



THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Remember Me: A Catholic Approach to Criminal Justice

Remember Me is the new document on criminal justice by the Department for Social Justice of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, exploring contemporary issues of criminal justice in the light of Catholic social teaching.

At a time of great challenge and opportunity for the criminal justice system, it is imperative to remember the common human dignity of all those affected and to accompany them in a journey of redemption.

We offer calls to action for the Catholic community, wider civil society and the UK Government and its criminal justice agencies, in the hope of creating a more just, merciful and effective criminal justice system.

87,726 prisoners in England and Wales

Only 20% of victims offered restorative justice

Around 193,000 children with a parent in prison

53% of female prisoners with a history of abuse

Over 80 full-time Catholic prison chaplains



Catholic social teaching on criminal justice

- Made in the image and likeness of God, we are created for a life of flourishing through right relationship with God, others and ourselves.
- While we are each capable of great good, we are also capable of great harm and of fracturing our relations with God, others and ourselves.
- We are all dependent on the grace of God to enable us to heal and restore relationships broken by crime and wrongdoing.
- Criminal justice must be truly restorative. This combines care for victims, punishment of offences and the rehabilitation of offenders.
- Our courts, prisons and probation service are integral to the common good and must be supported for the betterment of all in society.
- Criminal justice policy must recognise the human dignity of both victims and offenders.
- The principle of solidarity calls us to show particular concern for the poor and marginalised, including prisoners' families.

"I was in prison and you came to me [...] And the King will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'" (Matthew 25:36-40)

"Justice is properly sought solely out of love of justice itself, out of respect of the victims, as a means of preventing new crimes and protecting the common good [...] Forgiveness is precisely what enables us to pursue justice without falling into a spiral of revenge or the injustice of forgetting" (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti (2020) 252)

"Prisons continue to be places of hopelessness and despair for too many people [...] As long as we have a justice system trapped in survival mode – one that is focused on just getting through the day – prisons are unlikely to become the places that they need to be in order to deliver on their core mission" (Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile (February 2024) pp. 4-5)

Prison Advice Care Trust - Pact

The Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact) is the national Catholic prisons charity. Pact works in 68 prisons and is the largest national provider of services for prisoners and their families across England and Wales, including prison visits and a prisoners' families helpline.

The work of Pact is a shining example of the principle of subsidiarity. The knowledge and experience of family members and loved ones is especially valuable in supporting the rehabilitation of those in prison, from understanding complex medical needs to providing emotional support.



Calls to Action

Remember Me offers clear calls to action for the Catholic community, wider civil society and the UK Government and its criminal justice agencies. Stemming from the foundation of faith and guided by the insights of Catholic social teaching in dialogue with realities of criminal justice, these recommendations seek to develop a more just, merciful and effective approach to criminal justice in England and Wales.

Victims & Courts

1. The Government should improve support services for victims of crime, including assistance from specialist independent services whenever necessary.
2. The Government and Sentencing Council should strongly consider the greater use of community sentences, especially for non-violent offences and for older offenders.
3. The Catholic Church will continue to promote the work of groups supporting victims, such as Grief to Grace and Safe in Faith, and will encourage the replication of these activities across our dioceses and parishes.

Prisons & Prisoners

1. The Government and criminal justice agencies should actively facilitate the work of civil society groups that assist with rehabilitation.
2. HMPPS should ensure that prisoners receive any necessary vocational qualification in preparation for post-prison employment.
3. Catholic dioceses and parishes should encourage the lay Catholic faithful to consider ways in which they can more actively live out a calling to visit those in prison and support the work of groups such as the Prison Advice and Care Trust.

Rehabilitation

1. HMPPS should encourage the greater use of open prisons and day release to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders coming towards the end of long sentences.
2. The Government should improve the quantity and quality of restorative justice services throughout the criminal justice in England and Wales, whereby offenders can acknowledge and take responsibility for their offences.
3. The 2025 Year of Jubilee is an opportunity for Catholic parishes to show mercy and share hope with those who have returned to the community having served sentences.

Questions for discussion

1. How can we better seek both justice and mercy in our criminal justice processes?
2. How can we strike the right balance between punishment and rehabilitation in our use of sentencing?
3. How can we more effectively show solidarity with both victims and offenders in our Catholic parishes and communities?
4. How can we better remember the victims of crime, those who are in prison, and their families in our personal and parish prayer?

Further Information

If you would like to become more involved in supporting those affected by the criminal justice processes in your parish or local area, please do contact the Prison Advice and Care Trust: info@prisonadvice.org.uk

If you would like to connect your parish with a local prison to support the needs of prison leavers, please do speak with your parish priest and consider registering for the Welcome Directory: admin@welcomedirectory.org.uk

If you would like to read the full copy of *Remember Me* you can do so here: cbcew.org.uk/remember-me