

# Dochas Chaplain's Report

IN ACCORDANCE WITH RULE 119 (1) OF THE IRISH PRISON RULES  
2007, WE HEREBY SUBMIT THE REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2019.

DOCHAS CHAPLAINCY SERVICE

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## Prelude

### **You Were My Joy and My Life**

*You were my joy and my life,  
My everything, my all  
You were an answer to prayer  
I loved you so much  
I had to give you away  
You weren't a toy  
I would have broken you*

*You were my sunshine*

*After you were gone  
I lived in perpetual darkness.  
I became an underground animal  
Never seeking the sun*

*You are my sun*

B.P.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The Dochas Vision Statement is as follows:

*We are a community which embraces peoples' respect and dignity. We encourage personal growth and development in a caring and safe environment. We are committed to addressing the needs of each person in a healing and holistic way. We actively promote interaction with the wider community.*

Built in 1999, the Dochas Centre is a medium-security remand centre and place of detention that was designed to house 85 women. Later the infrastructure was upgraded to provide for a capacity of 105. It serves the women of Ireland from all courts outside the Munster area.

Over the course of 2019, the numbers of women in custody on any given day have varied between 130 and 150, with an average of 0-1 children in situ. During the worst periods of overcrowding, up to 5 women at once were sharing a makeshift bedroom, with access to a small shower/toilet unit between them.

As per the Director of Operations, the bed capacity of the prison at the time of writing is stated to be 146, and although fire regulations have been updated and extra beds obtained, no new infrastructural changes have been implemented. Based on the original structure and vision for the prison, in 2019 it operated typically at between 123% and 142% of its original capacity of 105. It has the highest ever number of in-cell hours for its prisoners since its inception.

## Role and Structure of Chaplaincy

Chaplains provide a non-judgemental, supportive outreach to those in custody and their families. We are also a pastoral presence and support for staff on duty in the Dochas Centre. Our support to the

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<sup>1</sup> Sue Stauffacher, *Poetry of Women Prisoners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Criminal Justice Chaplaincy, 2013), 5.

women, families and staff is held with respect and confidentiality. Chaplains are present at times of crisis, illness and bereavement, and work confidentially within the prison system to sustain the trust inherent in our role. Chaplaincy adopts a person-centred methodology with a focus on the emotional, spiritual, and pastoral needs of the person. It functions within a multi-disciplinary team of service providers, working collaboratively to provide a holistic approach to the well-being and flourishing of inmates.

Following three years of vacancy filled by a locum, in May 2019 a permanent chaplain was appointed to Dochas.

Dochas has one full time chaplain who holds all responsibility for the service. Due to the high numbers and the complex, high-tariff nature of the concerns relating to the women, the allocation of at least another 0.5 chaplain posts would be greatly welcomed.

In 2019 there were two retired chaplains offering approximately 40-50 hours of pastoral care work each per month. Even with this outstanding level of voluntary support, the service remains under-resourced. The provision of structured activities and group work proves very challenging under the burden of pastoral concerns.

The role of the chaplain in Dochas is multi-faceted. Tasks include, but are not limited to:

- Visiting daily committals;
- Regular pastoral care throughout the prison, including therapeutic listening;
- Advocacy around prisoner welfare;
- Spiritual support, ensuring access to religious literature and artefacts, and access to multi-faith community volunteers and leaders;
- Spiritual direction;
- Meditation provision;
- Bible study provision;
- Creating spaces within the prison for stillness, reflection and prayer;
- Bereavement support (immediate crisis and ongoing aftermath);
- Preparing and leading religious services, and ensuring the provision of weekly worship, and arranging timely payment for presiders;
- Facilitating a full team of Chaplaincy volunteers, students, and befrienders;
- Weekly choir practice and preparation for special events;
- Linking with family and liaising with social workers, particularly around access to children;
- Family reconciliation and reunification where appropriate;
- Arranging neutral venue visits;
- Visiting prisoners in hospital;
- Visiting the families of prisoners, where appropriate;
- Assisting families with advice about prison life and practical concerns;
- Follow-up and aftercare with released prisoners;
- Provision of shadowing and training opportunities to Chaplaincy students.

