need Mass as we are vulnerable (when new) and need God in our hearts and lives, especially we know as Catholics God is all around us it’s just nice been in a chapel with others who know you’re feeling lonely sad and in despair.”*

## Catholic prisoners being ridiculed

Some prisoners, seven per cent (18 of 252 mentions), said they had been bullied, harassed or mocked by other prisoners if and when they attend chapel.

*“Other prisoners call me names and tell me that I am wasting my time.”*

*“Yes, other prisoners feel they can mock me for my religion.”*

*“Maybe. Only if you let it. I have had the odd comment off the inmates and one in particular member of staff. Mocking me and asking if I believe in God.”*

This respondent, however, feels he can cope with this.

*“People might give me grief but I don’t let it worry me.”*

The needs of vulnerable prisoners are also important to acknowledge. Mixing with other prisoners at religious services can be a challenge and reinforce their ‘outsider’ status within the prison.

*“The only risk/downfall [to attending the chapel] is that that some people will not attend even though they want to from the wing because it is a mixed service with prisoners from the main.”*

*“Being a VP ... people don’t really want to go to a place where there is negativity or hatred towards them.”*

*“As I am a VP and want to go to chapel but find I cannot go as I get ridiculed from main prisoners who go to the same service. Due to this I will not go to chapel.”*

Other disruptions while in the chapel are also damaging to the reverence of the atmosphere, such as prisoners talking (five per cent, 13 of 252 mentions) or fighting (five per cent, 12 of 252 mentions).

*“Some attendees disrupt the Mass and are not necessarily attending simply to participate in the sacrament. This is a distraction.”*

*“People sometimes talk, lack of respect, puts one in a position of maybe conflict which should not happen in a place of worship.”*

*“Risks are people go for the wrong reasons and fights occur. In my eyes you should attend to keep faith and if you’re serious about it all.”*

### Attitudes of some prison staff

Some prisoners feel that staff are not supportive of their religious life and are cynical about prisoners’ motives for participating in services and engagement with religious activities.

*“Elements of staff look suspiciously on any new found faith as something deceitful and this prohibits full engagement.”*

*“There are none apart from some officers think that inmates only go there to trade drugs and tobacco.”*

Some prisoners find that prison officers contribute to the unsympathetic atmosphere in the chapel, experienced by some prisoners.

*“Rude officers sat at the back of the chapel, chapel for me is a place of peace and tranquillity.”*

Although these cases only occur rarely and in isolation these incidents may contravene paragraph 2.3 of PSI 51/2011. ‘A prisoner must not be subject to any form of discrimination or infringement of their human rights by declaring themselves of any faith or religion or as belonging to none.’<sup>28</sup>

Prison regimes and the priorities of security and other important aspects of prison life inevitably mean that prison life can be inflexible and create dilemmas over which the prisoners or staff do not have full control – restriction on freedom is after all the core meaning of being in prison. It is nevertheless important that the prison authorities and staff understand the importance of religious observance to prisoners as a marker of the prisoner’s identity and well-being and as milestones on the journey to desistance from crime. The prison authorities and the chaplaincy need to reinforce those messages, not just to prison staff, but to prisoners as well. The spiritual lives of prisoners are important to everybody, and not just to be viewed a ‘skive’, a dodge or a meaningless, futile superstition.

---

28. Ministry of Justice 2011 Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners, PSI 51/2011, 2.3. Ministry of Justice

# 6

## *Conclusions*

Catholic chaplains are overwhelmingly trusted as people who can support Catholic prisoners' attitudes to, and experience of religious belief and practice. They are also widely seen as independent support mechanisms who are connected to the prison regime but are not seen by prisoners as a part of the punitive 'system'. No prisoner in this survey commented that chaplains were proselytising in an unwelcome way or seeking to exert unwanted moral or emotional pressure. As most prisoners who responded were Catholics by tradition and upbringing, it is clear that the chaplains' effort is deployed in support of the faith and practice of existing Catholics, not in pursuit of new ones.

Formal and informal encounters with the Catholic chaplaincy creates a valued space and set of encounters distinct from the specifics of a prisoner's offence, sentence plan or participation in specific mandatory interventions, and separate also from the day-to-day prison regime, authorities and hierarchies with all the expectations that the prison's arrangements place on the lives and emotions of individual prisoners.

It is clear from this survey that religious belief and practice is an important part of many Catholic prisoners' lives and continued religious observance while in prison is therefore seen by them as very important. Religion has often featured in their former family and community life. The experience of being in prison and the reflection it brings about can sometimes bring prisoners back to the practice of their faith or to a deeper inquiry into its meaning.

