

# THE WELCOME DIRECTORY



## WHO WE ARE

Faith communities can offer a spiritual home, a friendly community of steady and supportive relationships as well as appropriate practical assistance to people leaving prison.

This third session explores the connections between faith communities at their best and some of the aspects research has shown are important to help people leaving prison to build towards a new life that is free from crime.

**2019 VERSION**



**SESSION THREE**



## Session three facilitator notes: who we are

Welcome to this third session which creates space to explore who we are as a faith community and how 'who we are' might help a person who has left prison with faith thrive as they work to reestablish their lives in the community.

During the first two sessions we saw how faith communities can provide a spiritual home; an open community that provides steady and supportive relationships as well as offering appropriate practical assistance. The faith communities beyond our prison gates can really help someone leaving prison to make a new start. Faith communities can also be changed by accepting people who have left prison into their community. Encountering each other can change us all for good.

### The 'National Bank of Virtue'

As we engage with the issues of crime, punishment and restoration we must somehow hold justice in balance with compassion. Faith communities have an opportunity to demonstrate what this looks like in our everyday lives. The following quote was given more than one hundred years ago, yet is every bit as relevant today as it was then. It describes the stored up virtue of a nation, a 'virtue bank' if you will. **Read the quote out loud.**

*"We must not forget that when every material improvement has been effected in prisons, when the temperature has been rightly adjusted, when the proper food to maintain health and strength has been given, when the doctors, chaplains and prison visitors have come and gone, the convict stands deprived of everything that a free man calls life. We must not forget that all these improvements, which are sometimes salves to our consciences, do not change that position.*

*The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country. A calm and dispassionate recognition of the rights of the accused against the state, and even of convicted criminals against the state, a constant heart-searching by all charged with the duty of punishment, a desire and eagerness to rehabilitate in the world of industry all those who have paid their dues in the hard coinage of punishment, tireless efforts towards the discovery of curative and regenerating processes, and an unfaltering faith that there is a treasure, if you can only find it, in the heart of every man (sic) - these are the symbols which in the treatment of crime and criminals mark and measure the stored-up strength of a nation, and are the sign and proof of the living virtue in it." (Winston Churchill, HC Debates, Col. 1354, 20th July 1910)*

**Discuss this question as a group for five minutes: Is the 'National Bank of Virtue' currently in surplus or deficit? Why?**

**What is the role of faith communities in this regard?**

## Unlocking the second prison

*“As I walked out the door towards the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew that if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.”*

Nelson Mandela

*“Change happens when we treat people as people with whom we build relationships. Investing time, energy and resources in the individual offender can lead to the kinds of transformation and reconciliation that other rehabilitation programmes could never achieve.”*

The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, The Archbishop of Canterbury at an event in Brixton Prison, 2015.

The Welcome Directory helps faith communities to play their part in unlocking this second prison. This second prison holds people captive in two distinctive ways. The first way describes the person who leaves prison but continues to carry a heavy burden through the prison gate. Perhaps they have not been able to forgive themselves for what they did in the past or they continue to sabotage their new freedom by living as if they were still convicted of a crime. As Nelson Mandela taught us at Robben Island, you can leave prison but continue to be held captive if certain attitudes aren’t left at the prison gates.

The second way describes how society can continue to punish a person after they have been released. This can happen in any number of ways; by rejecting job applications or denying people access to training courses and even excluding people from communities or activities because of past crimes. These are some of the more obvious ways in which this imposed second prison works. Judges and juries sentence people, but once a sentence has been completed the general public should not take it upon themselves to continue to punish someone.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said that *“change happens when we treat people as people with whom we build relationships.”* This is the core value at the heart of all The Welcome Directory is doing. Faith communities can play a significant role in helping our society to unlock the second prison and throw away the key and it starts with us.

**As a group, have a conversation that begins to explore the following questions: how can we help to unlock the second prison?**

***‘People transform themselves, we either facilitate it or hinder it.’* What do you think about this statement? How can faith communities help or hinder personal transformation?**

## Our faith community has the keys

We have begun to explore aspects of our faith community that can help to unlock the second prison. Faith communities have a powerful set of keys that can bring about freedom and we can play a part in helping a person leaving prison to forgive themselves and move on by offering friendship, reinforcing a new positive image of themselves and their offering ways to live out their faith in practical ways.

We can also play a significant role as a community by demonstrating what a rehabilitative community can look like to the wider society in which we live. We need a rehabilitative society and faith communities can help to make it so amazing.

