

Márta Miklósi

The role of prison chaplains in reintegration of inmates

Rola kapelanów więziennych w reintegracji więźniów

It is a well-known fact that churches cared for criminals for centuries, and made significant attempts to rehabilitate individuals having served prison time as early as the 19th century.

As regards the reintegrating process in Hungarian penitentiary facilities, the prison chaplain's service is of essential importance, promoting the effort that the practice of religion is not only a constitutional principle but that inmates may exercise the right of worship on a daily basis. In my article I study the educational, instructive role of the prison chaplain which supplements the traditional educational activities carried out in penitentiary institutions. As a result of prison chaplain visits the inmates' psychological well-being, discipline, and self-esteem undergo a positive change due to the meetings and sessions, which may contribute to their subsequent reintegration into society with as little mental and spiritual damage as possible.

Ex-convicts are renounced by the majority of society, they are difficult to welcome back. This prejudice is often so strong as to make it almost impossible, but at least very difficult, to realize the intention of social reintegration and the person discharged is ostracized. This is why it is important to create the perspective of majority society, as this is the basis of reintegrating people released from penitentiary institutions.

Key words: reintegration of prisoners, church in prison, effects of imprisonment, prison chaplain, personal support in prison.

Powszechnie wiadomo, że kościoły przez wieki opiekowały się przestępcami i już w XIX wieku podejmowały znaczące próby rehabilitacji osób przebywających w więzieniu.

Jeśli chodzi o proces reintegracji w węgierskich zakładach penitencjarnych, zasadnicze znaczenie ma służba kapelana więziennego promująca starania, aby praktykowanie religii było nie tylko zasadą konstytucyjną, lecz aby osadzeni mogli na co dzień korzystać z prawa do kultu. W moim artykule badam wychowawczą, pouczającą rolę kapelana więziennego, która uzupełnia tradycyjne działania wychowawcze prowadzone w jednostkach penitencjarnych. W wyniku wizyt kapelana więziennego w wyniku spotkań i sesji następuje pozytywna zmiana stanu psychicznego, dyscypliny i samooceny osadzonych, co może przyczynić się do ich późniejszej reintegracji ze społeczeństwem z możliwie najmniejszymi uszkodzeniami psychicznymi i duchowymi.

Byli skazani są wyrzekani przez większość społeczeństwa, trudno ich powitać z powrotem. Uprzedzenie często jest tak silne, że prawie niemożliwa jest reintegracja społeczna, a osoba zwolniona przeważnie doświadcza ostracyzmu. Dlatego ważne jest kreowanie perspektywy społeczeństwa większościowego, gdyż jest to podstawa reintegracji osób zwolnionych z placówek penitencjarnych.

Słowa kluczowe: reintegracja więźniów, kościół w więzieniu, skutki pozbawienia wolności, kapelan więzienny, osobiste wsparcie w więzieniu.

The task of penitentiary institutions is not only to keep inmates incarcerated, but also to ensure that as few as possible of those discharged become repeat convicts. Personal support and reinforcement, conflict management after release, and their families not receiving the convict as a stranger all have a major role in reintegration. Mentoring families and developing convicts is greatly entrusted to church organizations, in my article I will examine this part of the tools which can support the reintegration process of the inmates.

The penitentiary system is a hermetically sealed world in many senses, which is reflected in the organizations' mechanisms designed for management, operation, and control, as well as their organizational culture. This is why it is practical to study the appearance of external, church organizations within the prison walls.

To ensure the reintegration of inmates, penitentiary organizations perform several activities that go beyond the framework of classic jurisdiction. In the background of this there is the provision of Act No. CCXL of 2013

which provides: “*during the implementation of imprisonment it must be ensured that the convicts’ self-esteem, personality, sense of responsibility are developed, and thus they can prepare for an individual life after their release meeting the requirements of society*” (§ 83 (7) of Act No. CCXL of 2013). To reach these objectives the penitentiary system must “map” outside reality and organize imprisonment so that by carrying out tasks the system may get closer to the declared objectives: the fair and humane treatment of the inmates and via this the promotion of reintegration (Garami, 1997, p. 74).