The prisoners who responded to this survey did not take the view that their religion was irrelevant to their life in prison or to their futures once released. On the contrary, they were clear and specific about understanding their religion as part of their identity and, in particular, their family lives. They also saw religious belief and practice as a relevant and important lens to consider the crime they had committed, how they might make amends for it and how, ultimately, they might move on from their crime to a rehabilitated and more holistic lifestyle. Regardless of whether others regard religion as relevant, Catholic prisoners clearly see it as important and beneficial.

Religious life for Catholic prisoners (in common with other Catholics) means regular attendance at Mass, private prayer, shared prayer, deepening their faith through encounters and discussions with the chaplain and other Catholic

prisoners as well as cherishing religious objects which often have deep personal meaning and significance. Religious objects support personal prayer and religious observance, as well as having strong symbolic and emotional connections, particularly to family members outside prison and previous lives of family and community.

As well as supporting faith and religious observance, chaplains make a considerable contribution to the pastoral care of prisoners, in particular supporting them with emotional problems such as bereavement following the death of a family member outside prison or feelings of despair or giving up while in prison. As well as their religious significance, prayer and attendance at services are important as coping mechanisms providing comfort and consolation for some of the difficulties of prison life for example, loneliness, despair and feeling that life in prison has little meaning or purpose. Shared religious observance also engenders feelings of fellowship with other Catholic prisoners and Catholics beyond the prison.

Some prisoners experience practical problems in sustaining regular contact with the chaplaincy and participation in religious observance, such as not being on the approved list of Catholic prisoners or attending Mass clashes with other important aspects of prisoners' lives, like work or phone calls to family. Vulnerable prisoners also experience specific practical difficulties with participation in religious observance.

Chaplains are importantly not part of the prison regime; however, attitudes to conscience, sin, remorse, atonement for sins and forgiveness are at the heart of Catholic religious teaching (as well as featuring strongly in other religious traditions too). Unsurprisingly, some prisoners think about their offences, the impact their offence has on other people and the consequences for them of imprisonment partly through this religious paradigm, as well as through the secular paradigm of the prison regime, i.e. offence, guilt, sentence, rehabilitation etc. While it is imperative that Catholic chaplains remain – and are seen as – separate from the punitive aspects of the prison regime, these strong conceptual, philosophical overlaps between religious thinking and secular, legalistic thinking about crime and punishment could be more formally realised (for example, through chaplains participating in restorative conferences) in the way that chaplains work with and support prisoners.

Re-connecting with religious communities outside prison on release could also form an important aspect of rehabilitation and help ex-offenders re-integrating to community life on the outside.

## Recommendations for chaplains

Following on from the findings above, there are some important pointers for all chaplains, which are worth setting out systematically, though as evident from responses to this survey, these are already part of the daily lives of many chaplains' work.

## Overcoming obstacles to participating in religious life in prison and engaging with the chaplaincy

Since prisoners see religious belief and practice as important to their lives and identity, every effort needs to be made to ensure that Catholic prisoners can attend Mass regularly and engage fully with the chaplaincy. Practically speaking, this means:

- Ensuring that Catholic prisoners are properly recorded on 'the list'
- Staff on wings need to be made aware of and perhaps reminded of the importance to Catholic prisoners of attending Mass and engaging with the chaplaincy

- Logistical and other obstacles need to be overcome even though they often stem from factors that neither prisoners nor staff fully control, such as staff shortages or legitimate security concerns
- Clashes with other activities important to prisoners need to be managed and avoided where possible
- More flexibility about when and where Mass is said may also make it easier for prisoners to attend and avoid some of the logistical difficulties and clashes
- Special efforts may need to be made to ensure that vulnerable prisoners can participate in religious life and that other prisoners do not stand in their way, literally or through hostility.

## Deepening belief and practice through prayer and study groups

Supporting prisoners one-to-one and in groups with prayer and giving prisoners the opportunity to attend study groups should clearly be a part of the chaplains' effort for which there does seem to be some unmet demand among prisoners.

## Offering the sacraments of the Church

Prisoners who wish to should be offered the opportunity to be baptised (if they haven't already been, or to renew their baptismal vows if they have), and to make their Communion and Confirmation. It will obviously be best if this is offered, rather than relying on a request from a prisoner. This can be done in a simple, matter-of-fact way without exerting undue pressure.

