

Presence of a Chaplain in the Criminal Justice System

For many years I have served as a volunteer chaplain in our criminal justice system. Each week when I step through the steel gates and the chaotic spaces of the prison, I serve not as a judge or an enforcer, but as a fellow traveler, a listening ear, and hopefully a bearer of hope in places where hope often seems like a distant memory. My prison ministry is one of presence. I serve alongside the dangerously understaffed employees and those caught within the gears of our complicated state correctional system. From my vantage point, I see individual offenders seeking long overdue relief. I also see a system crying out for profound change.

Warehouses of Despair or Pathways to Restoration?

So, I wonder, is our current system building pathways to restoration? Or are they simply warehouses of despair at an enormous cost to taxpayers? And more importantly, to the human spirit? Working within the challenging landscape of the correctional system, I find that the sacred vows of my baptismal covenant take on a profound, almost raw, character that is less liturgical formula and more a daily, lived obligation.

Building Relationships and Finding Grace

“Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

In my ministry, I build fragile relationships. These relationships create a counter-narrative to the isolation prison walls impose. Just by the simple act of offering communion and pastoral fellowship, I am reminded that grace is present even in the most unlikely of places and faces. This vow for me is a quiet act of resistance against the dehumanizing forces of the system.

Glimpsing Christ Beyond the Conviction

“Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?”

I continuously recall this vow as I sit with incarcerated individuals. They are burdened by their past actions, societal condemnation, and present confinement. This call to love persistently calls me to look beyond the uniform. And, it calls me to look beyond the conviction to glimpse the face of Christ, however obscured by pain, or anger, or regret.

Affirming Dignity Amidst Systemic Pressure

“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”

This is where the weight of the system itself presses in with [nearly 2 million mass incarcerations](#). It pushes the subtle and overt ways human dignity can easily be eroded. My covenant compels me to be a witness to the systemic injustices that need reform. And in my own small, persistent way, be a presence that fiercely affirms the God-given, inalienable dignity of those in custody and those who work within the system.

A Constant Act of Faith: Towards a Restorative System

Living into my covenant as a volunteer chaplain within the criminal justice system is a constant act of faith. I am

always learning about the limits of the human condition. With God's help I pray for a collective will and a moral courage to [reform a system](#) that not only humanely punishes but also restores, that not only confines but also liberates the human spirit towards a better path by always, always, always returning for renewal to the source of abundant grace.



The Rev. Scott Kidd is a retired Episcopal priest and is enjoying forty years of marriage to Patty. Together they have four grown children and eight grandchildren with one due this summer. Scott is currently working part-time for the Diocese of Atlanta as lead transition consultant and supply priest at many parishes in the diocese.

Beyond the church, Scott enjoys cooking, traveling, hiking, and spending time with family. He is a firm believer in the importance of finding joy and balance in life. The Rev. Scott Kidd is deeply committed to serving God and God's people, striving to live out the Gospel message of love, justice, and reconciliation in all aspects of his ministry.

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