

From England

RELIGIOUS INTERVENTIONS IN PRISONS

by Jonathan Burnside

INTRODUCTION

Religious interventions in prisons are becoming increasingly important. It's hard to believe that, for example, a dozen years ago there were no faith-based units in prisons at all outside South America, yet today, they are spreading all over the world, including the United States, the Commonwealth and Europe, and right here in Germany. There are a great many religious interventions in prisons and I want to explore with you how these pioneering enterprises can open up new avenues for faith in prison and how they might encourage you as you reflect more widely on your vocation as prison chaplains, whether or not you are personally involved in formally delivering such interventions.

The widespread use of religious interventions in prisons may come as a surprise to some in the corrections field but in many respects they are a sign of the times. In many cases, religious interventions are being put forward in liberal democracies which have, on the one hand, become deeply secularised and yet, on the other, now contain a bewildering pluralism of voices, both secular and religious.¹ It's this blend of pluralistic openness, on the one hand, and restrictive secularism,² on the other, that makes the idea of religious interventions in prison viable in the first place, but also controversial. They're certainly reminders that secularism does not have all the answers when it comes to running an effective and humane prison service.

In speaking on the subject of religious interventions in prison, I'd like to draw on an evaluation that I headed up on four faith-based units in England and Wales, which was carried out for the UK Home Office and the Prison Service England and Wales.³ I'll also be drawing on the experience of faith-based units and religious interventions in other parts of the world. Although some of these units offer inter-faith or multi-faith

programmes, and all are open to inmates of all faiths or no faith at all, the majority of the units are predominantly run by Christian staff and volunteers. Having said that, I think they raise issues that are applicable to those from other faith groups.

Obviously it would be impossible to draw on all the different religious interventions currently in existence and so, for illustrative purposes, I shall concentrate on two. I'm aware that, at this conference, we come from many different parts of the world and with different church backgrounds. Accordingly, I'd like to draw on two examples, one from South America (APAC) and another from North America (Kairos). APAC stands for the Association for the Protection and Assistance of the Convicted. It's a Brazilian initiative which began in a prison just outside of Sao Paulo, Brazil, in the 1970s. It's probably the most rounded faith-based unit yet developed and is the only unit which has complete control over the prison. A prisoners' council is the highest form of adjudication and is responsible for practical administration of the prison, ranging from running the kitchens, to secretarial matters and even matters of security.⁴

I'll also be drawing on the experience of Kairos Prison Ministries (KPM) which is based in the United States (US). Kairos uses a three-day Christian course called *Cursillo*, which is one of the foundational components of APAC, and adapts it for use in a Western prison context. Kairos (which is the Greek word for 'opportunity') seeks to establish Christian communities in prisons by exposing 'negative leaders' to a three-day retreat in a Christian community run within the prison by volunteers. Its stated purpose is to build strong Christian communities inside prisons that will positively affect the prison environment and so benefit the whole population.⁵ Around 25,000 prisoners per year take part in a 'Kairos Weekend' and it's estimated that, by 2004, over 170,000 male and female prisoners took part.⁶

So what can we say about religiously-based programmes in prison? Let me give you, in no particular order, my Top Ten observations.

(1) THEY OFFER PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES SOMETHING UNIQUE

As prison chaplains you know very well how imprisonment forces people into a place of introspection that causes them to question who they thought they were. You know that for many it triggers a journey in which they

⁵¹ Ottoboni, J. M. C. B. 1998. "*Vida de Mário Ottoboni*" ("*The Life of Mário Ottoboni*"), São José dos Campos. 6.

⁵² See Burnside. 2005. 'From *Cursillo* to Prison', *supra* at n. 5, 65 at n. 5.