## Contributing to maintaining family life for prisoners

As family life is an important part of Catholic teaching and also clearly important to prisoners themselves, chaplains can both reinforce the Church's teaching as well as offering pastoral support to prisoners by helping prisoners to maintain their contact with their families and sustain their participation in the rituals of family life (especially bereavement and funerals) which are so closely attuned also to religious rituals in most faiths, even while prisoners are separated from their families in prison.

## Sin, crime, remorse, forgiveness, absolution

Many prisoners clearly see their religious life, belief and practice as deeply intertwined with their reflections on their crime, the need to better understand the consequences of what they have done for themselves, victims and their families and communities, feelings of regret and remorse and ultimately the hope of forgiveness or, in Catholic terms, absolution. This is an area of the chaplain's relationships with prisoners, either one-to-one or in groups or in the conduct of religious services, where chaplains can contribute greatly to the journeys that prisoners are hopefully on towards permanent desistance from crime. This can be best achieved by the chaplain's religious practice and not by straying into social work or therapy.

Prison was never meant to be easy. The prisoner is taken away, at least the first time they come to prison, from all that is familiar and reassuring, better to contemplate what they have done wrong, to make amends to society, to see justice done and hopefully to prepare for a better future without crime. The punishment for wrongdoing and most fundamental deprivation of being in prison is denial of liberty. With that comes a detachment from, and absolute disruption of the life of family, community and the outside world. Also denied and foregone are the right to live the life you choose. The prisoner must submit to the authority's

rules, regulation and regime. That too is part of the punishment. They must also deal as best they can with living cheek by jowl with other prisoners some of whom may well be difficult, hostile or even dangerous.

To begin with, and to some extent throughout their stay, prisoners may feel fearful and alone. Even accepting you have done something wrong and must pay a debt to society does not diminish those fears and anxieties though it may bring a degree of acceptance that might too readily turn to despair and hopelessness. And some of those fears may well prove justified. Prisoners, particularly vulnerable prisoners, are at risk of being bullied, having trouble with the authorities, becoming depressed, and contemplating self-harm or even suicide.

All this leads some prisoners to feel that they themselves are as much victims as the victims of their crime. They may feel they are victims of society's intolerance and lack of understanding as represented by the courts and the criminal justice system, or that they are victims at the hand of other prisoners, prison staff or the entire regime.

Prison in other words is, quite intentionally, an emotionally troubling, uncomfortable, anxiety-inducing experience. No wonder then that the prisoners who have religious beliefs and practices which they bring with them to prison (and on occasion acquire once in prison) see the chaplains as such an important aspect of coping with prison life, of maintaining their religious beliefs which lie for most religious people close to the heart of their sense of identity, and sustaining some of the ordinary relationships of family life in these difficult circumstances. Even once a prison sentence is done, that strong sense of identity and those relationships and emotional bonds are essential bulwarks against returning to crime and building blocks for a better future. The necessity for what chaplains do is considerable for prisons and for society. Judging by the responses given here, the benefits to prisoners are even greater.

## Appendix: research questionnaire

### *Prisoner's experiences of Catholic chaplaincy in prison*

If you need any help with completing this questionnaire please contact:

Name:

How to contact:

This questionnaire is part of some research on the role that Catholic chaplains have in the experiences of Catholic prisoners and how we might improve the service that we provide. We would like to know more about how your religion might support you during your sentence and after you are released, your experience of the Catholic chaplaincy in prison and how we can improve our service. No one will be asked to give their names on the questionnaire. All the questionnaires will be given to the researchers who are running the project and they'll write a report. The researchers, Lemos&Crane, are independent and are very experienced. The research and report will be used to improve Catholic chaplaincy in prison.

There are three sections to this questionnaire. The first is about you and your religion before you came to prison. The second is about your experiences of coming to chapel in prison and being in touch with the Catholic chaplaincy and the third is about how the Catholic chaplains might help you during your sentence and in rehabilitation. At the end of the questionnaire there is a chance to tell us anything else you would like to say about your experience of Catholic chaplaincy in prison.

You don't have to answer all the questions. You can answer just some of them – if you feel some questions are too personal you can choose not to answer. Or you don't have to take part at all. That's up to you. If you do take part, no one needs to know you have filled in a questionnaire and you will not be asked to give your name. Nobody who reads the report will know that it was you who gave these answers.

