



Commission for the spiritual care of prisoners

150

priests, pastors and
deacons are available in
the Swedish prison service



THERE ARE ROUGHLY 150 priests, pastors and deacons in the Swedish prison service. Their task is to meet the inmates' needs of private conversation, arrange group meetings and church services, and provide education and guidance in ethical and existential issues.

On a national level this work is coordinated by the Swedish Council of Churches (SKR), an ecumenical organisation in which nearly all the churches in Sweden are active. SKR provides advisors who coordinate the responsibility that the churches and the prison service share for the spiritual care of the inmates. In addition to the advisors, there is a commission, with representatives of the four church groupings, who are engaged in issues concerning criminal welfare policy, who work to develop the work of chaplaincy, and who plan the further education of all prison chaplains. This is carried out in cooperation with a consultative support group (SiK in Swedish).

A similar organisation exists within the Islamic faith, The Muslim Council of Sweden (SMI). In 2002 a declaration of mutual support and exchange between SMI and SKR in their work for the spiritual care of prisoners was agreed. Part of the prison chaplains' work is to help those on remand and those in prison to meet representatives of their faith and religion.

Churches working together in remand centres and prison

Priests, pastors and deacons, appointed by the different churches and church societies exercise an ecumenical task, based on the words and the spirit of the gospels.

Jesus says in the synagogue in Nazareth:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord."

(Luk 4:18–19)

He says in a parable:

"for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

(Matt 25:35–36)

The commission to be "church" for all in prison is given by the Lord Jesus Christ himself.



THROUGHOUT ITS LONG existence the Church has had a self-evident connection with prisons. The author of the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament writes in chapter 13:3 *"remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them"*. In the early church priests and deacons visited prisoners, and social work was carried out from the monasteries of Europe. Prisoners were given instruction and helped to adjust to normal life. In Sweden it was the Lutheran priest Olaus Petri in the 16th century who worked strongly to change the cruel treatment dealt out to those who had committed a crime.

The Church regulations of 1571 laid down rules for the spiritual care of prisoners. We can read instructions from 1740 for the creation of prison chapels and the responsibilities of the chaplains in prisons and houses of correction. With the introduction of the cell system in prisons in our country by act of parliament in 1840-1841, special prison chaplains were also created. Gradually the responsibilities of the chaplains in prisons increased.

After about 100 years the cell system was changed by new legislation in 1945. The system of prison chaplains was then to be abolished.

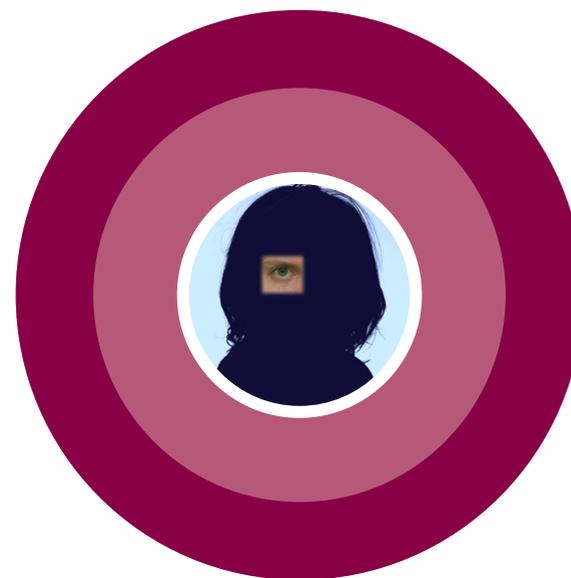
In 1952 a thorough reorganisation of spiritual care was carried out, and *committees for spiritual care were created. In line with the Swedish Freedom of Religion Act of 1951, the Free (nonconformist) Churches and the State Church were to work under the same conditions. Together with the director of the prison they were responsible for religious care in the prison. In 1962 an act of Parliament reorganised the spiritual care committees to form the commission for spiritual care, which was to be established in every prison and remand centre.

*Committees for spiritual care (Nämnden för andlig vård – NAV in Swedish)

Direction and goals

To welcome every Christian and affirm and deepen his/her identity. To increase his/her awareness of belonging to a church. To help each one to grow in faith and stimulate them to continue to live a Christian life.

To welcome others – believers of all religions, those who are searching and non-believers – with openness and through discourse raise their self-esteem and dignity so that they can more easily recognise the dignity and rights of others.



ECUMENISM IS THE basis of all activities. The ecumenical activities are not only an exchange of ideas but first and foremost an exchange of spiritual gifts and experiences. The different forms of activities cover spiritual guidance, church services, group activities, meetings with prison staff and the external information.