It is important to ensure for the inmates’ culture, religious practice, and work, as well as health care and social political care. But the list includes law enforcement activities, too, related to the guarding of inmates, protecting the internal order of the institute and the safety of its environment, the public order (Lőrincz-Nagy, 1997, p. 253).

Cooperating social, church, and charitable organizations and private entities are prominent in penitentiary activity. There are three groups of contributors: those supporting institutional activity are first and foremost involved in training the inmates and organizing their recreational programs. The second group includes those which provide personal support and help for inmates and those on release. The third category consists of those providing help, financial and moral support to the relatives of inmates (Lőrincz-Nagy, 1997, p. 254).

The role of churches and pastors

Domestic and international sources agree that church programs and opportunities in prison provide great help for inmates who are receptive to those. They contribute to the inmates’ coping with the harsh and sometimes inhumane environment of the penitentiary institution, and give them strength (Dammer, 2002; Sundt, 1997; Thomas – Zaitzow, 2006, p. 242).

To understand the central role of the church played in reintegration, we must highlight the contrast between religion and the prison. The latter is always associated with bad and unpleasant events, such as crime and punishment. Religion, on the other hand, is related to good and pleasant things such as the concept of sanctity and self-sacrifice. Inmates are like exiles who have been cast out of society. The instance of understanding carries the promise that with the help of it inmates will be characterized

by the adjective “free” instead of “captured, arrested, devoid of freedom” (Clear et al., 1992, p. 1).

It is a well-known fact that churches cared for criminals for centuries, and made significant attempts to rehabilitate individuals having served prison time as early as the 19th century. The leaders of churches and different denominations, as well as members of missionary or charitable organizations may enter Hungarian penitentiary facilities since the autumn of 1989 (Teleki, 2010, p. 35).

At the start the representatives of denominations took over from one another in the institutions. When, however, they saw the difficulty of the task they shied away from the service because new ministers were not prepared for the new circumstances, and were not familiar with the specificities of the institutions, the population, and how to deal with them (Estók, 2002, p. 5).

It is important to distinguish between prison chaplains’ service and broader religious-based civil organizations. These civil organizations independent from churches are bodies whose members have a religious motivation (Somogyvári, 2014, p. 68). There are four missionary organizations specialized for the support of prisons and inmates: the Hungarian Evangelical Prison Mission, the Hungarian Prison Pastoral Society, the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service, and the Hungarian Prison Fellowship (Lőrincz-Nagy, 1997, p. 254).

The Hungarian Prison Pastoral Society was established in September 1991. They coordinate and control the work of Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical, Methodist, Adventist and other pastors. They protect the rights of spiritual counselors and pastors, teach and distribute Christian culture and a humanist value system and morals in the penitentiary system, as well as create a person-centered perspective in the penitentiary institutions which includes respecting human rights. Their activities focus on two venues. In prison they carry out prison missionary work, caring work based on a humanist value system, reinforcing relationships between the inmates, charitable activity, spiritual care, and the training of correctional staff for pastoral work. Outside the prison they coordinate the entire activity of the prison pastoral activity, organize joint retreats, operate a methodological periodical, and organize trainings (Herczeg, 1997, p. 64).

Pastoral activity can contribute to accommodating to prison life, according to Clear et al. One possibility is to support coping with the emotional

distress caused by incarceration, the other is to mitigate the stress of privation experienced in the prison environs. In connection to mitigating emotional burdens caused by incarceration it must be stressed that although religion is not the only tool assisting the inmate in understanding and processing the causes of their wrongdoings and criminal acts, it is the only tool which can provide a solution (Clear et al., 1992, p. 4).

Clear et al. emphasize two ways to mitigate the pain of incarceration. The first is to manage the problem of guilt. Apart from the taking away of one's freedom, the most important message of incarceration is to emphasize guilt. Inmates can turn to religion with their desire for relief, as if doing penance for committing the crime. Many convicts do not forgive themselves for doing their crime. The second way is the promise of a new life. Inmates stress that religion has changed them, and they have started a new life as a result. The really deeply religious inmates take the prescriptions of religion seriously, the certainty and calculability of church doctrines is really attractive to them when changing their own uncertain lives, submitting their old lives to the new completely, gaining strength from the change. They sense an active role of God in their lives, which helps them cope with the pain of incarceration (Clear et al., 1992, p. 5).

