

## The DNA of Correctional Chaplaincy

### Where Did We Come From?

Chaplains play a vital role in correctional facilities, providing spiritual support and guidance to inmates. Their work is multifaceted, encompassing both the study of religious texts and the practical application of their faith. Here are some key aspects to consider:

Chaplains find immense joy in studying the Bible. When teaching incarcerated individuals, this joy is amplified. Regardless of the specific chapter or book being studied, the theme of God's redemption can be discovered through careful exegesis. It may not always be explicitly stated, but it emerges as chaplains delve into the scriptures.

While the history of correctional chaplaincy isn't always overtly documented, examples of chaplaincy as we understand it today can be found. Consider the biblical account of the Apostle Paul's imprisonment alongside Onesimus (as described in the epistle of Philemon). The unique circumstances of persecution led to a divine interaction—a pure form of prison chaplaincy. Paul attended to the spiritual needs of fellow prisoners, demonstrating the essence of this ministry.

Throughout history, chaplains have responded to crises within correctional settings. Just as our Lord sought divine presence during the crisis of His impending crucifixion (as depicted in Matthew 25), incarcerated individuals also seek solace. Chaplains serve as representatives or stand-ins for God, offering companionship to those in emotional, physical, or spiritual pain.

Importantly, chaplains don't attempt to fix problems or provide unsolicited advice. Instead, their mere presence communicates that the individual is not alone. This presence often leaves a lasting impact, even when specific words are forgotten: "I don't remember what you said. I know it made sense at the time. All I really remember was that you stayed with me."

The divine presence of correctional chaplaincy combines theological study, historical context, and compassionate presence—a powerful combination that brings hope and comfort to those behind bars. This need for divine presence during crises, tragedies and inhumane treatment of humankind is where the ministry of the chaplain may find its DNA.

No greater historical crises can be imagined than humanity's obsession with war. It was during these times that the military chaplaincy may find its own similar heritage bred out of crisis and terror. Doris L. Bergen writes about the impact of chaplaincy during war.

It may be precisely the chaos and terror of such moments that make the chaplain as important as a symbol that somehow, even amid death and fear, there is meaning. That role of the chaplain—to embody courage, hope, and steadfastness in the face of alienation and destruction—may in turn explain why so many popular accounts of chaplains emphasize an almost superhuman bravery. Under the most extreme circumstances imaginable, people need heroes, and chaplains, because of their association with traditions that extend beyond the immediate horrors, are likely candidates.

Although heroism is attributed to chaplains during these times of horrific battles, history demonstrates that chaplains were simply doing what everyone around them was doing—fighting for a cause—albeit a divine one. It was their presence of symbolic divinity and their voluntary willingness to endure the same dreadfulness even unto death that over

time has elevated some military chaplains to the status of hero. This demonstration of self-sacrifice and willingness to suffer was the example used behind the title we now use which is ‘chaplain’.

In a similar fashion the prison chaplain became the lightning rod for the divine voice of justice, fairness and a hope in redemption and forgiveness among the impoverished and imprisoned. Like a divine presence from the courts of heaven the empowered men of God who are attributed to chaplaincy’s roots championed reformation of the criminal, the justice system and the way society treated the disenfranchised and disadvantaged.

Unlike today’s criminal history it was often the innocent victims of social disorder and the deprived, underprivileged, destitute, and needy of our history who sought the divine voice of hope in hopelessness. By exploring the brutal injustice of humankind, the human suffering of the innocent, and the despicable deplorable conditions of prisons we can uncover the many scenarios of chaplaincy in action in the evolution of social punishment.

### **The Crisis of Imprisoned Clergy**

Today’s philosophy and purpose for imprisonment are modern. For most of history imprisonment was designed for the temporary holding of convicted criminals facing some form of death or imminent punishment. “Their purpose was to detain prisoners awaiting trial or until their sentence—death, mutilation, branding, flogging, or deportation—could be carried out.” It wasn’t until somewhere in the Middle Ages that imprisonment for criminal activity became the norm. And it wasn’t until the twelfth century that the first notable construction of jails for imprisonment occurred in England. For the most part during this development of imprisonment as punishment prisoners often depended on others for their needs, similar to the Apostle Paul.

Dr. Dale Pace attributes the first voice to sound the dire need for ministry to prisoners facing death to Hugh Latimer (c.1485 - 16 October 1555) in a speech before King Edward VI in 1549. It was during this time that Latimer and others felt the brunt of Queen Mary’s wrath against Protestantism when they were imprisoned and often executed for their faith. During Latimer’s imprisonment prior to his horrible death, he recognized the need for a gospel minister while awaiting his sentence.<sup>1</sup>

### **Chaplains: Beacons of Light and Compassion**

The poignant words exchanged between Bishop Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer during their joint martyrdom - “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, we shall this day light such a candle by God’s grace in England as, I trust, shall never be put out”—not only ignited a flame for Protestantism worldwide but also kindled interest and passion for chaplaincy. Latimer’s sacrifice became a beacon of divine presence for those suffering unjustly.

During subsequent centuries, other persecuted clergy found themselves unexpectedly assuming the role of chaplains. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, evangelical preachers in both America and England faced imprisonment for religious reasons. Remarkably, they turned adversity into ministry, providing spiritual support to fellow prisoners and others. Notable figures like John Bunyan (author of “The Pilgrim’s Progress”) and George Fox (who documented the redemption of prisoners and jailers during his own confinement) exemplify this dual impact. Their writings and salvations reverberated through history, establishing the need and justification for prison ministry.

