

They are not driven to convert prisoners and prison leavers, but support faith if they ask for it. It was clear to me that they operate on a level of non-judgement, and are some of the few in society who trust the 'untrustworthy', persevering with clients when setbacks occur, and continue in their efforts to help them grow.

Thirdly, there were some clear parallels to what I had found in my previous research that many of client's stories were imbued with experiences of trauma and addiction, and this is something the GMCC take very seriously, drawing upon psychology-based trauma-informed pastoral care through which to provide that additional, yet pivotal layer of support.

In criminology and research on desistance, it is known and argued how someone can change their offending behaviour, but not always with permanence. Sometimes their offending past no longer fits with the person they see themselves as in the present, or who they want to be in the future. However, what is also known is that any efforts to change behaviour and identity will in many cases be determined in their outcome by the society and community they return to - without a sense of belonging, how can these efforts always be maintained?

My PhD thesis revealed, amongst numerous other findings, that having faith helps to strengthen one's sense of self and identity, a connection with God, and a bond with the community. However, paradoxically, it takes real strength in trying times to maintain that faith! This is something that must be supported and nurtured beyond the prison gates; something that the GMCC certainly offer. One of my PhD research participants put it very well when asked about how his journey away from crime and drug addiction is now maintained, in the eighteen months since serving his final sentence:

I'll be honest with you Alex, I still struggle with my faith, it's like, thinking 'is God real? Is he here, is he here?' ... But it's all about faith, and it is hard, it's so hard, to have faith in something we can't see. It's like the wind ... you can't see it but you can feel it. I say church is like a petrol station where I can go get my fill of the Holy Spirit — because I need it ... I ain't going back to my old life.

Some of this memorable quote rings true with my current research with the GMCC - in so many ways that same community that can be found in a place of worship, be it a church, mosque, temple, synagogue, etc., is present on that first floor of the Methodist Central Building, down on Oldham Street, in Manchester's Northern Quarter. Whilst faith may not always lead to God for every prison leaver accessing the GMCC, there is certainly faith that there will be a warm welcome to all; a belief that they are more than the label society puts on them, and ultimately deserving of a life worth living.

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**HMP MANCHESTER; HMP FOREST BANK; HMP BUCKLEY HALL;
HMP & YOI STYAL; HMP YOI THORN CROSS & HMP HINDLEY**
GREATER MANCHESTER COMMUNITY CHAPLAINCY

Prison Prayer letter for May 2026

Who put the 'community' in community chaplaincy?

As an early-career researcher, fresh out of passing my PhD, I was very keen to continue with my research journey investigating the power that faith and spirituality can have on transforming the lives of justice-involved people, and how this supports pathways to desistance from crime. Through the contacts I had already made with the national Community Chaplaincy Association (CCA), in 2025, I had a number of meetings with them about conducting a new piece of research on their behalf, that would seek to study the role that community chaplaincies play in contemporary criminal justice. The CCA set up an introduction with the Greater Manchester Community Chaplaincy (GMCC) and by mid-September 2025, I came to find myself walking through their doors in my first role as a real researcher! This was for my first meeting with their head chaplain, Reggie van Dinter; what struck me immediately was his sheer enthusiasm and dedication to his role within the GMCC, and its wider mission.

Having already researched the religious conversion experience itself, as told through the stories of eleven participants, I explained to him that what I really wanted to investigate now were the people working in these services, which were pivotal to their faith and desistance journey's. This time I wanted to interview both staff, volunteers and clients, to see what support 'looks like' on both sides of the relationship. Reggie was keen for this research to be conducted from the outset, and he would come to be my first interviewee, and we organised a date for the end of the month.

Something strange happened on that day when I was about to enter the GMCC building for this first interview – whilst quickly checking my phone, I very unexpectedly received an email from the BBC, asking if I would be available the following week, to appear on a Radio 4 topical programme called Beyond Belief, presented by Giles Fraser. The show is a long-standing Radio 4 staple that explores questions about religion and belief, and I was being asked to appear on an episode about prison conversions, alongside other panellists: Pastor Mick Fleming, who leads the Church On The Street ministry based in Burnley; psychotherapist Jackie Oglethorpe, who is also Chair of Trustees at the Community Chaplaincy Association; and Suleman Amad, Project Manager on Criminal Justice at Maslaha. I thought to myself, is this a sign? ... Reggie said "yes, it most certainly will be!"

In the time since my first interview with Reggie, I have come to learn a few things about who the GMCC are through speaking to more staff, volunteers and clients. Firstly, despite being one of the longest-running community chaplaincies in the country, it is small, underfunded yet resourceful and desperate to grow, but ultimately in need of government support and new infrastructure. Part of its uniqueness is that it is a central hub in the heart of Manchester, for people to come in from off the streets, and sit in their café and talk to their staff/volunteers, for support or just company. Secondly, the GMCC runs on the unwavering goodwill of their staff and volunteers, and driven firmly by their faith; if someone were to ask what 'walking in faith' looks like, then these people at the GMCC are the poster child!

June 2026

- 1 Pray for the prisoners at Rye Hill as they are being released again after 56 days on recall in prison.
- 2 Pray that the prisoners at Rye Hill will find community and receive all the necessary support in their rehabilitation journey.
- 3 Pray for the Navigating Trauma Course which is starting today. Pray that all of our participants will engage well.
- 4 Pray for the new managing chaplain who has come into place at HMP Manchester.
- 5 Continue to pray for funding to come in, so that our staff can keep their jobs.
- 6 Continue to pray for all of our activities here at the centre. That we will have more people interact with us.
- 7 Pray for prisoners who have found Jesus in prison, that they will also find a good biblical church to visit.
Pray for R, our chaplain who has recently moved into his own house. Pray that he and his wife will settle in well.
- 9 Pray for all our participants that do the course, that God will heal their hearts and wounds of trauma.
- 10 Pray for D, our manager who is working hard on getting us more funding in to continue doing our work.
- 11 Pray for E, who is still in the process of receiving certain news.
- 12 Pray for R, our chaplain, who will be going into Buckley Hall soon to discuss the way forward in supporting chaplaincy team there.
- 13 Pray for D, one of clients, that he gets a better accommodation to move forward with his life.
- 14 Pray for A, one of our other clients, that he may continue to build stability in his life.
- 15 Pray for K, one of our clients, that he will grow more in his relationship with God.
- 16 Pray for continued connection with other organisations, so we can work together to support ex-offenders.

June 2026

- 17 Pray for our continued endeavours to see clients positively re-integrate into society.
- 18 Pray for all staff shortages in prison chaplaincy teams.
- 19 Pray for K, one of our clients, who has been struggling with his health over the past few months.
- 20 Pray for our Tuesday Chapel Service as this is our way of discipling our people besides some of other activities.
- 21 Pray for more open doors to work with prisons in Greater Manchester.
- 22 Pray for all the organisations we already work together with to support our clients and future clients.
- 23 Pray for S, one of our guests, whom we are trying to get into accommodation.
- 24 Pray for the families of prisoners across Greater Manchester.
- 25 Pray for all of our volunteers here at GMCC, as they continue to support our clients.
- 26 Pray for our staff here at GMCC, especially for all of their families.
- 27 Pray for all the trustees involved in GMCC.
- 28 Pray for prisoners who are finding their faith in Christ through the ongoing work of the Christian chaplains.
- 29 Pray for R, our chaplain, who is continuing to engage with prisons across Greater Manchester.
- 30 Pray for the final leg of our Navigating Trauma Course as the participants will finish in a few weeks.
- 31 Pray for all of the prison services across the country.