Prison pastoral activity has a lot of beneficial impacts on inmates: firstly, in contrast to consultations with psychologists ("mentally ill," "crazy") and counselors ("snitch") it does not result in the disapproval of other inmates, as there is a basic respect towards religion in all convicts without exception. Secondly, consultations with a chaplain mean the offer of an unprejudiced relationship, as the pastor encourages inmates to face their own lives and does not chide them because of their errors, there is no punishment there (Czenczer, 2008, p. 325).

A really interesting and iconic effort for inmates is the prison Cursillo. Prison Cursillo is the same as the Cursillo outside prison, with a few basic differences due to the obvious location and time limitations. Cursillo is a movement recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, its original full name is "Cursillo de Cristiandad"¹. The word has Spanish origin, meaning a crash course on Christianity. With its help believers, people living far from belief and the church, as well as special believers can consider and experience the Christian perspectives and answers provided to today's

¹ Between 26-28 November 2014 the Sátoraljaújhely Prison and Correctional Facility was the venue of the first Hungarian prison cursillo, with the participation of 15 inmates and 7 presenters (Székely, 2019).

questions. It is not a theoretical course nor a traditional retreat and it is best described as an experience. An experience that leads to discover and better live what is fundamental in Christianity. Prison cursillos intend to provide for this with a short, intensive experience within the prison walls for three and half days with collective occasions, presentations, and spiritual retreat. A cursillo is not only for the religious. Cursillos are organized by the Catholic church, but it is mostly presented by secular persons. According to some experiences it is valid without respect to participants' sex, family situation, denomination, age, qualification, social status, or even their religious belief, and most often than not it generates enthusiasm (Székely, 2019). A cursillo is a spiritual experience, a kind of shock, to participants rather than the gaining of some knowledge, even though there is knowledge involved. The inmate explores a new world. This meeting is nothing else than a personal religious experience. According to some accounts, a cursillo provides joy, makes a person active, and inspires action to better ourselves and our environment. A cursillo may present friendships and new communities, and due to its impacts it may ensure that after release the inmate can reintegrate in society more successfully.

Prison Chaplain Service

Decree No. 13/2000 (VII. 14.) of the Minister of Justice gave birth to the Prison Chaplain Service. The renewed establishment of the service was a significant event in Hungarian correctional institutions. Both churches and the penitentiary system paid attention to creating the conditions ensuring the operation of the prison chaplain service so that the practice of religion would not only remain a constitutional principle but those that used religion as a day-to-day support and guidance could exercise their right to religious practice on a daily basis (Vári, 2008, p. 48). By setting up the prison chaplain service, spiritual care provided to inmates and spiritual life became more organized than before. In 2000 8 Catholic, 6 Protestant and 1 Judaic chaplains and deacons were employed full-time in some of the penitentiary institutions. In the regional institutions part-time pastors carry out this activity, including 10 Catholic and 5 Protestant ones (Estók, 2002, p. 6).

According to Bízik, prison chaplains carry out 4-8 hours of discreet ecumenical pastoral activity daily, in contrast to which small churches

would like to get the inmates to join their own congregation, spending 1-2 hours of spiritual activity in prisons, performing direct and assertive missionary activity. In his opinion, prison chaplains wish to help, know prison circumstances better, while the objective of missions is rather proselytism and they are rather naïve when it comes to the circumstances in the prison. He claims, however, that both structures have positive and negative sides; nonetheless, the way of “missionaries” is not the way of penitentiary chaplains; the right thing is to let both freely perform their activities, supplementing each other (Bízik, 2002, p. 98).

The educational, instructive role of the prison chaplain supplements the traditional educational activities carried out in penitentiary institutions. A prison chaplain has to have psychological stamina well above average. Dealing with inmates requires much more patience, more generosity, and empathy. Psychological stamina rests on the following three pillars: the expertise of the prison chaplain, the potentials of their personality and their personal faith and devotedness, and commitment towards their service. Having these skills and features the prison chaplain may become the educator, the caretaker, and the pastor of their congregation within the penitentiary facility (Vári, 2008, p. 52).