- ³² E.g. A. E. Bottoms. 2001. "Compliance and Community Penalties." In A. E. Bottoms, L. R. Gelsthorpe, and S. Rex, eds., *Community Penalties: Change and Challenges*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing; A. E. Bottoms. 2002. "Morality, crime, compliance and public policy." In A. Bottoms and M. Tonry, eds., *Ideology, Crime and Criminal Justice: A symposium in honour of Sir Leon Radzinowicz*. Devon: Willan Publishing, 20-51; K. L. Curran. 2002. *Finding God Behind Bars: An exploratory study of the relevance of prison conversions to criminology*. Doctoral dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Law, University of Cambridge.
- ³³ E.g. Sampson and Laub's 1993 reanalysis of the Glueck's 1950 study of delinquency; Sampson, R. J. and J. H. Laub. 1993. *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning points through life*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- ³⁴ K. Curran, *supra* at n. 32.
- ³⁵ A. E. Bottoms and Rex, S. 1998. 'Pro-social modelling and legitimacy.' In *Pro-Social Modelling and Legitimacy: The Clarke Hall Day Conference* eds. Sue Rex and Amanda Matravers. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, Institute of Criminology, 11-27, 18.
- ³⁶ A. E. Bottoms *et al.* 1995. *Intensive Community Supervision for Young Offenders: Outcomes, Process and Cost*. Cambridge: Institute of Criminology; C. Trotter. 1996. "The impact of different supervision practices in community corrections: Cause for optimism." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 29: 29-46.
- ³⁷ Quoted in Burnside. 2005. 'The Prison That Started It All', *supra* at n. 4, 27.
- ³⁸ Ottoboni. 2000, *supra* at n. 13, 123.
- ³⁹ Quoted in Burnside and Loucks, *supra* at n. 25, 104.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Quoted in Jonathan Burnside. 2005. 'Navigating by the heavens: Horizon Communities'. In Burnside with *et. al.*, *supra* at n. 3, 105.
- ⁴² 2003, *supra* at n. 13, 50.
- ⁴³ 2000, *supra* at n. 17, 37.
- ⁴⁴ Quoted in Burnside. 2005. 'From *Cursillo* to Prison: the story of Kairos', *supra* at n. 5, 53.
- ⁴⁵ Kairos Prison Ministry. 1998, *supra* at n. 23, 7-3.
- ⁴⁶ Ike Griffin quoted in Burnside. 2005. 'From *Cursillo* to Prison: the story of Kairos', *supra* at n. 5, 52.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Ottoboni 2003, *supra* at n. 13, 101.
- ⁵⁰ Ike Griffin. Quoted in Jonathan Burnside. 2005. "Keeping faith in prison: The promise of faith-based units". In Burnside with *et. al.*, *supra* at n. 3, 319-357, 335.

discover the things that have led them to their present position. From this place they can find a new story about themselves that is a much better story. We also know that prisoners need guidance in that journey of discovering the positive pieces and healing the painful ones. However, they don't get much help in doing this. So at their best religious interventions offer prisons something unique. They recognise that the experience of imprisonment can expose sides of people's personalities of which they were previously unaware and which Christianity can help them to integrate, and which if they aren't so helped can do them great damage. More than this, religious interventions are opportunities to say that prisoners deserve to be shown care and unconditional love.

For example, the approach in APAC is based on the belief that: "it is necessary to have an experience of God in order to love and be loved"⁷. In this way, religiously-based interventions can offer unique opportunities for emotional healing. APAC's psychologist, Hugo Veronese, identifies four images as decisive in structuring the personality, namely the father's image, the mother's image, the self-image and God's image, each of which is important because it possesses both a representative content and an emotional content, which makes it a powerful determinant of our affective states.⁸ For Veronese "no person can be psychologically healthy if there is deep conflict with one of these images".⁹ He argues that Christianity has the power to recycle and resymbolise these primal 'images' and that this makes religious interventions necessary in prisons. "God is the great reality, in the face of which nobody can remain indifferent... The restored image of the Lord, Friendly Father, in the mind and heart of the prisoner, is the strong stimulus for recuperation".¹⁰

(2) THEY CAN HAVE BROAD APPEAL IN PRISONS

Religious interventions have the potential for a broad appeal because, as you know, many prisoners have a genuine desire for faith. Our research on faith-based units in England and Wales found that these units attracted three different types of prisoners, all of whom had different reasons for being there. The first group was: (1) those prisoners who genuinely wanted to change their behaviour and who saw this religious intervention as an opportunity to do so, if not a last resort; (2) those who volunteered because they thought it would be an 'easy option'. A number of these decided to stay, even when they realised that life on the wing was more challenging

than they expected; (3) the more religious prisoners who wanted to be in a faith-centred environment. In addition, we found that there was a fourth group of those who did not volunteer at all and who were placed on the unit for different reasons (e.g. lack of bed space or those deemed 'vulnerable' in some way).¹¹

The appeal of these units was broader than traditional forms of religious expression in prison. Many of the prisoners I interviewed were interested in God and Christianity but wouldn't be seen dead in the prison chapel. So religious interventions in prisons can have a broad appeal inasmuch as they are a kind of 'half-way' house: they give prisoners the chance to explore religion or Christianity without their being labelled as 'chapel boys'. At the same time, we need to acknowledge the risk that religious interventions may attract more compliant prisoners. And if that's the case then it will be harder to show a significant impact on reconviction rates (since, to begin with, the baseline is lower).