Research shows that most people who have committed offences move away from a life of crime and that most offenders, even persistent offenders, eventually stop offending. This is due to a number of factors, the main one being the process of simply growing older and maturing. However, the community we associate with has a significant impact upon behaviour and this revolves around relationships. The kind of people we get close to, the values of the community that those people are part of, the opportunities this gives us access to and the culture, beliefs and actions that are embodied in the community are all important factors.

Living a non criminal life is a gradual learning process that means stepping away from crime and learning to live in a different way. Sometimes, this means leaving behind friends, family, long held values and habits, it can be very lonely! A faith community can offer the space in which to change for good in a positive, supportive and connected way.

### **Film - Leaving Prison In Faith: Community**

**Watch the final film as a group. The film lasts for just under fifteen minutes and is available to stream or download at [www.welcomedirectory.org.uk/sessions](http://www.welcomedirectory.org.uk/sessions)**

**What did you notice that stood out or surprised you?**

**Why does it matter?**

**What does to mean for me?**

**Talk together about the impact that the third film made upon you.**

## Who we are

For the rest of this session, we will think more deeply about who we are as a faith community. Every community expresses its faith and beliefs in different ways, however, there are powerful features that good faith communities possess that we should be mindful of as we consider who we are and how that, in and of itself, is a powerful factor in helping people leaving prison establish themselves after a period of time in prison.

### A community made of people

The first significant quality that faith communities possess is that we are formed of people. It seems obvious, but research shows that steady relationships, where people can be normal and where experiences can be shared plays a powerful part in resettlement. For many who have spent time in prison, relationships have been anything but steady and many find that people distance themselves from those who have been caught up in criminal activity.

People coming out of prison might have lost all previous relationship ties and so are starting again. Participating in a community can be one of the most important things that someone can do once they have left prison and a community of faith can offer this.

Faith communities can provide parental figures that might offer stable and wise input and peers who can be normal and have fun together as well as potential lifelong partners! Positive steady relationships have been shown to be one significant factors in helping people leave a life of crime.

Someone might be resettled into a completely new area and have no social network or support structures. Starting over is a huge endeavour and faith communities can offer a coherent and steady community that offers every kind of meaningful relationship that people need to form.

When speaking with prisoners, it is the personal connection and not the provision of housing and work which were the most important aspect of joining a faith community, although these practical elements also play a vital role. A sense of humanity is strengthened in community. A steady and faithful community of people from all walks of life provides something that no other resettlement agency can offer. The slow pace of building friendship and belonging; becoming part of a family.

Research shows that people leaving prison with faith join a faith community for shared values rather than in the search of material help. However, material help that develops out of a relationship of growing trust and mutual support means that physical benefits are more likely to have a positive and lasting impact.

Relationships are at the heart of this; people meeting people. Talking, sharing, helping, moving forward together. In essence, doing life together.

**Have a conversation about how someone who has left prison in faith might build new friendships in your community. How might you help to sustain life giving connections in the areas we have thought about together? What issues might you encounter and how might you overcome them?**

## **A community of people with faith**

The second significant quality that faith communities possess is that we are made up of people who practice a common faith, whatever that faith tradition is. Again, it might seem obvious, but faith is the focus of the community and faith reinforces a specific identity or way of being that provides inspiration day by day. Practicing faith is not an easy endeavour at times, but it is made easier as we practice with others. The belief that each and every person can become a more faithful adherent is part of faith identity and promoting positive beliefs about love, compassion, peace and hope that are common to all faiths helps to promote a new self image. Offering people who have left prison a positive self image that underlines their worth and enhances their self esteem can be a significant part of rebuilding a new life post release.

If the maturing process has been identified as a significant factor in leaving a life of crime, then being part of a community that is seeking to grow in maturity is clearly a good thing. This discipleship journey therefore provides a path that can be followed. Learning, praying, fasting, worship, study, pilgrimage and many other elements that are common throughout faith traditions give structure to our lives. Having faith and values that are reinforced on a daily and weekly basis is a huge benefit that faith communities share in and promote naturally.

Someone who has left prison with faith can continue to grow in a community that has faith at its core and because this happens in the midst of a network of new relationships, the impact is even greater. Not only that, but the practical application of learning to apply faith to everyday challenges such as money matters, disagreements we might have with others and learning new responses to situations that may have contributed to offending behaviour in the past is something that faith communities are often well equipped to help with.

New patterns, interests and skills and a shared belief system is a strong basis for belonging and can be a significant factor in resettlement.