Colleagues of missionary organizations and chaplains carry out versatile activities among the inmates. Prison chaplains are responsible for ensuring that inmates have access to spiritual teaching, counseling and guidance, regardless of the incarcerated people’s particular religion, practice or spiritual belief. This person provides spiritual growth and education programs for incarcerated people. The major tasks of the prison chaplain service are the following: ensuring the practice of religious worship and piety; performing masses, church services, Bible lessons and prayer meetings; spiritual counseling of the individuals and the community; life management and moral education. Moreover, they provide assistance on how to take care of inmates and former inmates after their release as well as their families, how to strengthen their faith, how to build communities, and how to settle the inmates’ family relations, how to solve their personal and social issues. Chaplains counsel them preparing for release, coordinates special programs, such as seminars and family programs and trains volunteers.

Inmates may ask for one-to-one chaplain audience; however, group meetings are much more common, such as spiritual practices, church services with music, preparations before church celebrations, and Bible

sessions (Teleki, 2010, p. 33). As a result of prison chaplain visits the inmates' psychological well-being, discipline, and self-esteem undergo a positive change due to the meetings and sessions, which may contribute to their subsequent reintegration into society with as little mental and spiritual damage as possible (Lőrincz-Nagy, 1997, p. 254). A prison chaplain tends to lead the religious congregations of a prison and provide religious counseling to the inmates which is often a high stress job because there may be concerns about health safety.

The chaplain's activity can be carried out in individual and collective form as well. The inmate may request individual consultation with the chaplain, but collective group consultations such as retreats, musical services, preparations for church holidays, and Bible classes are more popular (Czenczer, 2008, p. 327).

Prison chaplains provide an opportunity for inmates to shape themselves through this activity. According to Bízik, the goal is not to "resolve tensions," make them "more manageable," or to ensure "a safety valve"; these are only lucky outcomes but not objectives (Bízik, 2002, p. 97).

It is important to stress that Decree No. 13/2000. (VII. 14.) does not prescribe visiting cells for chaplains, but this is the primary venue of individual and communal spiritual care. The main goal of visiting cells is to announce the occasions of religious practice, and to make personal contact with the inmates (Vári, 2008, p. 53). It is a rule that in penitentiary institutions the inmate can keep contact with the church personality without supervision, which contact may be initiated by each of the parties (§110 (2) of Decree No. 16/2014).

According to Szegál, the direct objective of pastoral activity is to organize the religious life of convicts and manage moral conflicts, thus improving the atmosphere of the prison (Szegál, 2007, p. 32).

As a result of prison chaplains' visits the positive experiences of inmates can be felt in the psychological air, conduct, and self-esteem of inmates, which ensure that they can reintegrate in society with as few spiritual injuries as possible (Baran, 1997, p. 80). The main tasks – according to Estók – include "*rebuilding the inmates' moral standing, creating and shaping a real view of humanity based on everlasting rules, that is, influencing morals and ethics positively*" (Estók, 2002, p. 7). The presence of a chaplain means the reinforcement of an inner bearing for the inmate, and discussing problems, jointly facing sources of anxiety can help reduce the distress (Békeffy, 2005, p. 85). Aggression is a frequent

problem in prisons: the quenching or significant mitigation of aggressive drives is possible by verbal and Biblical means, singing, and the therapeutic effect of shared spiritual experiences. It is practical, furthermore, to have constructive discussions about the conflicts which have led the inmate to aggression. During this the inmate can experience the cooperative and facilitating attitude of the chaplain and the service community, which may provide help in processing it (Békeffy, 2005, p. 89). Another important task of prison chaplains' is the education of self-esteem, as it is a generally accepted view in the professional literature that only strong characters can cope with closed institutions and resist repeat delinquency, people who have appropriate self-esteem. The prison chaplain has an important role in balancing out the self-esteem of inmates, a tool of which is a permanent and unprejudiced attention to others (Békeffy, 2005, p. 90).