In the face of trials, tribulations, and unjust incarceration, revivalist preachers—such as William Morgan, John Wesley, Charles Wesley, and Silas Todd—continued to lay the groundwork for modern correctional chaplaincy. They

visited workhouses, prisons, and similar institutions as part of their circuit for preaching the Gospel. This system of circuit ministry, pioneered by these bold evangelists, motivated others to follow suit, solidifying the chaplain's future role.

Beyond individual stories, the historical climate played a pivotal role. The Reformation, sparked by Martin Luther on October 31, 1517, reshaped religious beliefs and interactions. Luther's emphasis on the direct and personal relationship between Christ and believers led to three foundational principles: God's Word as authority, salvation by grace alone, and the recognition that every believer is a priest. This last principle, in particular, elevated humanity's view of life and contributed to the evolving need for chaplaincy.

Chaplains whether facing martyrdom, ministering in prisons, or riding the waves of historical change—have consistently embodied compassion, courage, and hope. Their legacy continues to inspire us as we navigate the complexities of faith and service.

### **The Evolution of Penal Philosophy: From Reformation to Revolution**

During the tumultuous period of the Reformation (1500-1650), significant Protestant movements emerged, including the Anabaptists and various sects formed in response to Rome's efforts to suppress the Reformation. Leaders of these movements often faced persecution, imprisonment, and even death, underscoring the need for chaplains during these theological storms.

Central to the chaplain's role was the revolutionary idea that all individuals were equal in the eyes of God. Regardless of social status, everyone deserved fair treatment and just punishment. This shift challenged the prevailing belief that criminal behavior stemmed from birth into a lower caste or lack of access to education and privilege. Instead, the Reformation era recognized that the worth of each person mattered, leading to a fundamental change in penal philosophy.

Four key assumptions emerged among early prison reformers:

1. **Internal Causes of Crime:** Crime was seen as originating within the individual.
2. **Deserved Punishment:** People should be held accountable for their inappropriate actions.
3. **Modifiability of Behavior:** Behavior could be changed.
4. **Isolated Institutions:** Prisons were deemed appropriate settings for behavior modification.

Before this shift, punishment had often been purely retributive, with little concern for rehabilitation. The Reformation not only challenged religious norms but also questioned the authority of existing governments and the social conscience of law enforcers.

As history unfolded, the Great Awakening, Revival, and Revolution (1650-1914) continued to emphasize these four principles. Religious and philosophical thought increasingly valued human life, reinforcing the need for a more enlightened approach to criminal justice.

Amid remarkable intellectual advancements and social changes, prisons swelled with the downtrodden and underprivileged. Yet, inspired individuals—drawn to prison chaplaincy—sought to rectify these injustices.

Two additional historical factors contributed to rising prison populations: the Industrial Revolution and the American Revolution. The shift away from manual labor led to poverty-related crimes, prompting the institution of the Vagrancy Act in 1744—a response to the growing number of “vagrants.”

From the Reformation to the Revolution, the evolution of penal philosophy reflected a profound shift toward recognizing the value of every individual and seeking to transform behavior rather than merely punish. The chaplain's role remained crucial throughout these transformative times.

While industry propelled segments of society into prosperity, the jobless and skill-deprived received little compassion from the emerging elite class. Homeless wanderers found no place in this new industrial world of seemingly boundless power and affluence. Consequently, imprisonment transformed almost overnight from an occasional punishment for felonies to the default sentence for minor property offenses.

Simultaneously, the American Revolution fostered a fresh sense of independence, prompting a break from England's traditional forms of incarceration. Guided by colonial principles of justice and a call to uphold Christian tenets, prisons were compelled to reconsider their punitive methods, especially as swelling inmate populations strained existing systems.

During the war, imprisonment served immediate needs—punishing those who sided with the enemy or disrupted America's bold experiment. However, it failed to address the plight of new colonialists subjected to endless labor without meaningful attempts at rehabilitation or hope for freedom. In response, the evolving religious community championed faith, hope, and the transformation of lives, envisioning individuals restored to God's intended design.

In 1682, William Penn—an influential figure—crafted the Great Code, departing from prevailing European concepts. Drawing inspiration from the Age of Enlightenment, Penn prophetically reshaped prison design, treatment, and purpose. In 1786, Pennsylvania leaders revisited Penn's earlier work, emphasizing novel ideas such as labor-based punishment and focused treatment within penitentiaries.

As both European and American landscapes underwent radical shifts, prison environments evolved as well. From swift punishment to imprisonment and, eventually, forced labor, the conditions demanded attention. Neglecting these deplorable prison settings created a crisis, underscoring the growing need for chaplaincy.

### **The Evolution of Penal Philosophy: From Harsh Punishments to Reform**

In the annals of criminal justice, historical crises reshaped how societies treated their prisoners. Overcrowded prison systems, spiraling out of control, prompted a pivotal shift. Those in authority abandoned the old approach—waiting for criminals to make amends—and instead, enforced punishments directly. Ironically, this transformation laid the groundwork for what would become a fairer and more just criminal justice system.

#### **Key Points:**

1. **Emergence of Governmental Control:** Crime ceased to be solely an individual matter. Governments stepped in, meeting out punishment to fit the offense. This approach, while efficient, turned places of confinement into grim cesspools. It fell to dedicated reformers in the eighteenth century to establish the basis for modern penal philosophy.
2. **John Howard's Impact:** John Howard (1726-1790), as Sheriff of Bedfordshire, spearheaded prison reform. His tireless efforts led to the influential work "The State of Prisons" (1777). Subsequently, Parliament passed the Penitentiary Act in 1779, emphasizing secure and sanitary structures, systematic inspection, fee abolition, and a reformatory regime.