**Have a conversation about how someone who has left prison in faith might develop their faith in your community. What does your community have to offer? How might you help to sustain faith in the areas we have thought about together? What issues might you encounter and how might you overcome them?**

## A COMMUNITY THAT ACTS ON THEIR FAITH

The third significant quality that faith communities possess is that we are made up of people who practice a common faith and find opportunities to act upon our faith in a variety of situations. Faith communities exist for the good of the world and this idea is core to our identity and purpose for being.

It is clear from research and experience that structure and routine post release is an important factor in resettling well and leaving criminal activity in the past. A job or opportunity to develop work skills, a place to live that is secure and in a place away from opportunities to reoffend are very important aspects of starting a new life away from prison. However, beyond that, positive relationships and activities that form the core of a new life and positive identity is vital.

Faith communities often have ways in which they practice their faith through actions that create positive changes in the wider community. Seeing your belief in action and making a positive difference to others can be life changing. This sense of purpose beyond ourselves, helping others, can be a powerful motivation for change and continues to reinforce a new identity that contributes to the good of society, rather than causing harm.

Many people who have spent time in prison have affected others in negative ways. With a newfound community of supportive relationships, the opportunity to grow in faith and act upon that faith, people who have previously done harm now have an opportunity to do good and make a real and lasting difference not only to others but in a way that helps them too.

This sense of purpose, doing something good that impacts others, is the final aspect of what faith communities can offer someone who is trying to resettle.

It is important to realise that people leaving prison have strengths and resources to offer as well as risks and needs. Supporting and developing these talents is at the heart of human flourishing and we could all do with more of this in our lives.

**Have a conversation about how someone who has left prison in faith might find opportunities to act upon their faith in your community. What opportunities to serve others does your community have to offer? How might you help to provide opportunities to develop their resources and skills in the areas we have thought about together? What issues might you encounter and how might you overcome them?**

In conclusion, the power to change comes through participating in a faith community that provides opportunities to make a difference. It is this participation that can offer the greatest chance of helping someone who has left prison in faith to resettle and thrive.



## Ordinary things, extraordinary love

We hope that you can see that there is much that a local faith community can do together to create a supportive environment for someone leaving prison. Each community will be able to offer something different, something that is distinctive and special and we hope that you were able to begin to imagine some of those things together.

In the first session, we learned that the most important thing that a faith community can offer someone leaving prison is a place to belong; normal relationships. Whereas, Community Rehabilitation Companies can offer practical support, they cannot offer friendship - the slow pace of community. Maybe it is this special quality that offers purpose and meaning which then helps to make sense of everything else. Many of the things that are going to help someone leaving prison to settle are everyday ordinary things. Faith communities have the opportunity to show people what doing those ordinary things with extraordinary love looks like. That is the gift that faith communities can offer and it will make all the difference.

## Ending place

This last exercise records your ending place and will reflect your journey during the time you have been participating in these sessions.

**Spend a few minutes filling out The Welcome Directory Attitudinal Awareness Survey. Your responses are anonymous and will help us work towards a rehabilitative society. Please pass them to the facilitator at the end of the third session.**

## Taking things further

This is not the end, it is just the beginning. These three sessions have prepared you to begin but there is so much to learn and experience, so many stories as yet to tell, so many organisations that can support you and there are other faith communities you can grow alongside and others you can encourage to become a Welcome Directory Faith Community. We hope that the Welcome Directory sessions have inspired you to take things further.

We have written further material that will enable you to take things further if you are interested. One of our dreams is that as a result of our work that faith community will consider forming a resettlement team. A small team who are engaged in the task of helping the vulnerable find a community that will welcome and support them and to work with others in their area to make sure that everyone in our society is cared for. We can support you to do that.

Check out our Next Steps resource for ideas, information and inspiration.

## Thank you

For a long time we tried to come up with a different title for The Welcome Directory, but we decided that *welcome* is a good word. Welcome is just there... available... it doesn't force itself... it just is. An open community bound together by faith and always ready to respond, always prepared to accept and help others and welcome them into that community for a short time or a long time.

As you try to establish this work, you will no doubt get it right and you will get it wrong, it is okay and part of the process. After all, standing alongside someone in their own failure is all part of rehabilitation. But whatever happens along the way, we establish this work together, as faith communities who offer hope, the chance of renewal, of new beginnings; for the person who has just left prison, for the faith community and for our wider society. We have an opportunity to invest in the 'National Bank of Virtue'. Together we can be part of a rehabilitation revolution!

Thank you for participating in the Welcome Directory awareness raising sessions. We hope that they have offered you good information, inspiring stories, powerful experiences and a challenge that will transform both you and your faith community.

**Please remember to  
register your faith  
community!**