Prison pastoral activity is essential for coping with the injuries caused by incarceration and prisonization. Emptiness and existential vacuum are one of the biggest dangers. In this case inmates are overcome by indifference and depression. To evade this the penitentiary system offers several alternatives such as correspondence, telephoning, receiving visitors, short-term leaves, as well as cultural and sports clubs and religious occasions. The task of church events is to assist the inmates in leaving behind the crisis of values (Békeffy, 2005, p. 91).

The prison chaplain serves in an incultured environment, existing in a permanently incultured process, that is, in contact with the local culture. As per Vári's opinion, evangelization is necessary in all extremely incultured environments— including incultured persons themselves. Prison chaplains during evangelization have to face not only incultured persons and environments but also linguistic inculturation (Vári, 2008, p. 52). During inculturation, forms, rules, and rituals of communication, and practical know-how are internalized (Pusztai, 2010, p. 25).

Prison chaplains are in close contact with the supervisors, educators, and prison psychologists, and their cooperation with other prison staff is a priority task. Majzik claims there is some resistance by the staff to the activity of prison chaplains and missions, and suspects an anti-religious attitude behind this (Majzik, 1997). Garami, however, emphasizes that the personnel of prisons perform services with disregard to world views. Services must not be influenced either negatively or positively by religious convictions (Garami, 1997, p. 76). Estók stresses that dealing with

the prison population² is among high-priority jobs in the prison chaplain's service (Estók, 2002, p. 9).

The prison chaplains' job is not possible without the cooperation of supervisors and guards. So that the prison chaplain may get in touch with the convicts this service cannot be neglected, as these officers carry out the majority of penitentiary tasks: guard, supervise, and control the inmates (Vári, 2008, p. 55). It is evident, therefore, that the prison chaplain's activities present a significant excess burden on the personnel.

In cases where the reintegration officer finds that the inmate needs consultation with a chaplain, they can notify the chaplain. In addition, prison chaplains may make recommendations to the reintegration officer to reward those inmates that regularly attend and actively contribute to the church practices (Hajdú, 2006, p. 36).

Continuous communication with psychologists assists in the pastoral activity of inmates, as the group whose philosophy and working style are closest to those of pastoral service is evidently that of psychologists. In some cases it happens that the prison chaplain has questions about the spiritual treatment of the same clients, which may be discussed without breaching the obligation of confidentiality (Vári, 2008, p. 56).

The accommodation of inmates to the prison takes place in two well-distinguishable ways, on the one hand, coping with problems, on the other, avoiding problematic situations. We can say that a convict can cope with their penitentiary term if they feel they are able to live in captivity without feeling endangered, angry, exposed, or depressed. Avoiding problematic situations means the convict can serve their term not breaking the rules of prison life during the time spent in the institution (Clear et al. 2002, 2; Dammer, 2002).

Conclusions

Ex-convicts are renounced by the majority of society, they are difficult to welcome back. This prejudice is often so strong as to make it almost impossible, but at least very difficult, to realize the intention of social reintegration and the person discharged is ostracized. This is why it is

² This includes masses, Christening, weddings, funerary services, and suggestions, advice provided for problems arising during routine work with the population of the prison (Estók, 2002, p. 9).

important to create the perspective of majority society, as this is the basis of reintegrating people released from penitentiary institutions. From this perspective those members of society who can provide discharged inmates with concrete assistance are especially significant, such as social experts, among others. It is important that they appear as real sources of help, that their conduct and attitude are characterized not by refusal but care, the willingness to help (Csáki-Mészáros, 2005, p. 114).

To reintegrate ex-convicts in society the penitentiary institution needs to broaden its network of relationships with all the state bodies, social, and church organizations and entities that on the basis of state or social entitlement or voluntarily provide assistance to inmates in leading them back to society (Lőrincz-Nagy, 1997, p. 253). On the basis of all this, the process of opening up prisons means increasing the number of law-abiding citizens in direct contact with prisons (Mihály, 2014, p. 130). This can be carried out in today's legal framework: both inside and outside prisons more and more people can be involved in the reintegration and resocialization of inmates.

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