3. Chaplaincy and Quaker Influence: Chaplains found a unique role within this reformatory idealism. The Quakers, advocating for quiet penance, aligned with the push for more humane prisons. Their timing was serendipitous, coinciding with early American ideals of independence, Enlightenment-inspired perfectibility, and a rejection of harsh punishments.
4. Pennsylvania's Role: Pennsylvania emerged as the vanguard of reform, setting the stage for transformative changes in American (and potentially global) penal history.

Both Howard's and the Quakers' lifestyles contributed to the establishment of the first reformatory and the Walnut Street system, characterized by silence, penance, and spiritual transformation. Religion became the primary method to address the criminal mindset of offenders (*The American Prison*, p. 44). In an effort to maintain clean and successful facilities, prison officials began appointing chaplains and promoting Sabbath schools, Bible classes, and literacy programs. However, the philosophy of silence and penance, combined with religious initiatives, failed to address the persistent issue of prison overcrowding. This led to the development of the Auburn Prison System.

Although the Walnut Street and Auburn systems differed in architecture and the degree of inmate isolation, both believed that industrious habits and scriptural principles could reform convicts. Initially, it was assumed that criminals could be reformed through the "divine presence" of chaplains and reformers. However, over time, it became evident that sin and crime often resist voluntary change, leading to the ongoing issue of recidivism. Neither system could explain why criminals feigned repentance and reoffended upon release. Advocates of penitentiaries underestimated the resilience of the human will. Despite denying prisoners' physical freedom and causing psychological harm, penitentiaries failed to eliminate their freedom to resist spiritual coercion.

To counter growing criticism, prison systems sought methods to enforce repentance and change. One such approach was early release, introduced by Captain Alexander Maconochie and Sir Walter Crofton. This led to the concepts of classification and early parole, shifting the focus from mere punishment to rehabilitation.

However, the pressure to prevent crime created an imbalance of power in the advance release system. Those with the authority to grant advance release became power-hungry, imposing their principles on inmates and extending sentences. This resulted in poor conditions, overcrowding, and a system plagued by injustice and prejudice.

Zebulon Brockway (1827–1920), through his work with reform schools, delivered a compelling speech at the National Prison Congress in 1870 advocating for prisons based on Christian ideals of change. His ideas were adopted by the Congress and influenced the American Correctional Association, the successor to the NPC, into the twentieth century. However, like the Walnut Street and Auburn systems, these principles also failed, leading to skepticism about rehabilitation as a form of punishment and impacting chaplaincy. The decline of the rehabilitative ideal within the correctional community paralleled a reduced commitment to institutional chaplaincy programs, which became just one of several treatment alternatives.

The notion that inmates could not be rehabilitated led to the view that they were not sinners to be saved but sick individuals to be diagnosed and cured (*The American Prison*, p. 148). This perspective created an opportunity for industries to exploit inmate labor under the guise of rehabilitation. Without the chaplain and Christian community to ensure fair treatment, the prison industry temporarily lost its focus on the well-being of inmates. The hope generated by successful industry masked the failures of prison reform, and the innovative ideas of parole and labor as treatment were exploited.

The period following the emergence of the penitentiary as a tool for reintegrating offenders into society was initially hopeful. The Industrial Revolution provided a means to use the “captive” workforce in productive enterprises. However, the growth of industrial prisons led to the exploitation of prisoners as slave labor, prompting opposition from labor organizations, reformers, and penal administrators. The shutdown of prison industries led to devastating conditions in fortress prisons, resulting in riots and unrest throughout the 1960s.

Chaplains and religious organizations, the so-called “do-gooders,” protested these conditions. However, without an emphasis on sin and repentance, their voices were largely ignored as society moved towards humanism, modernism, and postmodernism. The entry of psychologists, psychiatrists, and educators into corrections aimed to address inmate idleness through the ‘medical model.’ However, institutionalization soon overshadowed treatment, leading to an obsession with security over rehabilitation. This lack of consensus on the proper prison model persisted into the 1960s, and well-intentioned reforms often led to chaos in American prisons. The saying “a leopard cannot change its spots” reflects the minimal impact of rebranding prisoners as ‘residents’ without a commitment to comprehensive reform in fortress prisons. True reform remains elusive without a total commitment to change.

Now, we witness the evolution of modern chaplaincy, which continues to strive to echo the message of redemption and transformation. The chaplain’s presence remains a persistent historical force challenging the corrections system, reminiscent of the voices of martyred clergy and the impoverished.

The twentieth century and beyond will introduce new crises for prison chaplains: changes in their role, shifts in national religious beliefs, evolving inmate rights and prison standards, and the rise of modern philosophies replacing religion in contemporary life. The world and corrections will undergo rapid and significant changes.

As we transition from the nineteenth-century chaplain to the twentieth century, the role of the correctional chaplain mirrored the broader societal changes of the “greatest century.” According to Stephen Moore and Julian Simon, the United States experienced unprecedented material progress during this era. Indicators of health, wealth, safety, nutrition, consumer goods availability, environmental quality, and social conditions all showed rapid improvement, particularly for women and minorities.

Notable trends include a 30-year increase in life expectancy, a tenfold decrease in infant mortality rates, a significant reduction in major killer diseases, a 30 percent improvement in air quality in major cities since 1977, a five- to tenfold increase in agricultural productivity, a rise in real per capita GDP from \$4,800 to \$31,500, and a near quadrupling of real wages from \$3.45 to \$12.50 per hour.

Throughout the century, the affordability and availability of consumer goods greatly increased. Today, over 98 percent of American homes have a telephone, electricity, and a flush toilet, and more than 70 percent own a car, VCR, microwave, air conditioning, cable TV, and a washer and dryer. At the turn of the century, these conveniences were rare. Despite feeling more time-constrained, most adults now have twice as much leisure time as their counterparts did 100 years ago.

