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From England

A CENTURY ON IS PASTORAL HOME VISITING STILL RELEVANT TO THE WORK OF THE PROBATION SERVICE?

by Dave Wood

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to consider what relevance the pastoral home visiting of offenders still has a century after the missionary conception of the Probation Service. It acknowledges the ministerial heritage of Probation work as a basis from which the pastoral uses of the home visit would have impacted upon early practice. It then reconsiders the relevance of this and challenges how the pastoral purposes of home visits could be used and applied in the contemporary practice context. It intends to challenge the reader to reconsider whether the pastoral ideas of early practice with regards to home visiting could be used to help achieve the goals of a very different modern Probation Service.

THE WORK OF THE POLICE COURT MISSIONARY

The modern Probation service in England and Wales can be traced back to 1876 and the work of Fredrick Rainer. Rainer is said to have been, "so appalled by the cycle of 'offence after offence and sentence after sentence'" (Whitfield, 2001, p.11) that he gave a five shilling donation to the Church of England Temperance Society for something to be done. The response was to appoint the first Police Court Missionary with the aim of reclaiming drunkards from their moral degeneration.

As the evangelistically-focused title suggests, part of the motivation for the Police Court Missionary was the perceived need for spiritual salvation. Nevertheless, the evangelism of lost souls should not be seen as the only factor influencing the work at that time. Thomas Holmes, one of the early Missionaries, was asked by a rich philanthropist of his work, "Do you give them Christ?" Holmes replied, "Sir, I cannot carry Christ in parcels and distribute him. I can only do as I think He would

have done ... I give them myself." (McCulloch, 2004). This exemplifies the compassion and dedication of the early missionaries who saw the importance of a humanitarian as well as religious response to the needs of their clients. This was demonstrated through practical as well as spiritual needs being met (Jarvis, 1972). For example, men and women were invited to receive a free breakfast upon their release from prison and upon meeting the practical need they would be encouraged to sign a pledge of allegiance to the temperance movement. Further practical examples included direct visits being made to women working as prostitutes with the aim of assisting them to secure accommodation and employment.

Home visiting formed a crucial part of how the work was undertaken with visits not only being made to see the offender, but also to speak to family members, employers, educators and other important people in the individual's life (Mair, 1997). Home visiting was an essential part of the community basis to the work undertaken, with the recorded work being completed in the usual environment of the offender, be that their home, or as in the example above, the community in which they lived and worked.

Examining the work of the Police Court Missionary in retrospect it is possible to view and understand the Christian ministerial pastoral discourse present in their work. Three themes of that ideology are now discussed:

EXAMINATION OF THE PASTORAL DISCOURSE AND APPLICATION IN A MODERN PRACTICE CONTEXT

1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP

The first theme to highlight is the importance that was placed on the officer-offender relationship. In his book on the work of the Christian minister, Griffith-Thomas (1995) notes how home visiting can influence a minister's understanding of their congregation and the congregation's respect for their minister. Hockling (1985) explains how this functions; demonstrating an interest in individuals, getting to know people and their background, and being available to help and advise them. Part of this is the visitor having an increased profile with the family of the individual

- The development of the working relationship and the availability to gain a stronger understanding of the offender and their background / context.
- Being available to support the offender and their family through crisis times, encouraging them to develop long-term coping strategies.
- Building clear links to the community in which the offender resides and the support available in that locality.

In addition to highlighting the relational aspects of visiting, perhaps one of the most important points about visiting highlighted through the early Police Court Missionaries was that they did not just visit homes. The contemporary officer should therefore consider whether their definition of home visiting should be extended, and perhaps restated as 'out of the office' visits. Home visits are not about visiting a home so much as interaction with key people in an offender's life and building positive links to the community in which they live. In doing this, well planned and considered pastorally minded home visiting may still have an important role to play in the practice of the modern Probation Service.

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personal space in the form of their home is being entered. With this in mind, Carr (2002) notes that if the visit is experienced as oppressive and judgemental the whole purpose may be skewed. As one guard against this, Carr suggests visits are only made by mutual consent. These points are particularly relevant to Probation practice in that many offenders can already feel on the margins of society. With this in mind, any further unnecessary infringement of their privacy could serve to strengthen this notion. Further, feeling oppressed could close them to the possibility that they may have the opportunity to engage with the criminal justice system in a respected manner and as such reduce their openness to assistance with rehabilitation and reformation.

A further consideration is the delicate balance between building a healthy professional working relationship with the offender and the less formal relationship which is often developed through pastoral work where there are no serious repercussions should the relationship develop to a friendship. Hebbeler and Gerlach-Downie (2002) discuss the problem in balancing the development of the relationship with the overall purpose of encouraging change. They recommended a need for visitors to be guided by examining the overall purpose of their visitation as they found in the child protection context some visitors tended to emphasise their role as a social support to the detriment of making clear their role in changing inappropriate behaviour. This perhaps reminds of the change from 'advise assist and befriend', and that whilst this article argues these features are a crucial part of practice which could be developed through home visiting, this is not the overall goal. The aim must always be to remain focused on the protection of the public through accurate assessment and the effective rehabilitation of offenders.

