

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Reconciliation Ministry team have launched a “transformative” course for prisons that explores conflict, forgiveness and reconciliation.

The course is based on *Difference*, a five-session course that explores following Jesus in a complex and divided world, navigating disagreement, practising forgiveness, and crossing divides through everyday encounters.

The new course is being launched this week at a national training event for Anglican prison chaplains.

The *Difference* team have worked closely with prison chaplains who have run the course and leaders in prison ministry, ensuring that both those who run it and those who participate are able to get the most out of it. The course has been piloted in a prisons context and has had a transformative impact on the lives of those who have taken part, enabling prison chaplaincy groups to consider new possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation in relationships that had previously felt like a lost cause. One participant commented that the course felt like the closest thing to rehabilitation that he had experienced in prison.

Each session includes films, scripture reading, prayer, discussion, and interactive exercises that guide participants on a journey towards better connections and healed relationships.

The course is based on three habits – being curious, being present, and reimagining – which, if practised, help participants encounter others well and see society transformed.

Training for running the *Difference* course in prisons is being offered to attendees at an Anglican prison chaplaincy training event this week, with over 100 chaplains in attendance. Prison chaplains of any denomination can also get trained online through the *Difference* website.

Speaking about the new resource, Archbishop Justin Welby said: “I am delighted to have launched this new version of the Difference course for prisons. Prison chaplains play a crucial role in the life of our Church and the rehabilitation and discipleship of prisoners. It is a privilege to serve their ministry through the *Difference* course.

The way we treat people in prisons is a key measure of our civilisation as a society. In providing the Difference course, we want to say wholeheartedly 'you matter'. It is our hope that the course equips prisoners with new habits that enable the reconciliation made available through Jesus Christ to flow out of them into their wider relationships. Having visited a prison whilst the course is being run, I have seen first-hand its potential for creating new possibilities of forgiveness, dialogue and reconciliation.”

The Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester and Anglican Bishop for HM Prisons in England and Wales, has added her support for the Difference course: “Reconciliation is at the heart of God's love, and followers of Jesus Christ are called to join in with God's mission of _____

reconciliation. The Difference course provides an opportunity to explore what it means to live reconciliation amid the struggles and joys of our everyday lives, and this contextualised course for prisons will enable people to explore new possibilities for transformation in relationships with other people, God and Self amid the messiness of life.”

A prison chaplain who ran the Difference course said: “For us as hosts, it’s very exciting when you see things start to click with people as the course goes on. Recently a participant spoke about a person in his life who he fought with every time he saw him, often leading to violence. He wanted to do things differently, but he just didn’t know how.

“As the course went on, he started to put into practice the habit of being curious, asking questions that would allow him to find out more about this other person’s life and why the situation was the way that it was. It was beautiful to see him think about this stuff and process it between the sessions, and we’re really hopeful that he’ll be able to have a different relationship with this person going forward.”

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