In addition, religious interventions, and particularly faith-based units, have characteristics that appeal to most prisoner populations. They include things like: escaping the 'prison jungle'; better treatment for the prisoner and perhaps also the prisoner's family; a more active regime and the possibility of sentence reduction.¹² Some of these incentives, of course, raise problems of their own. As one of the founders of APAC, Mario Ottoboni observed: "We have learned that, under the mantle of religion, inmates wear masks, negotiate and conceal what goes on inside them in order to take advantage of religious groups [with the purpose of] ... obtaining correctional benefits".¹³ As Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons".

But although there may be hypocrisy on the part of prisoners there must be transparency in the programmes themselves. Trying to develop a religious intervention that is all things to everyone – say, Christian for the Christians and non-Christian to everyone else – is a recipe for disaster. Leaders of religiously-based programmes need to understand the value of clearly communicated aims and objectives, the danger of secrecy and the importance of informed consent. There's a need for a professional programme structure, with an appropriate sense of progression and a planned ending – all of which are made clear to prisoners.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹¹ Nancy Loucks. 2005. 'Kairos Community and religious freedom'. In Burnside with *et. al.*, *supra* at n. 3, 172-173.

¹² See, for example, Burnside, 'The Prison That Started It All', *supra* at n. 4, 12-16.

¹³ Mario Ottoboni. 2003. *Transforming Criminals: An Introduction to the APAC Methodology*. Washington DC: Prison Fellowship International, 59-60.

¹⁴ See generally Loucks, 'Kairos Community and religious freedom', *supra* at n. 11, 171-195.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁶ Burnside, 'The Prison That Started It All', *supra* at n. 4, 6-12.

¹⁷ Mario Ottoboni. 2000. *Kill the Criminal, Save the Person: The APAC Methodology*. Washington DC: Prison Fellowship International, 9.

¹⁸ Ottoboni, 2003, *supra* at n. 13, 84.

¹⁹ C. J. Toral. 2000. *Towards Freedom*. Washington DC: Prison Fellowship International, 13.

²⁰ D. Van Patten *et al.* 1991. *The Dysmas Project*. Unpublished paper.

²¹ Ottoboni 2003, *supra* at n. 13, 59-60.

²² Tom Wright. 2007. *Surprised By Hope*. London: SPCK, 146.

²³ Kairos Prison Ministry. 1998. *Kairos Organisational Manual: Release 1.1*. Winter Park, FL: Kairos Prison Ministry, 3-4.

²⁴ Ike Griffin, Executive Director of Kairos Prison Ministries (1990-2001). Quoted in Jonathan Burnside, 'From Cursillo to Prison: the story of Kairos', *supra* at n. 5, 44-45.

²⁵ Quoted in Jonathan Burnside and Nancy Loucks. 2005. 'Kairos Community: Views from the inside'. In Burnside with *et. al.*, *supra* at n. 3, 104.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, 103-104.

²⁷ See generally Stephen Pryor. 2001. *The Responsible Prisoner: An Exploration of the Extent to which Imprisonment Removes Responsibility Unnecessarily and an Invitation to Change*. London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

²⁸ Shadd Maruna and Thomas P. LeBel. 2002. 'Revisiting ex-prisoner re-entry: a new buzzword in search of a narrative'. In Michael Tonry and Susan Rex (eds.) *Reform and Punishment: The Future of Sentencing*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 167.

²⁹ Quoted in Jonathan Burnside. 2005. 'The Prison That Started It All', *supra* at n. 4, 27.

³⁰ Godparent quoted, *ibid.*

³¹ Ottoboni, 2003, *supra* at n. 13, 71.

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¹ Jonathan Chaplin. *Speaking from Faith in Democracy*. Delivered at the inaugural event of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics, held at the Divinity Faculty, University of Cambridge, 24 January 2007, p. 1. Available at <http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/KLICE/pdfs/Inaugural.doc> (accessed 2 July 2008).

