

# Faith Behind Bars; Rekindling a Hope for the Earthly Convicts

Rev. Dr. Manya Wandefu Stephen  
*Alupe University College, Kenya*

**Abstract:** - Throughout the history of humanity, faith has been used as a rehabilitation tool as well as tool of hope. Particularly for a troubled and stressed population psychologists have commended the use of faith convictions as part of the remedies of such situations. The use of prison religious programs presents a unique opportunity to channel inmates into the straight and narrow. In this regard, faith is being used as a tool for the rehabilitation of inmates in prison owing to the restrictive and restorative qualities faith has had in the course of history. This paper explores the use of faith and the role of faith providers in the process of rehabilitating inmates in Kenyan prisons.

**Key terms:** Inmates, Faith, Prison, Chaplain, rehabilitate Faith programs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The use of prison religious program presents a unique opportunity to channel inmates into the straight and narrow way. In this regard, faith is being used as a tool for the rehabilitation of inmates in prison owing to the restrictive and restorative qualities faith has had in the course of history. Nathaniel and Pallone (2002) have observed that, since the time of penitentiary, prison religion has played an integral role in the lives of incarcerated offenders. In Kenya, Pastoral Care Council, a 2008 Act, points out that religious chaplain, spiritual visitors and pastoral cares engage with prisoners on the understanding that no person is intrinsically evil. By that fact that one is human means that there is a depth and richness of humanity that can be called to surface of the person's life and be in a relationship that supports a spirituality that is at the core of self-identity and sense of purpose in life. In this way then, faith is directed into the offender's life in hope of winning them back to the right way.

## II. A REHABILITATING FAITH

Religion plays a large role in restructuring the lives of several inmates. The concept of Prison Ministry believes in supporting religious and spiritual beliefs of the inmates. This gives them a faith to hold on to, in times when they need it the most. Many a times, this gives the felons a new purpose in life. It helps them to re-establish the lost beliefs in themselves, share their uplifting experiences with other inmates, and cope up with the brutality of prison life. Consolatamk (2012) points out that Spirituality is the foundation of any change in a human being and unless this is achieved a person cannot be saved. Faith provides a moral compass for the inmates, and

those that embrace it easily fit into rehabilitation programs within the prisons.

Rehabilitation is possible, to change a criminal to a useful life, to a life in which they contribute to themselves and to the society. Rocket (2005) points out that for the success of rehabilitation in prison, we need to provide prisoners with rehabilitation program so that cases of prisoners reoffending will be low. By use of faith paradigm, inmates are thus encouraged to adopt moral values that help in achieving a minimum degree of re-offending. As Wright (2007) rightly observes faith based criminal rehabilitation is able to realize this much more than any other programs that have been used before.

Net-industries (2010) states that recidivism rate are an indirect indicator of the correctional systems performance in achieving the public goal of rehabilitation. The recidivism rate measures the relapse of person into criminal behavior after incarceration. Unfortunately, no approach to prison reform has had much effect on the recidivism rate among released prisoners. Effective rehabilitation programs reduce the likelihood of re-offense and recidivism. Effective programs are characterized by three things. First, they provide more hours for people with known offence risk factors. Secondly, they address problems and needs that have proven causal link to offending and thirdly, they use approaches to behavior modification. Commenting on recidivism, Kenya National Council on Human Rights (2006) states that rehabilitative purpose of prisons should find its expression in the law, prison management practice and activities designed for prisoners. It continued saying, the government of Kenya (prison department) had made some effort towards realizing the rehabilitation nature of prisons. In prisons, several rehabilitation programs are offered to inmates but the said programs seem not to be achieving any result. They however note that, faith based program has succeeded in this line.

In support of the KNCHR, Ericson and Marion (1996) says that the prison system needed to become a rehabilitation centre in order to help prison inmates to have healthy growth and development of good moral and interpersonal relationships. In my view, prisons in Kenya are not rehabilitation centers because prisons force their inmates to live in strictly structured environment which is not conducive for behavior changes. This may lead inmates to returning to their crime life when they leave prison. Fox (2005) says that

the prison inmates are forced to have a cellmate, someone they do not know, and most of the time they do not trust. Everyone in prison is a suspect of crime, except for the guards who are watching over the inmates. Forcing a group of outlaws to live in the same vicinity is not a very good idea. This makes a person think that what he/she did was not that bad because other people have done it too. This type of thinking is not the best if the government wants them to stop committing crimes. In such case then, faith approach to criminal rehabilitation is appropriate.