CONCLUSION

In his pastoral work, Jefferson (1998) concludes that misunderstanding the true purpose of home visits results in visiting being seen as a waste of valuable time thus highlighting the importance of a clear understanding as to why visits are being undertaken. This article suggests practitioners should reflect on how the following functions of pastoral visiting could be of use in guiding their own contemporary practice in relation to home visiting:

visited. Ross (2003) argues that this provides the opportunity to gain an increased informal knowledge of the individual as family behaviour patterns and beliefs can be observed.

This was reflected in the work of the Police Court Missionary. Undertaking their work in the home of the offender they were able to gain a greater understanding of the 'congregation' through visiting and interacting with offenders and their family members. However, the purpose of this was not limited to the collection of information. Through their interaction with key people in the offender's life the early Police Court Missionary would have sought to gain the respect of their clientele as they offered practical solutions, or advice and assistance, through their befriending and visiting educators and employers. So it is seen that the working relationship was developed through the combination of a fuller understanding of the offender and their context alongside intervention based upon that understanding.

It could be argued that the development of the working relationship in a historical context where supervision was voluntary may be different to the contemporary setting in which supervision is mandatory. However, being forced to comply with supervision through legal statute does not equate to full engagement. As McNeil (2006) writes, "desistance-supporting interventions ... need to be based on legitimate and respectful relationships..." (p55). This would indicate the working relationship is still of crucial importance to effective practice. As McCulloch and Kelly (2007) have phrased the argument, there is a 'who works' incentive in that the effectiveness of Probation work is underpinned by offenders perceptions of staff.

Relating this to pastoral home visiting, Carr (2002) argues that the relational aspects of pastoral home visiting are crucial to developing the authority required to carry out ministry recognising authority by title carries no real meaning without relationship. This reflects back to the earlier point made by Griffith-Thomas that good home visiting develops mutual respect between the visitor and visited and would suggest pastorally minded Probation home visits can still play a role in effective practice through the development of positive, respectful working relationships which may support desistance from offending.

2. OFFERING ENCOURAGEMENT WHERE AND WHEN IT IS NEEDED MOST

The second theme is that of availability and encouragement. Capps (1981) highlights how visits can be used to undertake a less formal type of counseling known as 'pastoral conversation'. This is explained by Wright's (1982) observation that the visitor's physical presence in the home can be the most important factor of a visit. The thought here is that simply 'being there' to offer support and encouragement during a time of crisis can be the most effective intervention in assisting the visited to cope with that crisis; more so than the actual words or actions of the visitor.

This could be viewed in the work of the early Police Court Missionary, Thomas Holmes, who above is quoted as saying, "I give them myself". Holmes recognised that he had little to offer other than being present where and when needed.

Clearly, the officer working in the contemporary practice context cannot act as a 'sustainer' for any lengthy period in an offender's life; supervision becoming a legal sentence time bounds the length of the service's intervention. Nevertheless, being sentenced is often a 'crisis point' in an offender's life; a time at which there is frequently a multitude of social and emotional difficulties facing the offender. As such, the officer certainly has the opportunity to take advantage of this pastoral use of home visiting to help the offender make sense of their difficulties and seek solutions for themselves through their personal presence during difficult times. This form of practice would be supported by recent research which suggests committed attention from staff is more important than the methodology employed in motivating and engaging offenders (Davies, 2006).

However, further to the above, doing this in the home of the offender adds another benefit. Hornsby-Smith (1989) has noted that through pastoral home visiting a minister can increase their profile with an individual's family. This could prove to be an invaluable tool for the Probation Officer who is unlikely to spend significant amounts of time with an offender in comparison to their family (or those with whom the offender resides). Increasing their profile with the offender's family can therefore offer the opportunity to further provide 'sustaining situational' support to those who in turn can offer much more time to the offender in the immediate and long-term.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNITY-FOCUSED ORGANISATION

The final theme to be highlighted is that of the community-focus of the early practitioners. Pastoral discourse argues that visiting makes for an outward looking church (Wright, 1996). Without any doubt, the work of the early Police Court Missionaries was based in the community as discussed above. Links were seen to be built between the missionaries, accommodation providers and employers and as such the work was very much undertaken 'in the community'.

In the contemporary setting, the importance of the community basis to the organisation has been highlighted by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). Indeed, part of the NOMS Offender Management Model suggests using community resources with offenders should become part of 'core correctional practice' (NOMS, 2006). In effect, this would promote a return to the manner in which Police Court Missionaries operated in the community linking offenders to local services. Home visiting which is used to assess and build relationship (as in theme one), and sustain / support to a solution (theme two) could then also be used to accompany the offender from their home to local services which could be of assistance in working through the solution.

Such a use of home visiting to link offenders into the community would also be in keeping with the ideology which suggests advocating for an offender's needs within their social context and network to promote the desistance of offending (Burnett and McNeil, 2005). However, further to that, such a community basis to practice could be used to gain public confidence as it has been seen that criminal justice organisations that attempt to engage the public in their communities are seen as more successful at meeting their aims by the public as demonstrated by the Red Hook Centre in Brooklyn, New York, USA (Centre for Court Innovation, 2005).

HIGHLIGHTING SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES FACED

Apart from the purposes for visiting highlighted in the pastoral discourse, some of the problems with home visiting are also acknowledged. Lynch (2002) discusses the issue of power, an intrinsic element of all human relationships, highlighting the importance of the visitor being attentive to how they exercise their power when visiting an individual whose