By any measure, the twentieth century stands as the greatest century of human progress in history. To survive these epic changes, correctional chaplaincy had to be adaptable, creative, and find a place within corrections to respond to monumental social influences.

Notably absent from the above article is the role of religion in America during the twentieth century and its significant expansion. Correctional chaplains of this era had one foot in the crowded prison cell and the other amidst the

dramatic religious turmoil. They navigated the growing need for professionalism in religion, the challenges of an emerging pluralistic society and ecumenical spirit, social demands for inmate rights, and the influence of world religions. Many gospel-preaching, Bible-teaching chaplains did not survive the turmoil created by these forces.

### **The Evolution of the Chaplain's Role**

Eerdmans's Handbook to the History of Christianity describes the twentieth century as the age of ideology, anxiety, and liberation. Nationalism, communism, and individualism challenged the conventional ideology of Christianity in the West. This era championed a better world, the freedom of man to choose his destiny, and a new kingdom of God. However, these ideologies did not bring the liberation they sought, instead producing secular humanism and fractured faith.

For traditional fundamentalist chaplains, secular humanism was the first religious challenge to their credibility and role in twentieth-century prisons. With the prison system overwhelmed by a growing inmate population, inmates sat idle "in the middle of punishment and custody." Advocates of secular humanism introduced the "medical model" of corrections, promising a new means of reducing recidivism. Consequently, the corrections industry sought chaplains who matched the expertise of professional psychologists and social workers emerging from post-World War treatment of returning soldiers. Chaplains were challenged and tested regarding their need and place in the correctional system amidst these new ideologies.

Chaplains also faced challenges due to the belief that religion was part of the historical failures of correctional reform. Tension and hostility toward traditional chaplains came from new inmate treatment professionals. Some of these professionals, influenced by humanistic theology and new mental treatment approaches, dissuaded inmate participation in religious activities and influenced prison administration's view of religious programming.

Chaplains from liberal religions, although not formally adopting all tenets of secularism, began experimenting with social reform through faith. This aligned with the new mentality of penal reform, hiring trained professionals who worked cooperatively with like-minded correctional treatment staff. This rift between chaplains maintaining traditional Christian values and those embracing social liberalism paralleled the evangelical and ecumenical conflicts of the twentieth century.

The corrections industry was not influenced by trivial religious matters but responded to the voices of secular humanism and ecumenicalism due to increasing legal standards and requirements. Consequently, the chaplain's role evolved from merely preaching the Gospel to hardened inmates seeking redemption through Jesus Christ. Chaplains now needed to be well-trained, denominationally, or organizationally endorsed, and capable of integrating science and mental health into inmate treatment. Clinical Pastoral Education became a requirement for many government-supported chaplaincy positions, emphasizing the need for endorsed and accepted counseling ministries.

Historically, chaplaincy did not always attract the most cooperative and progressive individuals. Many chaplains were appointed politically or sought the position for additional income, often displaying little empathy for inmates and a lethargic, apathetic attitude. A survey from the 1970s revealed that 16 percent of Protestant chaplains entered the ministry due to divorce, disillusionment with the church, financial reasons, and similar motivations.

The corrections industry often viewed chaplaincy as a second-rate ministry, inferior to the pastorate. Many pastoral dropouts sought refuge in chaplaincy, leading to poor practices that became so evident that the Federal Bureau of Prisons demanded, “Either decent-quality chaplains would serve in federal prisons, or there would be no religious activities in those prisons.”

Prison officials turned to the Federal Council of Churches for training ecumenical clergy, aligning with the growing pluralistic social view and the need to meet legal standards for chaplaincy and prisons. However, the fundamentalist chaplains often avoided credentialing processes like Clinical Pastoral Education (C.P.E.), deeming them too liberal. They labeled government-sponsored chaplains and their ecumenical training as “liberals” controlled by the government, while considering themselves the “true religion” chaplains, steadfast in their ministry and church ordination. This historic struggle between chaplains embracing America’s pluralistic society and those adhering to traditional Christianity permeated prisons and American culture.

In Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity, the Age of Anxiety is aptly described as a period where secular humanism influenced the religious community, leading to liberal idealism permeating the church, nation, and prisons. This era saw anxious chaplains trying to maintain historical roots while others embraced liberated theology. The “social gospel movement,” rooted in Ritschl’s liberalism, advocated for social reform and political action, influencing chaplaincy through politically appointed chaplains and religious programs incorporating social liberation ideals.

During the Age of Anxiety, traditional Christian values were questioned, including the Bible, Jesus Christ, salvation, and the existence of God. Liberal biblical criticism led many theological circles, including fundamental ones, to view basic Christian concepts as mythical or questionable. This era’s religious movements challenging traditional values caused a fundamentalist and evangelical backlash. In prisons, this weakened the justification for traditional chaplaincy and sparked ongoing confrontations between “redemption through faith” chaplains and ecumenical “all-inclusive” chaplains rooted in social gospel idealism and liberal theology.

Unfortunately, the term “pluralism” became contentious for some correctional chaplains, who believed it meant compromising their faith or accepting other faiths as truth. During this period, it would have been more beneficial for chaplains to quietly respect the faiths of others, thereby gaining support and establishing their role in corrections. Chaplains should have lived their faith with credibility, met people where they were, and loved them for who they were, understanding their uniqueness and worldview. Many long-term chaplains failed by remaining stoic and inflexible.