² *Ibid.*

³ The faith-based units were called 'Kainos Communities'. See generally Jonathan Burnside with Nancy Loucks, Joanna R. Adler and Gerry Rose. 2005. *My Brother's Keeper: Faith-based units in prisons*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing (www.willanpublishing.org, accessed 2 July 2008); hereafter cited as Burnside with *et. al.*

⁴ See generally Jonathan Burnside. 2005. 'The Prison That Started It All'. In Burnside with *et. al.*, *supra* at n. 3, 1-33.

⁵ See generally Jonathan Burnside. 2005. 'From *Cursillo* to Prison: The story of Kairos'. In Burnside with *et. al.*, *supra* at n. 3, 34-67.

⁶ John Thompson, *pers. comm.*, 6 April 2004.

⁷ Mario Ottoboni, co-founder of APAC. Cited in Angus Creighton and Ken Rennie. 1995. *APAC (Brazil) Prison Regime: Feasibility in the Scottish Prison Service*. Unpublished paper submitted to the Scottish Prison Service.

⁸ Burnside, 'The Prison That Started It All', *supra* at n. 4, 4.

As part of this transparency and informed consent, interventions need to be clear in advance as to what elements are mandatory and which are optional. Otherwise there is a real risk that religious interventions may violate prisoners' conscience and freedom of religion which can, in turn, lead to accusations of 'brainwashing' and favouritism.¹⁴ Religion is an intensely personal experience and so "the manner and extent to which it forms the basis of programmes in prisons must always be handled with extreme care".¹⁵ This inspires trust which is essential to community living. At the same time, however:

(3) THEY ARE NOT 'MIRACLE CURES' FOR CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR AND THINGS TAKE TIME

This means that religious interventions should not oversell themselves. There is great pressure on prison services to think in the short-term. Yet the most successful religious interventions have taken time to develop and this is not always properly appreciated. For example, those who wanted to replicate the model APAC prison in Sao Paulo in a short period of time overlooked the fact that APAC was the result of slow development over 25 years. Often religious interventions need to be nurtured through a process of trial and error. This is not surprising. By virtue of their innovative nature, some religious interventions require a long period of slow development in which to mature. This process of trial and error should remind us of the parables of Jesus: this is how the kingdom comes (e.g. *The Gospel According to Saint Luke* 8:5-15). Some seeds take root, others do not and often it's not clear what's going on. This means that religious programmes need the support and covering of key figures inside and outside the prison. Mario Ottoboni candidly admits that there were many failures during the early days of APAC, including escapes that brought significant political pressure on it to close.¹⁶

So even a well-rounded religious intervention like APAC did not spring into existence fully-formed but was the product of a long period of trial and error, during which volunteers and administrators became attuned to the particular needs of the prisoners who took part. For APAC the breakthrough came when they stumbled on the realisation that the solutions to prisoners' problems lay with the prisoners themselves (evoking Vincent de Paul who said that, after God, it was to the prisoners

that he owed the most). Problems exposed in therapy sessions were restated to prisoners who would come up with their own solutions. Only after this “commitment to ongoing dialogue with the prisoner”¹⁷ in 1986 did APAC move into a period of relative calm. APAC was ‘on trial’ by the authorities for a long period, and its future was never guaranteed. Perhaps its greatest advantage was that, even when it hit trouble, the judicial authorities were at a loss to know what else to do with the prison population. There was no alternative and this, more than anything else, allowed APAC to survive.

Just as APAC developed slowly, the same is true for its prisoners, who are called *recuperandos* (persons who are recovering). The emphasis is on graduated progress towards freedom. Re-entry to society is a gradual, closely-monitored process that involves small steps. As Ottoboni remarks “not being in a hurry is a virtue”.¹⁸ Things take time. In fact there is a presumption in APAC *against* progressing through the various stages of the regime, from ‘closed’ to ‘semi-open’ to ‘open’ conditions. The onus is on the prisoners to prove they are ready. As they make progress, prisoners can begin leaving the prison for certain necessary tasks, always accompanied by volunteers or other trusted prisoners. It is “a continuous test of the inmate’s decision to continue training without a relapse, since it is at this time that provocations typical of the old environment reappear”.¹⁹

