

International Meeting
Integral Human Development and the Catholic Prison Pastoral Care
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International Commission of Catholic Prison Pastoral Care
(ICPPC)

Secretariat:

Ryan van Eijk

Email: ryan.sg.icppc@gmail.com

European Representative:

Dr. Ryan van Eijk, RC Head Chaplain

Office: Bezuidenhoutseweg 20, 2594 AV The Hague

Email: r.van.eijk@dji.minjus.nl

Your Eminence, Excellencies, Dear colleagues, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Introduction (1)

It is a great privilege to make a contribution to this important meeting. Europe shows a huge diversity regarding penal systems, detention circumstances, human rights situations, and models of prison chaplaincy. Despite these many differences I will mention some major aspects influencing today's RC prison chaplaincy in Europe.

Prison population (2 and 3)

Prison population tells the story of which groups are extremely vulnerable in a society for the prison population in a society consists mostly of the social and economic poor, and shows overrepresentation of members of ethnic, cultural or religious minorities, and mental sick people. Background and composition van prison population reveal in most countries what is or should be the social and economic agenda and its challenges.

Radicalism (4)

The increase of political and religious radicalism and intolerance raises tensions in European societies and prisons. In many cases law is increasingly used rather as an instrument to order than as instrument to bring justice. Justice is in a certain way besieged by security. In prison care there is the concern to balance the fight against radicalization and terrorism and at the same time to see after human dignity and humane treatment of all inmates.

Overcrowding (5)

2018 figures show an decrease of prison rates in Europe in many cases, however overcrowding is still in many countries a daily problem, causing a serious threat to health and safety of inmates and staff, and the risk of radicalization.

Lack of attention and resources (6)

Well trained staff and sufficient facilities are a permanent point of attention. In many countries prisons are the last matter of concern in society and politics resulting in

- Insufficient or inhumane situations for inmates regarding treatment, food, clothing, healthcare, family visits, and
- poor facilities for rehabilitation etc.

Stigmatization (7)

Imprisonment, even a relatively short pre-trial period, destroys the future of many because of stigmatization and the loss of housing, work and social ties in this period, even when found innocent at the end.

Drugs and organized crime (8)

Drug addiction and drug related crime and violence are destroying individual lives, families, neighborhoods and even society by undermining the rule of law because of the enormous amounts of money which can be earned. However, a lot of drug addicts are better helped to be seen as patients than as criminals.

Migration (9)

Special attention should be given to the circumstances in detention centers where thousands of migrants stay, often victims of human trafficking. The ignorance for their reason to leave their countries and families is a denial of global problems like the ecological crisis, poverty and the tremendous lack of political and social justice.

Lip service (10)

There is a lot of lip service by church people including bishops regarding prison chaplaincy. If they are involved their involvement is often reduced to sacramental rites. Prison chaplaincy is in many countries done by lay people and not by clergy: why wasting your time on these people? Moreover, in many countries there is a lack of priests and so of sacramental service. Bishops give priority to parishes. Many workers and volunteers feel ignored or frustrated.

Challenges of prison chaplaincy

(11) Prison chaplaincy is mostly organized on local or diocesan level however the penal system is in most cases organized on national level. This raises questions and problems regarding organization, continuity, and quality of pastoral and diaconal care after transfers or release of inmates. PC should be recognized as a special ministry for it demands special competences, and it should be well embedded and structured on diocesan and national level of the church, expressing the spiritual, personal and material (diaconal, financial) commitment of the whole church, lay and clergy.

(12) The increase of religious diversity in prison. RC Prison chaplaincy is challenged to find a way that religious freedom is respected to all. However, how to organize this in a just way in situations where Catholics are the majority or minority and the state authorities are involved directly? How to cope with religious interfaith, interreligious dialogue and to cooperate with religious representatives of other faiths? How to reach the point that every inmate receives his or her spiritual care as wanted? Competition or privileges are existing.

(13) Overcrowding and humane treatment challenge pastoral and diaconal care for prisoners. Prison chaplaincy is a ministry done in a public, secular context of the state which makes it a political ministry for it is not only about legal justice but also about moral and evangelical justice. At the end this means that there is always a prophetic aspect in the biblical sense involved in this ministry.

(14) There is the challenge to find a consistent balance in the catholic social doctrine between retributive and restorative justice in which the offender's and he victim, 's rights, interests and perspectives are taken into account.

Request

(15) A papal publication on retributive and restorative justice, , punishment, imprisonment, prison chaplaincy, and rehabilitation would be much appreciated by the field workers and prisoners. Prison chaplaincy could and should be an integral part of theological reflection and teaching in pastoral theology.

(16) 'End' why all this...?