As traditional chaplaincy waned amidst social change, the correctional mentality of “lock them up, count them up, and shut them up” grew stronger. Despite trends towards better treatment, humane conditions, and increased professionalism, inmate populations and prisons exploded in the 1960s. Riots, substandard conditions, financial woes, a social anti-criminal mentality, and the revolution of the 1960s once again challenged chaplaincy to redefine its role in corrections.

### **Emergent Social Demands**

Immediately before the explosive 1960s, the saner 1970s, the edgy 1980s, and the numb 1990s, prisons were powder kegs. The Federal Bureau of Prisons’ attempts to improve living conditions and provide more humane treatment failed. “But no matter how they were cleaned up, prisons remained monuments to idleness, monotony, frustration, and repression. Despite attempts to tear down the massive walls around prisons, the forces of ‘lock psychoses’ continued to



hold out. Prison inmates were feared as the ‘convict bogey’ who could be dealt with only by locking and relocking, counting, and recounting.” This era of rioting continues to influence policy and legislation today.

The American Correctional Association cited the following reasons for the failure and explosiveness of inmate populations:

- Inadequate financial support and official and public indifference
- Substandard personnel
- Enforced idleness
- Lack of professional leadership and programs
- Excessive size and overcrowding of institutions
- Political domination and motivation of management
- Unwise sentencing and parole practices

Many of these issues persist in today’s local and county jails.

For chaplaincy, indifference, substandard personnel, lack of professionalism, and a new religious environment forced a transformation of their role in corrections. Fundamentalists and emerging evangelicals were slow to respond, while higher learning institutions of the ecumenical community quickly filled the vacuum created by legal demands. They leveraged political influence, dominated the requirement for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) certification, and accepted the need for transformation.

Embracing all religions as legitimate, the now favored liberal chaplains seized the opportunity to become the primary voice of religion in corrections. The modern era presented a prime time for mainline denominations to establish their presence within correctional walls.

The Modern Era (1960-1980) was a period of significant transformation for both corrections and chaplaincy. As religion was reshaped by contemporary social contexts, prisons also adapted to social pressures. The forces for change in society were mirrored by pressures for change in corrections. Dramatic reinterpretations of criminal law, the civil rights movement, violent and nonviolent demonstrations, the assassinations of a popular president and two other national figures, and the longest and most unpopular war in American history, Vietnam—all these external pressures were felt inside the nation’s prisons, leading to periodic violent prison riots and disorders. The turmoil continues.

This era saw many religious revolutionaries and social radicals enter the prison systems, causing a cultural transformation within prisons like other historical transformations in corrections. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) metaphorically dramatized the changing culture within prisons and the chaplain’s need to adapt. His presence, along with other civil rights figures, became a lightning rod for thousands of inmates who were brutalized, unfairly imprisoned, and without social influence. The lasting legacy of the civil rights movement is still felt in the litigation process developed within the inmate population during these times of turmoil. Like contemporary pastors, many chaplains were indifferent, unsure of what to do, or simply ignored racial tensions.

Dr. King’s success was fortified by the “social gospel” influence. His Christian commitment, rooted in the Black evangelical tradition and influenced by the social gospel movement, saw Christianity as a force to transform both individuals and society. His unique message of Jesus (love your enemies) and Gandhi’s method (non-violence) provided both a philosophy and a strategy for the Civil Rights movement. The use of non-violence to achieve social justice in a violent society appealed to both minority and majority.

The social gospel chaplains, leveraging civil rights strategies and successes, secured their roles within the correctional system. They became entrenched in the prison system, gaining administrative acceptance as a solution to civil unrest, social violence, and inmate disparity.

However, rather than turning to faith, many inmates used this period to rebel, planning riots and forming underground networks that evolved into what we now recognize as gangs. This situation is metaphorically represented by the evangelical church, silent chaplains, and America's tendency to overlook growing tensions. For instance, on July 4, 1970, while Bob Hope, Billy Graham, and 350,000 people celebrated Honor America Day in Washington D.C., a major riot erupted at Holmesburg Prison in Philadelphia. As many ignored the escalating prison issues, riots became more deadly, inmates more hostile, and chaplains less effective.

The optimism surrounding the medical model and efforts to ensure humane, safe, and fair treatment was sidelined during the 1980s and 1990s. The prison systems gradually adapted and overcame challenges through the courts, legislatures, and standards set by agencies like the American Correctional Association. John Cowart noted a shift towards three core principles for corrections: the punishment of criminals, the protection of society by incapacitating the most dangerous offenders, and the deterrence of others from committing crimes.

Allen and Simonsen echoed similar sentiments, observing a shift from the medical model to one emphasizing custody and control in a bid to maintain peace in institutions and protect society. They highlighted the ongoing challenge for administrators to select an effective and reflective philosophy of corrections that aligns with society's evolving mood.

The course of correctional treatment in the 1980s and 1990s was shaped by the philosophies of each presidential administration and their allocation of federal, state, and local funds. President George H. W. Bush (January 20, 1989 – January 20, 1993) believed that educating inmates would prevent recidivism. President Bill Clinton (January 20, 1993 – January 20, 2001) emphasized that gainful employment for inmates would deter them from returning to crime. President George W. Bush (January 20, 2001 – January 20, 2009) combined both approaches, increasing funding for mental health treatment and faith-based initiatives post-release.

During this period, the chaplaincy faced challenges not only from developments within the prison system but also from religious turmoil. Newly formed denominations, the pressure to accept new world religions, and resistance from growing evangelical movements hindered the chaplaincy's adaptation to the 21st century. The Age of Liberation did little to advance the evangelical chaplaincy.