This is a way of getting around the old problem of ‘minding the gap’, in this case, the gap between the religious intervention and the real world. There’s always the danger that people can appear to function well within a religious or therapeutic community when in fact all that is happening is that they are simply learning to cope with being in a religious environment. If that’s the case – and prisoners are simply adapting their behaviour to fit in with a particular religious environment – it’s very hard for them to carry what they have learned into a very different environment. Preparing prisoners for what their world is like is an important aspect of religious interventions. Otherwise it’s a bit like turning people out of hospitals in their pyjamas. Yet religious interventions like APAC show that “prisoners can make positive, sustainable changes in their lives when motivated and provided with consistent support, guidance and accountability”.²⁰

Opposition can come from other quarters. APAC faced wave after wave of criticism and discouragement, not because of its religious content, but because public opinion, especially among the poor, was opposed to humanising prison conditions. APAC also offended certain private interests, including “corrupt police who exploited prisoners”⁵¹, according to one biography of Mario Ottoboni. In the United Kingdom, the work of Kairos was criticised, not because it aimed to improve the quality of prisoners’ lives but because of its Christian identity and its use of volunteers.⁵² This was in direct contrast to APAC. To the extent that religious programmes are genuinely counter-cultural they can expect opposition, although this can come from different quarters and take different forms. This too reminds us of Jesus’ parables. The inauguration of the kingdom means following the way of the cross.

To conclude. Religious interventions offer prisons and correctional services something unique. They have the potential for broad appeal in prisons but they are not ‘miracle cures’ for criminal behaviour. Things take time. This means that religious interventions are not enough and they need to be meshed with non-religious prison programmes. They also show prisoners’ capacity for living in a cohesive community, as well as taking seriously their ability to take on responsibility. Prisoner responsibility is developed by building relationships between prisoners and the community. One of the biggest incentives of religious interventions is prisoner contact with free-world volunteers, which also shows volunteers’ capacity to be part of the community being created in the prison. In all these ways, religious interventions are a sort of counter-culture and as such they attract opposition, although the prisoners themselves are usually the least of their problems. At their best, religious programmes are a signpost to prison services in terms of promoting standards of decency, humanity and order in prisons. They can resymbolise the meaning of imprisonment, making prisons more human and punishment more humane. For prisoners and the community they are expressions of surprising hope.

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Finally, as the risks involved with volunteers reminds us:

(10) PRISONERS ARE NOT THE BIGGEST PROBLEM FACING RELIGIOUS INTERVENTIONS

Strange as it may seem, the greatest threat to religious interventions is found in the prison systems they serve. In the UK at any rate, it's generally recognised that prisons are increasingly about management and, in a managerial environment, it becomes difficult to manage things that are different. The history of faith-based units around the world shows that correctional agencies tend to seek control of such units when established. This isn't altogether surprising: control is inherent to corrections. Likewise, religious interventions are in constant danger of being hijacked by prison services and this can be to the detriment of such programmes.

For example, there was a period when APAC was not used in the manner for which it was intended. Judges assigned prisoners directly to semi-open or open conditions without requiring that they should first graduate from closed conditions. This was said to result in a lack of discipline among prisoners and greater reoffending on release.⁴⁹ In the US the Florida DoC insisted that 80% of participants in Kairos Horizon Communities should be short-term prisoners, even though this was not the group the programme was designed for. This is despite the fact that "one of the best defences a Department of Corrections has against critics is to maintain programmes run by others who are responsible for programme content".⁵⁰ All this simply reinforces the point that was made earlier on: that religious programmes have to be clear about their objectives and maintain a clear sense of their strengths and identity. This means identifying any potential 'deal-breakers' in advance.

For this reason, a key element of a successful religious intervention is having a willing and supportive institution. This means an institution that will not only welcome the intervention but try to make it a success. It's essential that the prison Governor or Warden is supportive and informs prison staff of their support so this filters down 'through the ranks'. However it's also important that this support is also shared more broadly among other management and staff. If support comes only from the Governor or Warden, the programme may fold as soon as he or she leaves because it is too dependent on the strength of a single personality.