In support to religious inclination to crime reduction, Ryde (2008) notes that religious personnel in prisons play a crucial role in supporting prisoners at a time in their lives when they are in crisis due to being in custody and also when they are feeling vulnerable, scared and lonely. The involvement of chaplains can occur when people are reflecting on their lives and on how to change them. He further says that many prisoners turn to religion to give them strength and motivation to make that change. Chaplains contribute to the individual's recovery and the wellbeing of the prison community by promoting the positive spiritual element of hope, reconciliation and peace. According to KPSO (1979) churches involved in chaplaincy include; Roman Catholic, Anglican, Africa Inland Church and selected Pentecostal Churches. For regulation purposes, chaplaincy section is answerable to the commissioner general of prisons for effective religious programmes and rehabilitation of the inmates, similarly, they are answerable to their respective religious organizations for the maintenance and the promotion of standards of behavior, conduct and discipline required for spiritual services.

### III. ENHANCING CHAPLAINCY PROGRAMS IN PRISONS

Chaplaincy program is considered to be important in changing the behavior of the prisoners in Kenya prisons. Lachland (2009) stipulated that prison chaplains seek to offer spiritual care to those in custody. The approach is person centered and is based on an understanding that all human beings have some ultimate questions to address. Some prisoners will say "it is good to know that chaplains are there. Lachland further says that prison presents people with a particular set of circumstances that profoundly affect their lives. Remorse, guilt and the quest for forgiveness, self-esteem, purpose and a belief in the future, relationships with family and those on the outside, addressing offending behavior and re-forming, anxiety, grief and hope, the wish to contribute and make restoration, these and other matters are often touched on in conversation between prisoners and chaplains.

According to a research carried out by Kent and Troy (2004) faith related programs positively corrected antisocial behavior of prisoners and increased pro-social behavior within the prisons. Their findings indicated that spirituality reduced the likelihood of arguing, thus indirectly reducing the likelihood of fighting. In this way prison spirituality controlled to a large extent prison crime. In support of Kent and Troy (2004),

Johnson, Larson & Pitts opined that effective faith based therapy reduced recidivism in prisons. Further, Pitts (1997), concluded in his research that; from every four adult male prisoners in New York State who attend ten or more bible studies in a year, were three times less likely to be re-arrested during 12 months after release compared to the group who did not attend the bible studies.

In the quest to understand more on religion and crime, Koenig (1995) conducted a research in North Carolina focusing on religious characteristics of inmates of aged 50 and above confined to the federal correctional institution. Forensic demographic and wealth data collected by Koenig on all prison inmates including detailed information on religious affiliation, background, beliefs, public and private activities, experience, intrinsic religiosity and religious coping. The result of the study indicated that religious background, belief activities, experience and intrinsic religiosity are important factors to the adjustment to prison life and behavior modification of prisoners. As far as prison chaplaincy is concern, this point to a faith based solution to crime reduction.

### IV. CHAPLAINCY IN KENYAN PRISONS

According to KPSO (1979) Kenyan prisons have chaplaincy (religion) department which consists of Islamic faith, Roman Catholic and protestant. The chaplaincy department is answerable to the commissioners of prisons for the effective spiritual programs and rehabilitation of inmates. Similarly, they are answerable to their respective religious organization for maintenance and promotion of standards of behavior, conduct and discipline required for spiritual services. KPSO (1979) notes that chaplaincy is mandated to ensure that all prisoners are cared for in terms of spirituality and spiritual counseling. Chaplains are supposed to encourage in the personal and spiritual development of prisoners, accepting them as valuable people in the community.

Going by what KPSO says, it seems to me therefore that chaplains are mediators between prisoners and the wrongs that they made. Not only has this but mediated between prisoners and the state and prisoners and their communities of origin. A chaplain is supposed to give restoration and binding the broken relation between the offenders and God, offenders and state, offenders and communities of origin. The chaplain is thus the dispenser of God's mercy to the offender and grace to the offended. This experience of God's mercy brings about mending within us and between others and us

### V. PRISON RELIGIOUS REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

Chaplains use spiritual services to bring changes in the lives of prisoners and prison officers as well. Smith (2007) postulated that Chaplaincy impacts on operations and recidivism of prisoners if it is well managed. Spiritual development and religious study are perhaps the most valuable tools for rehabilitation and to prevent recidivism of prisoners. Religion plays a crucial role in managing a prison

and positive effect that religion can have on an inmate is immeasurable. Smith (2007) further notes that, a full-fledged religious program directly impacts on the orderly operation of institutions by encouraging and supporting inmates and staff and provides positive reinforcement and reduces frustration, anger, and stress amongst prisoners and staff, thereby lessening threats, assaults and other negative behaviors.

Meier (1989) describes rehabilitation as the prevention of crime by changing offender motivation value, self-concept or attitude. The assumption of rehabilitation is that people are not natively criminals and that it is possible to restore a criminal to a useful life, to a life in which they contribute to themselves and to the society. Rather than punishing the harm out of a criminal, rehabilitation seeks by means of education or therapy. To bring a criminal into normal state of mind or into an attitude that would be helpful to the society, rather than be harmful to the society. In my opinion human beings are not totally inherently sinful, but there the potential of good in everyone of the human generation and every effort must be directed toward the exploitation of the good for the human race to attain order and harmony at all times. Crime and offense should be concepts of content in as far as resistance to restoration has been hindered and or refused to the offenders. This being the case though, it may as well be contentious issue should criminals willfully deny the restorative process that is actualized by faith to take place.

#### VI. RELIGIOUS SPIRITUAL COUNSELING

Sue and Sue (2009) describe spirituality as a belief in higher power, which allows us to make meaning of life and the universe. While Comer (2007) suggests that spirituality connects us to the people, nature, and the sources of life, the experience of spirituality is greater than we are and helps us transcend and embrace life situations. It is a force that can help the individual makesense of the universe and find a purpose of living. Corey (2009) also suggest that Spirituality and counseling have similar goals of learning to accept oneself, forgiving others and oneself, admiring one's shortcomings, accepting personal responsibilities, letting go-off hurt , resentments and dealing with guilt. It seems to me then that crime in more of intrinsic than extrinsic in origin; though the effecting may be in both realms. The most important thing therefore begins by forging oneself before forgiving the outer community in the course of being forgiven by the state and communities that were offended.

Spirituality from a theological point of view is the sense of personal connectedness or belonging to the higher power and the world. Our spiritual nature must be integrated with our physical, emotional and intellectual nature. A person who is spiritually alive is less likely to hurt other people, himself/herself or do wrong. Worthington and Sandage (2002) indicated that spiritual clients prefer a therapist who addresses change within spiritual framework rather than the body.They also indicate that religious therapy for depression works better than secular therapy for spiritual clientele. What needs to be

understood is that crime has its root in the heart and not the body and thus it is prudent to address the root rather than the fruit. Swinton (2001) argues that, Chaplains have a vital role to play in the spiritual care and the discernment of spiritual experiences of convicts, which form fertile ground for any crime. They bring specific expertise of religion and spirituality and as such, are in a perfect position to make a major contribution to the process of care assessment.

#### VII. CHAPLAIN AS A TEACHER

Aldridge (2006) notes that: Chaplains as spiritual experts have responsibility to teach about bereavement issues, breaking bad news, spiritual care for the whole person, multi-faith issues and ethical issues. Chaplains may actually teach the programmes or may act as a resource to empower others to do so. In some areas this can work by the chaplain teaching a group of prison inmates who then go on to teach others. This is demonstrated by the many theological graduations witnessed in Kenyan prisons year after year. However there are some areas where the chaplain remains the expert and the consultant.Such areas as spiritual experiences that prisoners go through need the expert knowledge of Chaplains for appropriate interpretation and not any other person. Maness (2009) indicates that religion offered by chaplains, helps the prison inmates to deal with criminal behavior and issues of denial, helping them cope with the deprivations of prison life and understanding the issues inherent in the loss of freedom. Religion provides them with the opportunity to start a new life while in prison. No one doubts that religion fosters coping skills in prison.

Baker (2008) agreed with Aldridge (2006) by stating that, chaplains of prisons provide education in the areas that gives the supportive background and format where issues such as sin, guilt, forgiveness, loneliness, trust, anger, isolation can be addressed in an open dialogue in spiritual group counseling such as parenting class. This class discusses parenting while in prison and helps those who are about to be released to deal with their children.This information acts a transition step for the offender to the family and friends. Baker (2008) further says chaplains deal with the anger management in a group discussion atmosphere. These prison inmates will discuss issues involving family violence which stems from their anger. Chaplains teach management skills in prisons such as personal money management, responsibilities, employability skills, community citizenship, marriage enrichment, effective communication and problem solving.

#### VIII. PRISON SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

According to Keizer (2009) prison chaplaincy provides a conducive environment in which spiritual guidance can be provided. Pacca and DeBiocck (2002) also observed that worship services in prison not only provide a welcome relief from their worries, but they are extremely therapeutic. Client centered therapy requires the chaplain to provide an empathic ear to the prisoners and not to be judgmental to prison

inmates. It is most assuredly a time for listening and for praying. Scripture takes on heightened meaning for these prison inmates because it is a constant source of hope and encouragement, for the dying souls; particularly those on long sentences, those with failing health and capital offense convicts.

Tonks and Fawkers (2009) stipulate that prisoners who are jailed for long sentences of imprisonment are faced with significant challenges upon entering and leaving the prison. They are forced to adopt a persona which protects them and unfortunately sometimes they lose themselves in that process. This persona may be in the form of attracting and or extracting favors from the warden and or the prison attendant or even fellow prisoners. This goes beyond the level of coping with the hard-core and the prison experienced residents. As such, chaplains are key persons in helping the long-term offender to understand when a 'mask' is needed to survive and when 'that mask' needs to be removed. This implies how to learn coping skills to do their time constructively and remain in touch with their inner-selves. When these prisoners come near to their release dates, they will experience many conflicting emotions such as joy and fear, anticipation and withdrawal, and even in extreme cases suicidal thoughts. Again the chaplains using community and contacts can be of practical help to prisoners as they return to the community and try to start a new life with the family.

#### IX. DEVELOPING THE SHACKLED FAITH

Aldridge (2006) found out that, there is a sense in which chaplains are involved in assisting in faith development almost like Jesus with the disciples on the road to Emmaus listening or as Muhammad instructed his followers, hearing, reflecting back, encouraging faith and discernment. According to Astley (1991), a chaplain encourages everyone to show some sort of commitment in faith. However, people's faith development is at different stages, partly related to age but also to life experience and openness to growth. Chaplains are in the unique position of being able to understand this and aid the person's faith journey. Many inmates still find something distinct and important about sharing their deepest thoughts with an authorized minister of religion.

#### X. A PRAYER THAT AWAILED MUCH

A prayer attitude acknowledges that God is our refuge and the deliverer from troubles and expresses unconditional faith and trust. Benner (1999) believes that Prayer is more than a therapy technique. It is the primary vehicle of growth in the spiritual life. Prayer is effective in helping people cope with their physical pain and the medical problems in reducing fear and promoting abstinence for those under alcoholic treatment. McArthur (2005) concurs with Benner (1999) that Gods people need to learn to pray, Jones (2006) supports the idea of prayer by saying that we should be having a prayer attitude. White (1995) reminds us that we should be instant in

praying. Come very near to Gods in sublimation and you will be like a tree planted by the river of water, Gods workers must be men of prayer, diligent student of scripture, hungering and thirsting after the righteousness that they may be a light and the strength to others.

Prayer is the channel of communication between our souls and God. God speaks to us through his word, we respond to him through our prayers and he always listens to us. We cannot weary or burden him by our frequent heart-to-heart communication. A praying soul listens to itself; a prayerful prisoner listens to himself/herself much more than one who doesn't. The act of listening provides a fertile ground for solitude and self-objective reflection by the prisoners. This brings the offender to self-realization and thus helps in the restorative process. Prayer helps in building the confidence that though a prisoner, and confined in the definition of the word, God can still reach out and embrace me in the incarcerated context in which I find myself in. Never mind that God is beyond the all and sundry, thus the thought of him who owns all keeps the soul of this prisoners ablaze for the years of prison service and beyond.

#### XI. CONCLUSION

Ordinarily when people are convicted of whatever crime they might have committed the spiritual part of humanity has often received little regard. It is thus important that the convicting agencies be reminded of this in the course of their noble correctional duties. This is because before the outer person is convicted, the inner person has already been in contemplation. This calls for an expert in handling the inner person, and this is the chaplain; whose role is to correct the inner person for the outward uprightness.

#### REFERENCES

- [1]. Aldridge, A. (2006). The unique role of chaplaincy. *Scottish journal of Chaplaincy*. 9. (1), 11-12.
- [2]. Astley, J. (1991). *How faith Grows: Faith development and Christian education*, London: National society publishing
- [3]. Banner, D., G., & Hill, P., C. (1999). *Baker Encyclopedia of psychology and counseling*. (2<sup>nd</sup>ed.) Michigan: Baker books, Grand rapid
- [4]. Blake, R., R. (2010). *Prison chaplain-role in ministry*, retrieved on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018 from <http://ezinearticles.com>.
- [5]. Comer, J., R. (2007). *Abnormal psychology*. (6<sup>th</sup>ed). New York: Worth publishers
- [6]. Corey, G. (2009). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychology*. Belmont: Thomson brooks press.
- [7]. Dammar, H., R. (2000). *Religion in corrections*. Lanham, MD: American correctional Association.
- [8]. De Shazer, S. (1991). *Putting difference to work*. New York: Norton.
- [9]. De Shazer, S. (1988). *Clues: investigation solution brief therapy: in Corey, (2009). Theory and practice of counseling and psychology (8<sup>th</sup>ed) Belmont: Thomson brooks*
- [10]. De Shazer, S., & Berg, I. (1988). *Doing therapy: a post-structural revision in Corey. (2009). Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy (8<sup>th</sup>ed). Belmont: Thomson brooks*
- [11]. Fox, B. (2004, May 5<sup>th</sup>). Repaving the long road out of prison. *The New York Times*. N Y, 4.



- [12]. Gurman, A. S., & Messer, S., B. (2003). *Essential psychotherapists' theory and practice* (2<sup>nd</sup>ed). New York: Guilford press.
- [13]. Hurdling, R. (1992). *The bible and counseling*. Sydney: AuckindHonder& Stoughton
- [14]. Howitt, D. (2006). *Introduction to forensic and criminal psychology*. (2<sup>nd</sup>ed). Essex: Pearson Longman Harlow.
- [15]. Johnson, B., R., Larson, D., B., & Pitts, T., C. (1997). *Religious programs institutional adjustment and recidivism among former inmates in prison fellowship programs, national institute of healthcare research centre for social research*. Retrieved on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2018, from [www.chapelofhope.org](http://www.chapelofhope.org)
- [16]. Keizer, M. (2009). *Chaplaincy ministries*. Retrieve on march 1. 2018 from <http://www.crena.org>.
- [17]. Koenig, G.H. (1995). Religion and men in prison. *International journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*. 10 (3): 219-230. Retrieved from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018 <http://www3.inter-science.wiley.com>
- [18]. KPSO.(1979). *Prison rules and regulations*. Naivasha: Naivasha maximum prison
- [19]. Lachlan, G. (2009). *Scottish prison service*. Retrieved from <http://www.Scottishprison.service>.
- [20]. Maness, G., M. (1997). *History of prison programming*. Retrieved on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2018, from <http://www.preciousheart.net>
- [21]. Maness, G., M (2001). *Chaplaincy in Texas*. Retrieved from <http://www.preciousheart.net>.
- [22]. Macarthur, J. (2005). *Pastoral ministry, how to shepherd Biblically Nesheville*: Thomas Nelson
- [23]. Meler, F., R. (1989). *Crime and society*. Washington: Allyn and Balon.
- [24]. Net industries, (2010). *History corrections punishment prevention on rehabilitation*, Retrieved from <http://www.libraryindex.com>.
- [25]. Pace, C. A., DeBlock, D. (2002). *Chaplain ministry in prison*. Retrieved on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018. From <http://www.usachcs.army>.
- [26]. Pastoral care council of the ACT. (2008). *Working paper guidelines*. Retrieved 4<sup>th</sup> February 2018 from <http://www.pastoralcare.org>.
- [27]. Rocket theme (2005). *Prisoner rehabilitation- giving a new life to prisoners*. Retrieved from <http://www.Rehabilitationtoday.com>,
- [28]. Swinton, J. (2001). *Spiritual and mental health care*. London Jessica: Kingsly publishers
- [29]. Sue, D., W., & Sue, D. (2009). *Counseling culturally diverse: theory and practice* (5<sup>th</sup>ed). New Jersey: John Willy& Sons.
- [30]. Tonks, J., & Fawkers, R. (2009). *Pastoral counseling for prison offenders*. Retrieved on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018. from <http://www.spiritual-wholeness.com>
- [31]. Whalen, P., J., & O'Boyle, A., P. (1967). *New catholic encyclopedia*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company.
- [32]. White, G. E. (1995). *Pastoral ministry*. Ft Pierces Florida: golden harrest fruit company family.
- [33]. Wright, M. (2007). *Criminal rehabilitation- working towards a better life*. For inmates and their families. Retrieved on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018 from <http://ezinearticles.com>