## Chaplaincy Annual Review

May

In May the Chaplaincy service interviewed and appointed two faith-community volunteers: a female support worker from the Dublin mosque and a minister from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Provisions and support were put in place to assist Muslim women in engaging in prayer and fasting for Ramadan.

June

In June the Chaplaincy service hosted the [REDACTED], the policy centre [REDACTED] with the aim of commencing a research project around the area of trafficked women.

A link was also formed with [REDACTED], who expressed an interest in providing ongoing supports to the women of Dochas.

July

After three years of vacancy, an interim national head chaplain was appointed. This was very much to be welcomed.

The Chaplaincy service in Dochas commenced a series of meditation sessions as part of the summer school programme. This was well attended.

August

In August the Chaplaincy service was invited to address the uniformed staff in Dochas in two sessions on the history, function and role of Chaplaincy.

Meditation sessions for the women continued throughout this month.

Due to the untimely death of a young woman who had been a former Dochas prisoner, the Chaplaincy service was involved in providing external supports to the prisoner's family.

September

Two Occupational Therapy students from Trinity College Dublin were interviewed and appointed as volunteer befrienders with some of the particularly vulnerable prisoners, in a placement to stretch until April 2020.

Also in this month, the Dochas chaplain was invited to record five segments for "A Living Word" on RTE radio 1, to celebrate Prisons Week. The theme was "What does freedom mean to you?"

In the September/October period there were an inordinately high number of close bereavements including the deaths of parents, siblings, and partners of Dochas women, which brought with it a significant number of practical and pastoral challenges.

October

A critical incident occurred in the Dochas Centre that ultimately resulted in the death of a vulnerable young woman. The Chaplaincy service provided supports to those affected by this event.

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, four chaplains including the Dochas chaplain attended the excellent annual conference of the Irish Hospice Foundation which took place in Dublin Castle.

In the same month a student of Loreto College came on board for two days of Chaplaincy shadowing, followed by a befriending placement which extended to January 2020.

November

In November the most significant Chaplaincy event was our All Souls Evening, a multi-denominational service of remembrance held in the Dochas gym. The Dochas Women's Choir and the professional choir [REDACTED] provided high quality musical accompaniment to a service

of embodied liturgy. Over 100 Dochas women were in attendance, as well as approximately 40 guests and volunteers.

Also in November, the location of the Chaplaincy office within the prison was moved from the governor's corridor to the healthcare building.

December

During this month the Chaplaincy worked with the [REDACTED] to provide a Christmas present to every woman in Dochas. 160 parcels were prepared, each containing a card, a custom calendar, a pair of fluffy socks and a large bar of chocolate.

Christmas day worship was a large celebration held in the gym with approximately 85 women in attendance.

## Issues Arising

Treatment of Female Prisoners

Towards the end of 2019 significant changes were made to the structure of the day in Dochas.

Pre-regime change in 2019, for six of the Dochas houses (standard houses), unlock hours ran from 08:20 – 19:30. This represented a daily unlock time of 11 hours and 10 minutes. In the remaining four houses (privileged houses), unlock hours ran from 08:10 – 19:30 which amounts to 11 hours and 20 minutes. However while these four privileged houses had their front doors locked at 19:30, the women were free to move within the house 24 hours per day and were not locked into their rooms at any time.

Post-regime change in 2019, the six standard houses were unlocked from 08:15 – 08:30, from 09:15 – 12:00, from 14:10 – 16:30 and from 17:15 – 19:30, totalling 7 hours and 35 minutes. For the women in standard houses, this represents a 32% drop in out of cell time. All four privileged houses are free to move around their own houses, but with the front door locked, during the day-time lock-back periods. Three of the privileged houses have retained their room unlock through the night time period, but one privileged house now has night-time room lock-in (19:30 – 08:15), as do all standard houses.