### **Emergent World Religious Influences**

Understanding the global religious influences of the 20th century is crucial for grasping the state of chaplaincy in corrections. Erdman highlights key historical facts about the expansion of Christianity during this period. First, the modern missionary movement, rooted in the West during the Industrial Revolution, spread Western values and modernity. Second, missionaries introduced a naturalistic worldview, disrupting traditional non-Western societies and fostering a desire for development. As global missionary efforts promoted religious and cultural acceptance, western Christianity lost its "traditional center," liberating many orthodox, mainline, and sectarian faith groups.

In the context of corrections, while the world sought ecumenical harmony, many chaplains viewed other faiths as adversaries. W. Thomas Beckner describes the internal prison dynamics, highlighting the contrast between global religious unity and the chaplaincy's struggles within the correctional system.

As external agents without strong ties to the prison administration, we have often approached our mission as if invading foreign territory. Our focus has been on supporting personal ministry agendas rather than partnering with correctional systems or their appointed chaplains. Frequently, we have viewed the designated chaplain as an adversary to circumvent rather than collaborate with. This approach limits our ministry to isolated efforts rather than sustained, comprehensive care. Consequently, we tend to quickly inject our message into the lives of inmates instead of addressing their broader needs. This must change as we adapt to new environments and rules in the coming century.

Dr. Beckner highlights several key observations for effective chaplaincy in the evolving world: total care, careful ministry to broader needs, and adapting to new environmental rules. As the world has expanded, so have the needs of correctional ministry, encompassing cultural expectations, diverse faith requirements, and legal constraints.

Additionally, internal demands from the faith community have added external stress to the chaplaincy. The dynamic new Pentecostals and traditional Evangelicals, such as Billy Graham, represent the twentieth century's age of liberation and limitation. Pentecostals brought a fresh spirit to prison ministry, thriving among inmates who had been abused, lacked entertainment, and had limited social activity. Charismatic churches often dominated weekly religious events, finding instant favor and success among inmate populations.

Conversely, evangelists like Rev. Billy Graham, with his worldwide crusades, provided a centering element for traditional chaplaincy amidst daily conflicts. Mega churches added credibility to traditional chaplains, and their voting power caught the attention of local candidates. Rev. Jerry Falwell's "religious right" movement, powered by media influence, further exemplified this trend. Many fundamentalists rode this wave of limitation in an era of expanding religiosity.

As traditional chaplains, new evangelicals, and other valued religious groups brought strength and credibility to the chaplaincy, the drive for world unity found an ally in Roman Catholicism and new ecumenical religions. The emergence of the Church of Rome as a partner in ecumenical discussions and the impact of the charismatic movement have significantly changed ecumenical relationships. Today, ongoing dialogues between Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, and other world religions reflect a desire for unity, challenging the notion of one religion as the sole truth. It will be interesting to see how this ethos of global unity and religion will affect chaplaincy in the twenty-first century.

## **Conclusion**

The invaluable wisdom of historical documents like the United States Constitution and the legal arguments derived from their principles will continue to validate the hiring of correctional chaplains. Paget and McCormick aptly conclude this historical overview of correctional chaplains.

Although the United States Constitution forbids a national religion, it protects individuals' rights to freely exercise their religion. People have the right to practice religion in personally meaningful ways or to decline participation. Chaplains operate in a pluralistic, multi-faith environment and must provide equal ministry to all individuals within their care.

Chaplaincy has faced legal challenges, but its primary legal basis is the "free exercise" clause of the First Amendment. In the 1980s, a Jewish army chaplain clarified that the chaplain's purpose is to ensure the free exercise of religion for everyone, not just those of the same faith. Chaplains provide opportunities for all individuals to practice, or

not practice, religion according to their personal choices and styles. Today, chaplaincy continues to meet the spiritual needs of all people in a way that no other established religious group can.

## **The COVID Chaplaincy**

### **Presence and Adaptation**

The chaplaincy prior to COVID imitated the regular services found in the church. During COVID Chaplaincy as a Ministry of Presence took the lead. Traditionally, prison chaplaincy centered around the concept of presence. Chaplains provide spiritual and emotional support by physically being there for incarcerated individuals, prison officers, and their families. [This presence is essential for offering comfort, solace, and guidance within the prison environment!](#).

However, the pandemic disrupted this model. Social distancing measures meant that physical presence became difficult. Chaplains couldn't visit prisons as freely, and face-to-face interactions were limited due to health concerns. This loss of a divine touch distanced the younger prison population from finding God.

In response, chaplains had to find innovative ways to maintain their ministry. Some turned to virtual communication—using video calls, phone conversations, and written correspondence—to bridge the gap. [While it wasn't the same as being physically present, it allowed chaplains to continue their work during lockdowns and restrictions.](#)

### **Specific Challenges Faced by Prison Chaplaincy During COVID-19**

Rapid inmate turnover resulting from emptying the prisons and the reduced access to stable care in jails exacerbated existing challenges. Many incarcerated individuals faced heightened anxiety and uncertainty due to the pandemic. The idea of being released back into the community seemed to have little to no hope of being successful in not returning to prison.

Prejudice related to COVID-19 contagion was directed toward prisoners with mental illness (PwMI) and prison staff. [This added to the stigma already associated with religious, ethnic, gender, and racial minority status.](#) Separation to control rapid spread of the disease became a convenient means of racial profiling.

With the inability to provide theological learning the chaplain was in constant stress that the inmate would simply ignore their religious heritage. However, most chaplains understand that their teaching is only the mouthpiece of God. It is the Holy Spirit that teaches and instills the truths in the believers. Drawing from theologian Karl Barth's work in Basel prisons, some propose that the eschatological presence of God (the divine presence beyond time and space) is logically and temporally prior to the presence of chaplaincy. In other words, even when physical presence is limited, the spiritual presence endures.