This means that:

(4) RELIGIOUS INTERVENTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH AND NEED TO BE MESSED WITH NON-RELIGIOUS PRISON PROGRAMMES

Ottoboni notes that "another usual mistake ... is to think that religion itself is enough to prepare prisoners for their return to society".²¹ Talk of religious programmes in prisons always risks buying into a kind of dualism which says that there are religious programmes over here and so-called 'secular' programmes over there. Even worse, for some people, it carries with it the implicit assumption that God works through the former rather than the latter! This sort of dualism is simply a reflection of the general Western, Platonic upstairs/downstairs view of things that has long since had its day. Those who run religious interventions have, I think, to be quite intentional about undercutting this tendency towards what Tom Wright describes as "a private dualistic spirituality... [which also tends] towards a political *laissez-faire* quietism".²² This is obviously more of a challenge in some contexts rather than others. The InnerChange Freedom Initiative in the US, for example, wanted to preserve a formal distinction between 'religious' and 'secular' so they could show that they were not receiving State funding for religious work in State prisons.

Nevertheless, there are ways of designing and presenting programmes that mesh different elements of the programme. For example, in APAC the 'spiritual' programmes in the three main regimes are combined with programmes designed to further moral development, pro-social behaviour, community-building, responsibility, creative self-expression, specialist professional skills, work experience and responsibility for their families. In fact, there's a sense in which we shouldn't see any of these things as being any less 'spiritual' than formal religious teaching. If the proclamation of the gospel is the good news that God's future has already arrived in the present, in the resurrection of Jesus, then anything we do that anticipates and celebrates the coming kingdom, whether in striving for justice, beauty or evangelism, is spiritual. From that point of view, there's a sense in which there's as much value in a prisoner sitting in a sunny courtyard and weaving a handbasket, just for fun, as there is in learning the Ten Commandments. We could have a debate about how to

categorise different sorts of ‘religious interventions’: are they *faith-based* or *faith-related*? It’s an important distinction. As far as APAC itself is concerned all its programmes, regardless of content, have the same purpose, namely, to create a ‘rehabilitative’ environment. There should also be some integration of supposedly ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ personnel within the prison. Going back to the previous point, it’s much easier for prisoners to integrate what they’ve learned with what their lives are like if this is sort of integration is modelled by the intervention itself. The *method* and the *message* should go together.

(5) THEY SHOW PRISONERS’ CAPACITY FOR LIVING IN A COHESIVE COMMUNITY

As prison chaplains you know very well that the easiest community to form in a prison is a negative community and that the most difficult community to form is an inclusive community. At their best, faith-based regimes provide an approximation to living in a ‘family’, often for prisoners lacking any such experience. For example, in APAC, emphasis is placed on group programmes, not individual tasks, in order to teach prisoners responsibility and how to behave in a community. Group activities include music, writing and cell-cleaning contests. Extremes of large dormitories and one or two-man cells are avoided in favour of ten to twelve man ‘collective’ cells to maximise group dynamics.

For example, the Kairos Weekend is specifically designed to help bring prisoners into “a safe Christian environment... as opposed to a coercive or manipulative environment”.²³ One of the hallmarks of a safe community is the ability to show vulnerability which is, of course, one of the things that is extremely delicate in prison. In order to let prisoners know that they have found a safe place “vulnerability is modelled first by the Kairos team members who basically, in each one of the talks, steps up in front of the group and introduces himself or herself and says: ‘I am a sinner’ or ‘I am a failure’ or ‘I am less than God created me to be’ and becomes vulnerable and tells some of the specifics of why that is so. Then they continue to tell the ‘grace’ end of the story of how God came to them and helped to heal them and how they are able to recognise that”.²⁴

Our research found that the Kairos Weekend seems to play an important part in bringing prisoners together. One prisoner interviewed said: “People you wouldn’t have spoken to before because you might have an argument

are sexually promiscuous. These same character failings... automatically disqualify a person from participation on a Kairos team”.⁴⁵ Yet at the same time “the best volunteers have suffered the same issues that the inmates have suffered; isolation, abuse, chemical dependencies, all sorts of things, isolation from the church, [and from] those that would normally nurture them”.⁴⁶

There’s a difficult balance that needs to be struck here between excluding volunteers who are actively suffering from the same character failings that afflict prisoners and the need, on the other, to involve volunteers who have experienced similar vulnerabilities, even though these vulnerabilities may not be very evident. In practice this means using, so far as possible, volunteers who have been ‘healed enough’ to give an honest account of the failures in their lives. Volunteers who haven’t ‘healed enough’ and who are still bleeding from their wounds, “just bleed all over the inmates and don’t help the inmates to recognise that healing can come”.⁴⁷ What is needed is “an example, a model, of someone who has been there, done that, and God has healed them, so it gives them hope that, yes, it can happen to me”.⁴⁸ There’s also a fine balance between maintaining some arms-length stance between the volunteers and the inmates whilst at the same time becoming vulnerable to the inmates and sharing their lives with them and being an inspiration and loving them. It’s a fine line but it can be done.

