



**Reformer** someone who lobbies or pressurises for change.

**Quaker** (also known as the Society of Friends) a Christian denomination whose central belief is that every human being contains a reflection of the image of God.



Elizabeth Fry, a prison reformer chosen to feature on the £5 note

## Prison reformers

Britain has a proud history of prison **reformers**, many of whom were inspired by their religious beliefs to lobby for change.

John Howard was a committed Calvinist (Protestant Christian) and inspected prisons in the late eighteenth century. He found them to be diseased, dirty and corrupt, and gave evidence to Parliament with recommendations that conditions and practices be improved. He called for basic but essential provisions such as clean running water, separate cells for men and women, access to doctors, and greater numbers of prison officers to support and ensure the safety of inmates. This was at a time when the majority of prisons were privately run for profit.

Elizabeth Fry was a nineteenth-century **Quaker** prison reformer, who dedicated her life to improving the state of British prisons after visiting Newgate Prison in London in 1813. She was a passionate advocate of education in prisons and looked towards reforming prisoners as opposed to simply isolating them from society. She is most famous for teaching female prisoners to read and write and holding Bible readings for inmates.

By the 1870s ideas both about prison and prisons themselves had changed dramatically. Purpose-built institutions (like Pentonville Prison in London) were to be found across the country, and a lively debate about how to treat prisoners once in jail had been born. Finally, real thought was being given to how we should approach the reform of individuals once in prison.

## Life in twenty-first-century Britain

The prison population of England and Wales was 85,641 in 2015, compared to 44,246 in 1993. Reoffending rates are high. According to the National Audit Office, reoffending costs us the equivalent of staging another Olympic Games every year. In light of these figures, many again are calling for a reform of prisons and prison regimes.

According to Government statistics, only 53 per cent of the prison population have any qualifications, compared to 85 per cent of the working-age population. The key focus of current discussions about prison reform is therefore education. The Government recently announced plans to overhaul the prison system in Britain, calling for prisoners to be viewed and treated as 'potential assets, not liabilities'.

## Tasks

- 1 In your own words, explain what the term 'reformer' means.
- 2 What was wrong with the early prisons in Britain?
- 3 In a mind map, identify the four main suggestions that John Howard made to improve prisons in the eighteenth century. For each, suggest how it would improve prisons.
- 4 Explain the current concerns with prisons in twenty-first-century Britain. Extend your answer by mentioning what the government is hoping to improve.



## ► Care for prisoners – chaplains

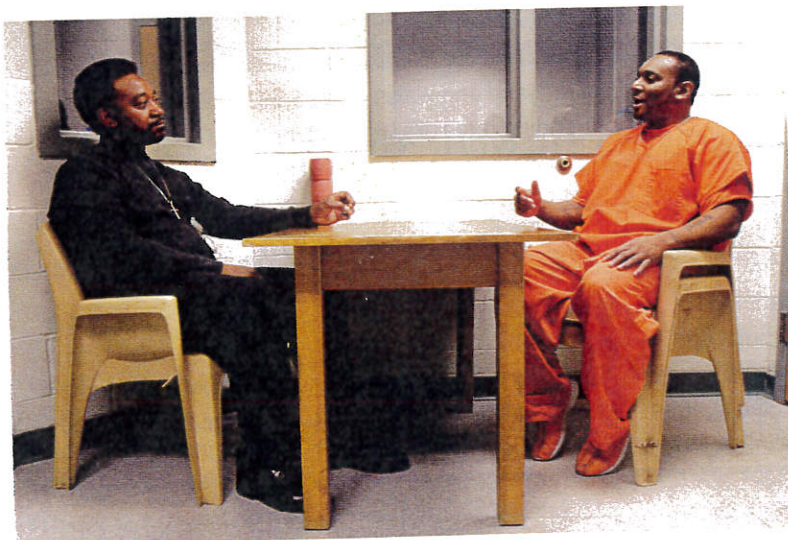
### What is a chaplain?

For many of us, our only experience of chaplains is through movies or television. Here they are often portrayed as people on the side-lines, without a uniform or an easily defined role, who give out quick slices of advice. Traditionally, a chaplain is a minister, such as a priest, pastor, rabbi, imam or community member of a religious tradition. They are attached to non-religious institutions such as hospitals, prisons, schools or universities. Their job is to provide 'pastoral' care for patients, pupils, or in this case, prisoners.

### What is their role?

Prison chaplains have a demanding and essential job, providing counselling to inmates, supporting them through their rehabilitation and seeing to their spiritual (and often religious) needs. Prisoners have to deal with a complex mixture of emotions and needs during their sentence, and they often need someone who is not a prison officer or warden to offer support. Fear, loneliness, guilt, concerns about family or children on the outside – all of these become the concern of the prison chaplain. In addition to this, chaplains often help prisoners re-enter the community, working with **parole officers** and other volunteers. Families of inmates also have access to prison chaplains. Family members can be the victims of the inmates' crimes and require the care of the chaplain just as much as the inmate.