Chaplains had to look beyond the physical boundaries to the spiritual realms of God's divine presence. This perspective encourages chaplains to adapt their approaches while maintaining integrity. [It reminds them that their impact isn't solely tied to physical proximity but extends to the spiritual realm as well!](#).

It was COVID-19 that has forced prison chaplaincy to rethink its traditional model, emphasizing creativity, adaptability, and the enduring spiritual presence even in challenging times. Chaplains continue to find ways to support incarcerated individuals, even when physical barriers exist.

## **Faith and spirituality**

These two concepts played a significant role in how incarcerated individuals cope with the challenges posed by COVID-19 within prison walls.

Instead of depending on the Chaplain and Volunteers it was the inmate's passion for inner transformation and reflection on where they have come from and where they want to go.

Seeking Redemption has been and will always be present regardless of the prison environment. For many inmates, faith provides a framework for self-reflection and seeking redemption. It allows them to grapple with their past actions, find meaning, and work toward personal growth.

As a chaplain during this time, the idea of embracing compassion and forgiveness never lost its presence when it comes to crime and conscience inside corrections. Spiritual beliefs encourage compassion and forgiveness. In a prison environment, where tensions can run high, faith can inspire individuals to show empathy toward others and practice forgiveness, even when faced with adversity.

Many inmates were forced to consider their own means of positive coping mechanisms such as religious coping. Research suggests that positive religious coping—such as prayer, seeking solace in religious texts, and connecting with a higher power—can reduce stress and promote emotional well-being. In times of crisis, faith becomes an anchor for many incarcerated individuals.

Spirituality will always be the foundation that fosters hope and resilience. Believing in something beyond the immediate circumstances can provide strength to endure difficult situations. In prison, where isolation and uncertainty prevail, faith can be a lifeline.

Community support from faith Communities seemed to disappear during COVID. In prison, faith-based communities—whether organized religious groups or informal gatherings—offer social support. They provide a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and shared purpose. During COVID-19, when physical distancing is necessary, these connections become even more vital.

Spiritual Leaders and Chaplains also seemed to take a step into the background of the restraints of the pandemic. Faith leaders 'must' play a critical role in preparing incarcerated communities for the pandemic. They promote healthy behaviors, tackle stigma, and provide practical care. Their presence and guidance offer comfort and hope to those facing isolation and fear.

Facing mortality and uncertainty seemed to be the prevalent crisis for everyone, in or out of jail. The pandemic forces everyone, including prisoners, to confront mortality and existential questions. Faith provides answers—or at least a framework for grappling with these profound issues. Providing reading materials on this issue became a prominent task.

Even in the darkest moments, faith can help individuals find meaning. Whether through prayer, meditation, or religious rituals, incarcerated individuals seek solace and purpose in their beliefs<sup>1</sup>.

Faith serves as a coping mechanism, a source of hope, and a community builder within prison walls during the COVID-19 pandemic. It reminds us that even in confinement, the human spirit seeks connection, purpose, and transcendence.

Restricted access created strict quarantines and safety protocols around COVID-19 wards, chaplains found themselves unable to make their usual rounds within prison facilities. Physical presence—the heart of their ministry—was limited. Chaplains like Ylisse Bess at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston had to adapt. She could only

communicate with COVID patients over the phone. While still powerful, these interactions lacked the immediacy and depth of in-person conversations.

Over the phone, chaplains had to ask more questions to understand inmate's needs. In person, they might notice someone shivering and provide a blanket without being explicitly asked. But on the phone, it required more probing to uncover unspoken concerns. Chaplains missed out on visual cues—body language, facial expressions—that often reveal emotional distress. Adjusting to this limitation was challenging.

It was often a struggle to balance safety and compassion. Chaplains who continued in-person visits had to don masks to protect themselves and others. Imagine trying to convey empathy and compassion while wearing a face shield! Being in close proximity to inmates meant chaplains faced the same risk of exposure as healthcare workers. Their commitment to serving others required courage and resilience.

Perhaps the most frustrating aspect was disrupted worship and group activities. Just as religious gatherings were affected in the wider community, chaplains struggled to conduct inmate congregant worship and group religious programs. Social distancing and safety measures made it challenging to maintain these essential spiritual connections. Chaplains had to find creative ways to adapt religious rituals, prayers, and communal practices to the constraints of the pandemic environment.

The pandemic brought heightened stress and grief to both inmates and staff. Chaplains were on the front lines, witnessing suffering, loss, and fear. Their own emotional well-being was tested. Despite their own struggles, chaplains continued to be voices of hope, offering solace and spiritual guidance to those who needed it most.

Chaplains working in prisons faced a host of unique challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. These dedicated spiritual caregivers play a crucial role in providing comfort, hope, and emotional support to incarcerated individuals, but the pandemic added new layers of complexity to their work.

In summary, chaplains faced a delicate balancing act—navigating safety protocols while maintaining their essential ministry. Their dedication and adaptability during these challenging times underscore the importance of their role in supporting incarcerated individuals.

3	<p><b>Assigned Reading:</b></p> <p><i>Where Did We Come From: <u>The DNA of Correctional Chaplaincy</u></i></p> <p><b>Research:</b></p> <p>Research several web sites that describe the history of correctional chaplaincy.</p> <p><b>Discussion Question: (chose 1)</b></p> <p>Briefly research and discuss: How does chaplaincy history influence/impact chaplaincy today?</p> <p>How has COVID influenced Corrections?</p>	<p><b>Written Submissions:</b></p> <p>Write a brief reaction paper of 500 words or less containing what you consider to be important</p> <p>Research several web sites that describe the history of corrections. Record some significant difficulty or ease of finding information of correctional chaplaincy history</p> <p>Respond to the discussion question with 250 words or less.</p>
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### Some of the resources used in the text

Allen, Harry E. & Simonsen, Clifford E. Corrections in America An Introduction. fifth ed. (New York, NY: Macmillan Pub., 1989),  
Beckner, Effective Ministry.

Bergen, Doris L. ed. The Sword of the Lord. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2004

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular\\_humanism\\_which\\_identify\\_the\\_following\\_traits:](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular_humanism_which_identify_the_following_traits)

**Building a better world** – A conviction that with reason, an open exchange of ideas, good will, and tolerance, progress can be made in building a better world for ourselves and our children.

**Ethics** – A search for viable individual, social and political principles of ethical conduct, judging them on their ability to enhance human well-being and individual responsibility.

**Fulfillment, growth, creativity** – A primary concern with fulfillment, growth and creativity for both the individual and humankind in general. **Search for truth** – A constant search for objective truth, with the understanding that new knowledge and experience constantly alter our imperfect perception of it.

**Need to test beliefs** – A conviction that dogmas, ideologies and traditions, whether religious, political or social, must be weighed and tested by each individual and not simply accepted on faith.

**Reason, evidence, scientific method** – A commitment to the use of critical reason, factual evidence and scientific methods of inquiry, rather than faith and mysticism, in seeking solutions to human problems and answers to important human questions

Cowart, Minister's Handbook

Dale K. Pace, A Christian's Guide to Effective Jail & Prison Ministries, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), p. 77-82. Dale Pace makes an argument for four changes in the twentieth century for chaplaincy. (1) the chaplain's role (2) the main thrust of the chaplain's ministry (3) the area of standards for chaplains (4) the legitimacy of government paid chaplains based on separation of church and state. I agree with these changes but I see the struggle of the chaplain following the basis of their need for legitimacy in the evolutionary correctional environment and their religious role changing from a chaplain for one to a chaplain for all. Many evangelical chaplains did not see a need to legitimize their presence and have remained silent when governmental, court, budgetary and legislative challenges emerged. Whereas many ecumenical chaplains see chaplaincy as a celebration of faith among faiths becoming a strong force inside the prison treatment plan.

Dowley, Tim. org. ed. Briggs, John H. Y., Linder, Robert D., Wright, David F. contr. ed. Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub., reprinted 1988)

Harry E. Allen & Clifford E. Simenson, Corrections in America An Introduction. fifth ed. (New York, NY: Macmillan Pub., 1989)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Maconochie\\_\(penal\\_reformer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Maconochie_(penal_reformer))

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Luther\\_King,\\_Jr.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King,_Jr.)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zebulon\\_Brockway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zebulon_Brockway)

<http://www.acpe.edu/howwearehistory.html>

<http://www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us/about/history.php>

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101065325/>

<https://www.aca.org/pastpresentfuture/history.asp>

[John Bunyan and George Fox are notable examples of incarcerated clergy who impacted prison ministry.](#)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Bunyan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Bunyan)

John Cowart, The Prison Minister's Handbook. (San Jose, CA: Resource Pub., Inc., 1996)

Kenneth Scott Latourette. A History of Christianity. (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1953)

Latimer's words to Bishop Ridley during their execution. Source: Foxe's Book of Martyrs.

Martin Luther's role in the Reformation and its influence on religious thought.

Stephen Moore and Julian Simon, Policy Analysis, The Greatest Century that Ever Was: 25 Miraculous Trends of the Past 100 Years, "CATO Institute," (Washington, DC: Policy Analysis no. 364, December 15, 1999) Accessed September 16, 2009. [http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=1223](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=1223), entire article Download the PDF of Policy Analysis no. 364. Stephen Moore is director of fiscal policy studies at the Cato Institute. Julian L. Simon (1932-1998) was a professor of business administration at the University of Maryland and a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. Most of the research findings come from Simon's lifetime of work showing how life on earth is getting better, not worse. The research assistance of Stephen A. Slivinski and Philip Kerpen is gratefully acknowledged.

The sentence of transportation was usually carried out in three parts. Prisoners started their sentence in the local gaol, followed by a period in a convict gaol or on the prison hulks before finally being transported <http://vcp.e2bn.org/justice/page11382-sentencing-to-departure-prison-hulks-convict-gaols.html> and <http://www.victorianlondon.org/prisons/hulks.htm> p. 20-22. Hulks were transport or warships used to house prisoners in the eighteenth and nineteenth century England. Gaols or Jails were pretrial detention facilities operated by English sheriffs during the eighteenth century.

The term Chaplain is attributed to the Latin cappellan (us) assigned to those who were assigned to the building where St. Martin's cloak (cappa) was preserved. The building in turn became known as the capella or as we know it, the chapel. This term was used and best described St. Martin Bishop of Tours (316-397) It was St. Martin who seeing a beggar ripped his coat in half and gave it to him to wear. In a later vision St. Martin saw Christ with the cloak, thus its preservation and the concept of chaplaincy was born. Any one providing a need in crisis was known as a Chaplain. Dale K. Pace, A Christian's Guide to Effective Jail and Prison Ministry, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), p 71-72.

**This life** – A concern for this life and a commitment to making it meaningful through better understanding of ourselves, our history, our intellectual and artistic achievements, and the outlooks of those who differ from us.

W. Thomas Beckner & Jeff Park, co-eds. Effective Jail & Prison Ministry for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. (Charlotte, NC: Coalition of Prison Evangelists (COPE), 1998), p. 2

[www.aca.org will provide historical insights in the American Correctional Association.](#)