Spiritual guidance

Prison chaplains shall:

- ❑ Welcome each prisoner as a spiritual counsellor and fellow human,
- ❑ Through individual conversation enable each inmate to work through on an existential level anything that causes anxiety and worry,
- ❑ Help the individual to cope with their grieving and support them in their attempt to heal broken relationships,
- ❑ Allow them to work through feelings and experiences and at the same time create a self-understanding and awareness of the world around,
- ❑ Wrestle with questions of responsibility and guilt, and punishment and the possibilities of reconciliation,
- ❑ Prepare them for reconciliation and absolution, encourage them to make good social contacts, help them to dare to enter programmes of treatment and amenable to reach such an insight that their future can be based on realistic aspirations,
- ❑ Assist in conflicts, accidents, at times of death and to break the news about a death,
- ❑ Inform parishes and society about the organisation of spiritual care (NAV) and about the prison correctional service (KV).

Church services

- ❑ Plan and celebrate church services in all prisons and remand centres,
- ❑ Promote the presence of the different church families so that each is able to celebrate its own services.
- ❑ Invite representatives of the different local parishes to participate in the work.

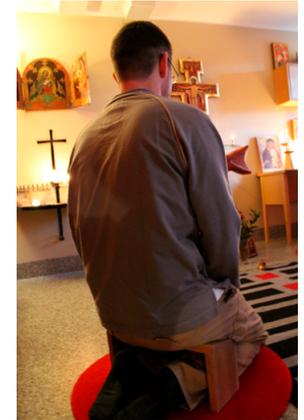
Group activities

- ❑ Create, plan and lead group activities within the framework of spiritual care, e.g. visiting groups (the volunteer visiting organisations), discussion groups, education in parenting, preparation for the reception of sacraments.
- ❑ Inform the inmates about the possibilities of making a retreat.
- ❑ Advertise the work of Gruvberget and especially courses there about faith and philosophy of life.

Relations with (prison) staff

When they meet prison staff, chaplain should:

- ❑ Represent a Christian view of life and provide ethical aspects when participating in education and competence development.
- ❑ Be prepared to support and assist in a crisis and other significant events.
- ❑ Participate in staff meetings whenever necessary.
- ❑ Be active within the institution in creating good relations, and as socially secure and positive an atmosphere as possible.



AT EACH PRISON, and hopefully at each remand centre, there should be a volunteer visiting group, preferable ecumenical. At present there are about 40 such groups across Sweden. There are specific recommendations for visiting groups.



PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

To be accepted as a prison chaplain...

... priests, pastors, deacons or members of religious orders must be ordained or commissioned or have received a corresponding appointment in keeping with the tradition of their church or religious organisation.

The following qualities are also necessary:

- ❑ Security in their church identity and a solid theological outlook.
- ❑ Personal maturity and a sound experience of parish life and work.
- ❑ A professional manner and attitude.
- ❑ A knowledge of, a will to become involved in, and respect for ecumenism and multi-faith issues.
- ❑ A willingness to learn and understand the organisation, rules and working methods of the country's prison service.
- ❑ Awareness of one's own position within the system.

The chaplain must be approved by the prison church's advisors.

Education

The advisors to the body for spiritual care are responsible for basic education and competence development.

National level

- By agreement with the prison service the Christian Council of Sweden (SKR), has taken the overriding responsibility for spiritual care.
- The steering committee consists of representatives from the churches in the Christian Council of Sweden. These are nominated by the member churches and confirmed by SKR's board of directors.
- This committee has representatives from the prison chaplains' organisation. A chairman is appointed by the board of SKR. The prison service chooses a representative who is co-opted to the group.

The juridical basis for prison chaplaincy

For all those on remand or in prison the law applies as expressed by chapter 2 §1, 6 of the Swedish constitution on basic freedoms and rights. It states:

- This cannot be limited by any other law according to the constitution chapter 2 § 12.
- Furthermore, European prison regulations apply. They can be found on the Swedish government website (www.regeringen.se).

"Each citizen is guaranteed: freedom of religion; freedom to practise his religion alone and together with others."

The constitution chapter 2 § 12

SiK: Chaplains in the prison service

This association represents the members of the different churches in Sweden who by appointment of their own church and after confirmation by the Prison Service are active in the prison ministry. Membership (of SiK) is associated with this appointment.

Local level

According to the statutes of the Prison Service 2006:2, a prison chaplaincy is to be present in all areas of prison work.

The person responsible for the prison ministry is the director of the prison or someone appointed by the director. The director will appoint those presented by the parishes in consultation with the advisors of the prison chaplaincy organisation. This work is conducted on assignment from a parish or church.



THE CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF SWEDEN

gathers 26 member churches from four church families, which represent the different Christian traditions in our country. The member churches' ministries, within several different fields, are linked together in the Council. This is done by offering places to meet and exchange ideas, creating networks, giving communication services, giving support for ecumenical development and coordinating common activities and ministries.



SVERIGES
KRISTNA RÅD

Christian Council of Sweden
Box 14038
SE-167 14 Bromma
Sweden
Phone: +468-453 68 00
E-mail: info@skr.org
Internet: www.skr.org