When you have completed the questionnaire please place it in the envelope provided and seal the envelope. Please return the sealed envelope containing the questionnaire either directly to the Catholic chaplain or to the Wing Office. The chaplain will send the envelope containing the questionnaire directly to the researchers Lemos&Crane without opening the envelope, so your answers will remain confidential and no one will know who filled in the questionnaire.

If you have any questions or comments please ask the Catholic chaplain.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire and for helping us to improve the services of the Catholic chaplaincy.



<i>Section one: About You</i>	
How old are you?	
How many times have you been in prison (including this time)?	
What is your nationality?	
Did you go to a Catholic Church before you came into prison:	
	Never
	When I was a child
	Only at Christmas and other holidays
	Sometimes
	Most weeks
	Something else (please describe):
Did you go to another sort of Christian Church or another place of worship?	Yes/No (please circle Yes or No throughout)
	If yes, please tell us which religion.
Have you been baptised?	Yes/No
Have you made your Communion?	Yes/No
Have you been Confirmed?	Yes/No
Did you go to a Catholic Primary School?	Yes/No

Did you go to a Catholic Secondary School?	Yes/No
Does anyone else in your family go to Catholic Church?	Yes/No
	If yes, who?

## *Section two: Coming to Chapel in prison*

Do you try to come Mass regularly (for example every week) while you are in prison?

Yes/No

If yes, does attending mass have any impact on you and your experience of prison?  
Could you describe this?

If no, please tell us a little about why you don't attend Mass.

Do you ever pray privately?

Yes/No

If you do, does private prayer have any impact on you or your experience in prison?  
Could you describe this?

Do you ever participate in shared prayer in prison?

Yes/No

If you do, does the experience of shared prayer have any impact on you and your experience in prison?  
Could you describe this?

Do you keep any religious objects with you or in your cell? (For example a Rosary or religious pictures)

Yes/No.

If yes, please tell us which religious objects you keep.

If yes, why do you choose to keep these objects? what effect, if any, does keeping religious objects have on you?

If you do go to the chapel for mass, what are the benefits of coming to Chapel in prison for you? Please briefly describe.

Would you say there are any downsides, risks or disadvantages of attending Chapel in prison? If so, could you describe these?

Have you experienced any practical problems or obstacles in getting to Chapel in prison?

Yes/No

If so, please describe anything you think the Catholic chaplain or prison staff could do to solve or address these problems with getting to Chapel?

*Section three: How we help you*

Do you think the Catholic chaplain in this prison helps you to learn more about or to practice your faith?

Yes/No

If yes, please describe in what way you feel the Catholic chaplain helps you to practice or learn about your faith.

Are there other ways you might like the Catholic chaplain to help you to practice and learn more about your faith? For example through study groups. Please describe briefly.

Would you like the Catholic chaplain here to help you to deepen your faith – for example through Baptism, Confirmation or prayer groups?

Yes/No

If yes, in what way?

Are there any other ways that you think the Catholic chaplain might help you to deepen your faith?

Please give any examples you can think of.

Have there been any times when you came to the prison Catholic chaplain for help with a particular problem or at a difficult time?

Yes/No

If yes, on that occasion did you feel that coming to the Catholic chaplain helped you?

If the Catholic chaplain did help you, what did they do that was most helpful to you? Please briefly describe.

If you felt that the Catholic chaplain didn't help you, what could we have done differently that might have been more helpful? Please describe briefly.

Do you feel as though you can trust the Catholic chaplain in this prison?

Yes/No

If yes, in what ways do you think the Catholic chaplain has worked to build a good, trusting relationship with you and other prisoners? Please briefly describe.

If you don't feel you can trust the Catholic chaplain here, please tell us any of the reasons you can think of.

Is there anything else you would like to see the Catholic chaplain in this prison do to support you and other prisoners, either while you are in prison or in rehabilitation? Please tell us any ideas you have.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of the Catholic chaplaincy in prison?

Do you have any other comments?

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire and helping us to improve the services of the Catholic chaplaincy.

Please place the completed questionnaire in the sealed envelope provided and return it either to the Catholic chaplain or to the Wing Office.

*Belief and Belonging* addresses a difficult and sensitive subject with great understanding. This report outlines the work that the Church does with those who are often outside the margins of society. The work of prison chaplains reminds us of the Church's mission of accompaniment and invites us to share God's genuine mercy. Just as Jesus reached out to sinners, we too, following His example must also reach out and show forgiveness. As well as addressing the spiritual needs of prisoners, *Belief and Belonging* recognises the valuable practical role that prison chaplains perform.

H.E. Cardinal Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster

