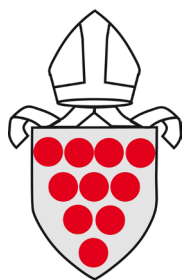


Criminal Justice Affairs Group Annual Review & Report 2015 – 2016



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
DIOCESE OF
WORCESTER



Foreword from the Bishop of Worcester

Justice is something the Judaeo-Christian tradition has always linked closely to the nature of God. In the Hebrew Bible this concern is most powerfully articulated by the prophets: "Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate", demands the prophet (Amos 5:15). The gate of the town was effectively the public courthouse of the town where legal and community disputes were settled: the location of both the civil and criminal justice systems of its day.

Christian – especially Evangelical and Quaker – opinion was very influential in the 19th century in securing a prison system whose aim was (at least in theory) the reformation and rehabilitation of the prisoner. In our unwritten constitution Diocesan bishops have a right of access without notice to any prison in their diocese, I hope to ensure that the system serves a justice that seeks to make right both the wrong done, and the one who has done wrong.

It is in this context that I am delighted about the establishment of a Criminal Justice Affairs Group in the Diocese of Worcester, and am especially pleased that the rehabilitation of offenders, and fair access to justice for all are among the Group's early priorities.

I am very grateful to all those who are part of this group for their work, demonstrated in this report, but I would particularly like to thank Charmian Manship, the group's chair, and Paul West, my Criminal Justice Affairs Advisor, for the energy and effort they have brought to the organisation of the events you can read about here. I commend this report, and the group's work, with gratitude.



Dr John Inge ~ Bishop of Worcester



Illustrations: Front Cover, clockwise from top: Bishop John with (right to left) Peter Merry, West Mercia Police, Kevin Downham, Matt Home (Willowdene Rehabilitation) and Paul West at the launch even; members of CJAG with Andrew Selous MP; Robin Walker MP with Paul Deneen of the West Mercia PCC's office; Cllr Pam Davey (WCC Chair 2015) and invited guests at the launch; Speakers at the Transforming Rehabilitation Conference. This page: right, Rt Hon Andrew Selous MP addressing the Transforming Rehabilitation Conference; above, the conference in session at the Worcester Arena.

Introduction

With the encouragement of the Mission Development Officer and following discussions in the Diocesan Commission for Social Responsibility, a small group of people met in November 2014 with the aim of forming a group to offer a Christian perspective and advise the Diocese on criminal justice matters. Terms of Reference, supported by Bishop John, were agreed in March 2015 (available to view on the Diocesan website), and the work of the Criminal Justice Affairs Group (CJAG) started in earnest.

From the outset the Group wanted to be proactive in its approach to its two main aims: internally within the Diocese to offer a Christian perspective and provide expert advice on criminal justice matters, and externally to raise public awareness and be catalysts of criminal justice related social action. It also wanted to ensure its membership reflected all aspects of the criminal justice system from key agencies, the voluntary sector, and those with expertise in CJ issues.

At that early stage, the most pressing issue was the pending 2015 General Election. The group considered it beneficial to have an event leading up to this that facilitated criminal justice discussion as an important political topic. Ultimately, this event was combined with a formal launch of the CJAG and the recruitment of additional core members. This report reviews the Group's activities in its first year of operation and also contains our reflections on the way ahead including particular areas of concern for our Diocese and society to consider.



Criminal Justice Affairs Group members

Doug Chaplin Diocesan Mission Development Officer ~ **Kevin Downham** HMP Long Lartin Managing Chaplain ~ **Diana Fulbrook** Former Probation Chief Executive and experienced Safeguarding Board chair ~ **Toby Hooper** (from 2016) former Crown Court judge ~ **Sarah Lou Home** Willowdene Care Farm ~ **Juliet Horne** Doctoral researcher in the School of Law, University of Warwick ~ **Mark Lister** Solicitor ~ **Charmian Manship (Chair)** Volunteer in HMP Hewell Chaplaincy ~ **Derek Markie** Worcestershire Voices ~ **Andrew Prickett** (from 2016) former Chief Crown Prosecutor and Immigration Judge ~ **Stephanie Watson** HMP Hewell Chaplain ~ **Paul West** former Chief Constable of West Mercia Police.

Part 1 – Key Events and Activities

Formal Launch of the Group

This took place on March 26th 2015 in Worcester Cathedral and was to feature a pre-election visit by Rt Hon. Andrew Selous MP, Minister for Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation. Unfortunately, at the last minute, he was unable to attend in person but sent a very supportive video address that was then discussed by a panel.

With less than 24 hours to prepare this change of approach, it was a demanding time but the whole event was well received. Discussions covered a range of challenging issues and opportunities for action across the full breadth of the criminal justice system locally.

The audience of around 100 people brought together criminal justice professionals and volunteers, members of a wide range of faith communities, academics and numerous very influential Worcestershire people in a way that had not been done before. Feedback indicated that attendees enjoyed the event and found it a thought-provoking, informative and positive launch. The Group particularly appreciated the support of the Cathedral and its generosity in providing refreshments and the venue.

Linkages with other Bodies

The Group has been aware of the importance of being linked with other bodies and to that end is connected with the following, either through membership or shared activities:

- ~ Diocesan Commission for Social Responsibility
- ~ West Mercia Criminal Justice Board
- ~ HMP Hewell
- ~ HMP Long Lartin
- ~ University of Worcester
- ~ Warwickshire and West Mercia Community Rehabilitation Company
- ~ Willowdene Care Farm

Prisons Week

This took place in the week of November 15th-21st and featured a number of local CJAG events.

Transforming Rehabilitation in Worcestershire Conference

This was jointly run in partnership with the University of Worcester on November 12th as a forerunner to the week. There were a number of speakers, with the keynote address being given by Rt Hon. Andrew Selous MP, Minister for Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation. The event also included table discussions, panel questions and opportunities to network. Approximately 90 people attended, bringing a wide range of differing experiences and backgrounds. Enthusiasm was expressed for faith communities contributing to the transforming rehabilitation agenda and some suggestions were made to progress this. Threaded throughout the day was music provided by Changing Tunes, a charity that works with prisoners through encouraging them to write and perform music as a means of expressing themselves, and supporting them on their release. Conference attendees therefore had the opportunity of hearing direct from former prisoners in relation to their experiences, which brought to life the purpose of the day.

Prisons Sunday

A special service to mark Prisons Sunday took place on November 15th at the Cathedral's morning Eucharist. Prayers were written by serving prisoners and read by chaplaincy staff, including one poem presented as a rap! Rev'd Charmian Manship preached about the reality of life behind bars for many thousands of people and the problems experienced upon release that so often lead to further offending. The service was a fitting start to a focused week.

Lecture by Michael Marett-Crosby on "The Real Prison"

This lecture took place after Cathedral Evensong on November 17th and was given by Michael Marett-Crosby, a former prison chaplain and Trustee of Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma's personal trust. He described the extraordinary way in which democracy has been growing in Burma (Myanmar), and the recent election results in support of this, despite the very restrictive military regime. He described its growth as "disciplined democracy" which remains very fragile. He referred to Aung San Suu Kyi's party as having been born in a prison and of her stillness as being steeped in faith, meditation and many years of house arrest.

He said "the real prison" is to come to believe that bringing about change should be left to someone else because it is too much for any one individual to actively participate in. He linked his experience of being a prison chaplain in this country, which exposed him to the reality of life inside, with life in Burma. Despite all the ongoing problems, he indicated that he remains very optimistic about the country's future and challenged us to pray for the 50 million people living there in hope. About 40 people attended the lecture some of whom outlined their own experience of visiting or living in Burma.

Open day at Willowdene Care Farm

Willowdene Rehabilitation works within prisons and communities and is unique in its provision of a residential "Women's Alternative to Custody" programme. It has particular links with HMP Hewell and HMP Featherstone. Willowdene offers a range of day and residential support schemes and has extensive training facilities, all designed to reduce reoffending. The Open Day was offered to the whole of their catchment area across West Mercia and Warwickshire. Representatives of faith communities were particularly encouraged to visit: the emphasis was on increasing understanding about rehabilitation and how they can support this. There were two sessions, approximately 40 people attended, and there were opportunities to talk to staff and students and to network.

Evening Prayer Vigil

This took place in the Cathedral crypt on 21st November and formed the final event of the week. Approximately a dozen people attended and it was led by Rev'd Margie Schutte, Managing Chaplain of HMP Hewell. She entitled the vigil "Some see bars, others see stars" and through giving the stories of four prisoners, provided a quiet contemplative space to reflect on prisons and prisoners. It was a moving and fitting end to a very busy week.

Part 2 – The Way Ahead

Reflections and Prospective Thinking

Having reflected on the year's activities, CJAG has recognised the need to consider the criminal justice system as a whole to better understand the way it operates and its impact on individuals and communities. We have identified a number of issues and challenges deserving of future attention, under three broad headings:

Societal/Systemic Concerns

- ~ The impact of the increasing politicisation of criminal justice matters leading to continuous change and lack of stability
- ~ Criminal justice agencies are not joined-up nationally either between government departments or strategically which makes it difficult to work together effectively on the ground
- ~ The impact of resource cuts to all agencies and increasing regionalisation of services
- ~ Potential further court closures and the move away from local justice
- ~ Prison numbers and availability of programmes/support for prisoners prior to release
- ~ Rehabilitation in the community particularly since the major changes introduced to the probation service
- ~ A lack of resources to support rehabilitation and protect victims, e.g. victims of domestic abuse
- ~ Proposed changes to Legal Aid and their impact on equality of access to courts and defence solicitors
- ~ A large increase in historical offences reported, particularly relating to sexual offences

Role of the Church/Diocese

We are aware of the need to develop understanding of the impact of the societal/systemic concerns on local communities, offenders, victims and agency staff. In this context, what is the role of the Church, particularly in view of the strong link between offending and poverty/social problems? It is important to encourage distinctive thinking in churches, and to increase public awareness of the issues, harnessing congregational resources to contribute to and influence opinion and action at every level.

Criminal Justice Affairs Group

Operating as a group of volunteers, the CJAG is aware of a need to pace its work and to arrange no more than two major events a year. To that end it intends to set up a database including contact details of interested people/organisations. We want to capitalise on the high level of interest in our work and to provide some focused direction/activity, identifying funding and resources support as required. Finally, we aim to develop our communication including greater use of the diocesan website.

Illustration: Bishop Graham Usher in conversation with Robin Walker MP. All photos James Atkinson, © WDBF Ltd

What Next?

In considering the wide range of issues, CJAG recognised the need to focus on just a few whilst also keeping in mind the bigger picture. We have therefore decided to concentrate on two main areas in the coming year:

Consolidating and taking forward issues raised at the November 2015 Conference, including:

- ~ Producing a freely available online directory (which we hope will encourage widespread use) outlining existing opportunities for voluntary work aimed at reducing crime and the impact of crime upon individuals, families and communities.
- ~ Formalising links with the Community Rehabilitation Company (part of the new probation arrangements)
- ~ Developing stronger multi-faith links
- ~ Exploring greater use of restorative justice, and potential involvement with the Welcome Directory and the Community Chaplaincy scheme

Securing fair and equal access to justice

This is particularly significant in respect to the impact of planned legal aid changes, and the experience of people from black and minority ethnic communities within the criminal justice system. Our aims in this area will initially be delivered through a workshop scheduled for April 2016.

Activities and achievements for 2016/17 will be reported on at the end of the year.

Conclusion

The CJAG has had a busy and productive year. The passion for fair justice for all is evident from everyone within the group. We hope to build on our first year's achievements and for there to be more active engagement with other faith communities as well as within the Anglican Community to promote the importance of this area of our common life. We feel beholden to support those working with offenders as well as with victims and with perpetrators, and we remain committed to find ways to do this effectively. Not least, people of faith have a responsibility to support those vulnerable to offending, those wanting to change their lives for the better, and to take responsibility for creating an inclusive approach to communal living. CJAG welcomes ideas to promote this from those wishing to support our aims.