The trouble is that prisons ask for religious interventions with often no appreciation of the basic work that is required in and among the local faith communities to support the ministry. It should be obvious to all that religious interventions cannot be summoned up at will but require a great deal of forward planning and nurture. As we have seen, it’s not prisoners’ *contact* with volunteers but the *character* of that contact which is important. Prison services, and those running religious interventions, shouldn’t underestimate the degree of community or volunteer support, or training needs. There’s danger here, for those involved, of a mismatch between the need for long-range planning to build the resources necessary to support the religious intervention and short-term timetabling by prison services.

you know, ‘I’ll be back next week and I hope to see some improvement’ on the issues before them. And that I think is so reaffirming. I remember just such an incident here [in Tomoka C.I.], one man walking back to the dorm after a godparent visit on Monday and he said ‘I *almost* feel human again’.”⁴¹

Of course this works in both directions. On the one hand, religious interventions show prisoners’ capacity to form a cohesive community; by the same token:

(9) THEY ALSO SHOW THE COMMUNITY’S CAPACITY TO VOLUNTEER TO BE PART OF THE COMMUNITY THAT IS BEING CREATED

This has all kinds of implications for religious interventions. We’ve already seen that volunteers play a crucial symbolic and communicative, as well as practical, role. Ottoboni maintains that “everything must begin with the participation of the community.”⁴² Ottoboni quotes a former Secretary for Justice of São Paulo who said that: “We should not expect the prisoner to be the first to hold out his hand, for obvious reasons. The first step must be taken by society.”⁴³ For both APAC and Kairos, volunteers are the heartbeat of their programmes. Commentators sometimes say it’s free but that’s not the same thing as saying it’s without cost! It’s estimated that in 2003, Kairos volunteers donated an estimated 3.5 – 3.8 million hours to various Departments of Corrections in the US and abroad. This means that having a well-prepared local volunteer base is a crucial factor in the success of religious interventions. It also means that an important restriction upon the development and expansion of religious interventions is the ability to recruit and retain effective volunteers.

Such recruitment is easier said than done. Religious programmes are always at risk of attracting the wrong sort of volunteers. Ike Griffin tells of one prison governor who said: “Sometimes I think I should have the officers throw a net over them and drag them out. They’re sicker than the inmates that they come to serve.”⁴⁴ Volunteers are frequently ministering to persons “who are often unstable... incapable of establishing viable relationships, in rebellion to authority... and who

with them; after the Weekend, everyone was friends”.²⁵ We also found that responses from prisoners to the Kairos Weekend were overwhelmingly positive (87%). Indeed, over a third described it in extremely positive terms. These responses were given several months after the Kairos Weekend itself and are therefore unlikely to be the result of a ‘post-Weekend high’. Only a minority (9%) was negative or critical.²⁶ Having said that, the Kairos Weekend is not an end in itself. It is simply a means of gaining the attention of people who live isolated and lonely lives and bringing them into an ongoing ‘share and prayer’ group that takes place afterward and is supposed to continue, in one form or another, for the rest of their lives. So whereas the Kairos Weekend is an experience in Christian *love*, the follow-up ministry is an experience in ongoing Christian *community living*. There is an appetite for that in prison.

(6) THEY SHOW PRISONERS’ CAPACITY FOR TAKING ON RESPONSIBILITY

One of the problems of imprisonment is that it tends to take away responsibility. This is ironic because finding offenders legally responsible is the reason we imprison them in the first place. To put it technical terms, we make prisoners *retrospectively* responsible for their behaviour, only to deny them *prospective* responsibility for how their lives will turn out in future. Or to put it yet another way, we take citizens and turn them into prisoners and then expect them, with minimal preparation, to turn back into citizens again, with all the responsibilities this involves for themselves, their families and for others.²⁷

In APAC, prospective prisoner responsibility is increased by encouraging prisoners to serve one another, their families (as they have opportunity) and the regime. Prisoners are made responsible for each other’s welfare. They begin to learn responsibility by performing simple tasks for one another (e.g. cutting hair, cleaning common areas and shared cells). Prisoners are taught that ‘the more they give of themselves, the richer they become’. Over half of the men in the ‘closed’ section have named positions of responsibility. Every month the men in this section vote as to which of their number has made the most valuable contribution to this section of the prison, and a medal is presented at a special service as a mark of honour. It’s a good illustration of what criminologists call a ‘strengths-based’ paradigm to corrections. This asks “... not what a

person's deficits are [i.e. these people are a problem to deal with; and how can we control them as much as possible?], but rather what positive contribution the person can make... How can their lives become useful and purposeful?"²⁸

A key way in which religious interventions can develop prisoner responsibility is by building relationships with significant others. This leads us onto the next point which is that religious interventions can:

(7) CREATE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRISONERS AND THE COMMUNITY

One of the strongest and clearest examples of this is the use of so-called 'godparents' in APAC. These are specially-assigned volunteers (preferably couples but can be single). They may be older couples, widows or former prisoners. The 'godparenting' initiative is intended to provide prisoners with additional support when they experience problems or setbacks in their sentence or upon release. APAC's founders see the godparents as crucial to the men's development. APAC's psychologist, Veronese, says that "... when nature is defrauded in something special [i.e. love], the human being hollers, from cradle to grave, to fill this vacuum. The loving presence of a couple (the godparents) ... [are] a bridge to the original family and to the external world".²⁹ The godparents accept that "no-one can take the place of a father or a mother"³⁰, but APAC maintains that godparents can help to "reshape the blurred and negative images of the inmate's father, mother or both".³¹

Research into desistance from crime has suggested that sustained desistance is more likely where a prisoner has strong ties to a community and available social supports beyond prison.³² Studies have also found that the strength of adult social bonds has a direct negative effect on adult criminal behaviour.³³ Connection with a religious community outside has the additional advantage of developing a pro-social identity for people who may never have had this before.³⁴ 'Godparents' offer a kind of 'pro-social modelling', which involves positive role models who act in such a way as to reinforce pro-social or non-criminal behaviour. Pro-social modelling differs from non-directive counselling because: "it provides a clear sense of direction... That direction is provided within the context of a caring relationship, in which the offender is encouraged or 'pushed' towards pro-social conduct and his or her achievements reinforced

through acknowledgement and approval".³⁵ There's some good evidence to suggest that this is effective in desisting from crime.³⁶ It's very important that religious interventions think through how, among other things, they intend to address offenders' criminogenic needs. Pro-social modelling is one, normative compliance is another.

(8) ONE OF THE BIGGEST INCENTIVES OF RELIGIOUS INTERVENTIONS IS CONTACT WITH FREE-WORLD VOLUNTEERS

Because volunteers come from the local community, they are potent symbols of the community to which the offender is seeking reintegration. For Veronese, what volunteers offer is unique. "The State, an impersonal entity, can build prisons, nominate agents, assign resources - but cannot give love. It is only we, physical persons ... that can face the challenge of seeding love in the prisons."³⁷ Volunteers are also important because they can embody a 'spirit of gratuity'. Ottoboni claims the experience of the volunteer's giving opens the door to real friendship and gratitude, inspiring prisoners to give in return. "It should never be forgotten that the whole of the APAC approach finds its inspiration in the sacrifice on the Cross, in the merciful look of Christ when he turned to [the] repentant [thief]... and announced his salvation".³⁸

Prisoners respond to the sacrificial giving of the volunteers who take part in the Kairos Weekend. One prisoner interviewed as part of our study: "It's different getting the love from people you don't know. It's unconditional, there's nothing attached to it, at the end of the day".³⁹ "I've been in prison six and a half years [a lifer] and it's different to anything I've experienced in prison or anywhere else. *In what way?* Fifteen Christians coming in from outside to spend three days with prisoners and they put so much effort into it and it's voluntary for them. *Why is the voluntary aspect important to you?* If somebody is putting so much into something then I will repay in kind".⁴⁰

It's probably fair to say that the clearest and most prominent incentive in religious interventions is prisoners' contact with free-world volunteers and those social mentors that give them the opportunity to reflect with someone who is stable. In particular, Mickey Bright Griffin, Co-founder Horizon Communities claims that "the volunteers also have a way of honouring each person and their dignity and holding them accountable -