**Parole officer** a person who supports prisoners on their release from prison and their return to the community.



Prison chaplains help prisoners deal with both their emotional and practical needs

Chaplains do not have to be religious, and it is documented that 32 per cent of the prison population have no religious faith. Since 2011 the British Humanist Society has been running a project with Humanist Pastoral Support Volunteers at Winchester Prison. This includes meeting inmates with 'nil' religion on admission, holding discussion groups and providing counselling, such as bereavement support, for inmates. This is especially important as often prisoners are unable to attend funerals of loved ones or benefit from the type of community support offered to those who have suffered the loss of family or friends.

*'You are there primarily for the inmates. Most offenders are also victims. That doesn't mean that we feel sorry for them; but we do offer them enough compassion.'*

Kate Johnson, Quaker and prison chaplain



## Tasks

- 1 What are prison chaplains and what is their role?
- 2 Explain by offering two specific examples why you think chaplains are important in prisons. Tip: Use excerpts from the quotes of chaplains as evidence or to support your explanations.

## Why do people become chaplains?

*'As a Quaker I believe that there is something of God in everyone – no matter how they have behaved or what crimes they have committed. I feel it is my duty to advocate for them.'*

*Through my work as chaplain I am following Jesus' commands – I am showing compassion, love and kindness.*

*There are so many problems in prison that cannot be solved by therapy, doctors or rehab. These problems are outside of religion – they are matters of the spirit.*

*People are more than the worst thing they have ever done in their lives.*  
Helen Prejean

Helen Prejean is a Roman Catholic nun, and leading advocate for the abolition of the death penalty. She began her prison ministry in 1981, when she began writing to a death row inmate.

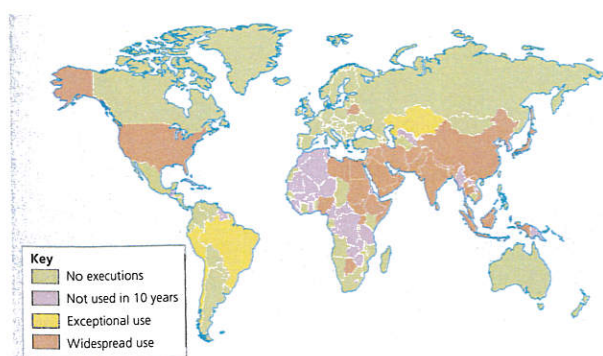
*'Prison chaplains are non-judgemental. We are not there to judge their actions. Loss of freedom is the punishment for the crime and this becomes particularly apparent when they are unable to attend events, whether joyous or sad. That's when reality hits home and makes them aware of the consequences of their actions. We are there to empathise and give them hope for the future.'*

Michael Binstock: Director of Jewish Prison Chaplaincy

## ► The death penalty

The death penalty has been a feature of punishment practices for thousands of years. It has been used by societies across the world to deter crime and to punish the very worst criminal behaviour. Also referred to as capital punishment or execution, the death penalty is still legal in over 80 different countries (although 50 of these countries have not used execution as a punishment in the last ten years). The majority of the countries that retain the death penalty are African or Asian-Pacific nations like China, Afghanistan and Iran. The greatest exception to this is the United States of America. Of the 50 states in America, 31 allow execution in both law and practice for the crimes of murder and treason. Death row, the name given to the area where death penalty convicts reside in prison, has now become a popular feature of film, TV programmes and documentaries.

Methods of execution have changed over the past century as governments look for cheaper but more **humane** ways to end the life of convicts. In America, executions can take the form of lethal injection, electric chair, gas chamber, firing squad or hanging (although in practice lethal injection is most widely used). Other less humane methods still in use include decapitation (North Korea and Saudi Arabia), shooting under anaesthetic (Taiwan) and stoning (Sudan).



Worldwide use of the death penalty

**Humane** showing kindness and compassion.



## Tasks

- 1 Copy and complete the table below. Add five statements that agree with the death penalty and five that disagree.

Agree with the use of the death penalty	Disagree with the use of the death penalty

- 2 Write down what you believe the death penalty is designed to achieve?

## Life in twenty-first-century Britain

The UK Parliament abolished the death penalty in 1969. Although public opinion has at times been in favour of reinstating execution for the worst criminals, all attempts to bring it back have failed. Some of the last people to be executed, including Derek Bentley, who was convicted of being involved in the killing of a policeman, have since received pardons after their death. Essentially this means that they should not have been convicted in the first place.

Last discussed in Parliament in 1998 during the passage of the Human Rights Act, the death penalty has always been hotly debated. The British Social Attitudes survey has recorded popular attitudes to the death penalty since 1983. Since then, the number of those in favour of execution has fallen from 75 per cent to 48 per cent in 2015. The UK is now among the 82 per cent of global nations that do not use the death penalty.

There are a number of key arguments and beliefs linked with the death penalty.

- The death penalty is just state-sanctioned murder.
- There is evidence that innocent people have been executed.
- The death penalty does not deter murderers.
- Only God has the right to end a life.
- Two wrongs do not make a right.
- The state should be a moral force for good.
- Forgiveness is important.
- The death penalty disproportionately affects members of racial, ethnic and religious minorities, as well as those living in poverty.
- Life terms in prison are very expensive – £40,000 per year.
- Some people – such as the criminally insane – cannot be reformed.
- It is the only way that victims can experience closure.
- There has to be an ultimate punishment for the very worst crimes.
- In Britain, life sentences amount to 15 years.
- Execution is the only way to truly protect society from very dangerous murderers and terrorists.