This reduction in freedoms coincided with the worst ever period of overcrowding. It would seem to the Chaplaincy service that an appropriate response to overcrowding would be an increase, not a decrease, in out of cell time.

This change brings the women's regime in line with that of the men's prisons. However, treating women the same as men does not bring about gender equality. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights states the following: "the concept of equality means much more than treating all persons in the same way. Equal treatment of persons in unequal situations will operate to perpetuate rather than eradicate injustice."<sup>2</sup>

While comprehensive research around the prevalence of mental illness amongst female prisoners in Ireland has not been conducted, a very significant number of Dochas women are in receipt of

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<sup>2</sup> UNOCHR, "Discrimination against Women: The Convention and the Committee," Factsheet 22 (Geneva: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), 1, accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet22en.pdf>.

psychiatric medications<sup>3</sup>. Rule 41 of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) states the following:

The gender-sensitive risk assessment and classification of prisoners shall: (a) Take into account the generally lower risk posed by women prisoners to others, as well as the particularly harmful effects that high-security measures and increased levels of isolation can have on women prisoners; ...

(d) Ensure that those with mental health-care needs are housed in accommodation which is not restrictive, and at the lowest possible security level, and receive appropriate treatment, rather than being placed in higher security level facilities solely due to their mental health problems.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike male prisoners, Irish female prisoners serving long and life sentences cannot avail of the open prison setting. This in itself is a blatant discrimination in lack of national service provision. Therefore, women serving life find themselves within a restrictive regime indefinitely. We can only guess at the long-term negative effects that this may have, and this practice is distinctly at odds with the vision statement of Dochas to address the needs of each person in a healing and holistic way. Rule 45 states this:

Prison authorities shall utilize options such as home leave, open prisons, halfway houses and community-based programmes and services to the maximum possible extent for women prisoners, to ease their transition from prison to liberty, to reduce stigma and to re-establish their contact with their families at the earliest possible stage.<sup>5</sup>

Women are being sent to prison in far higher numbers than ever before.<sup>6</sup> This would suggest that the process of imprisonment as it currently stands in Ireland is not effective for female prisoners. While the prison authorities cannot control the numbers referred here by the courts, nor impact the condition in which they arrive, we can work collaboratively to ensure that women return to their communities safer than when they were committed. At present the Chaplaincy service is not convinced that we are achieving this, and additional punitive approaches have been shown to fail as deterrents.<sup>7</sup>

In 2011, in *Standards for the Inspection of Prisons in Ireland - Women Prisoners' Supplement*, Judge Michael Reilly noted:

2.6 International research shows that in general women prisoners have complex physical and mental needs. A significant number of these prisoners will have suffered some form of abuse; be it of a physical, mental or sexual nature. Many women prisoners have addiction problems. International studies show that women prisoners are more likely to self-harm than male prisoners. A significant characteristic of the women's prison population is that many women prisoners are mothers of children under 18 years of age. A study in the United Kingdom illustrated that 66% of women in prison were mothers and one third of them were the sole

<sup>3</sup> A commitment has been undertaken by prison management to obtain an exact figure.

<sup>4</sup> UNODC, "The Bangkok Rules," A/RES/65/229 §41 (2011), 15, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Bangkok\\_Rules\\_ENG\\_22032015.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Bangkok_Rules_ENG_22032015.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> UNODC, The Bangkok Rules, §45, 16.

<sup>6</sup> "In 2018, there were 1,005 female committals, compared to 155 female committals in 1999." IPRT, "Women in Detention | Irish Penal Reform Trust," Women in Detention, 2019, <https://www.iprt.ie/women-offenders/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Increasing the severity of punishment does little to deter crime." U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, "Five Things About Deterrence" (Washington DC: National Institute of Justice, 2016), 2.

carers of minor children before being imprisoned. Further research showed that only 5% of children were cared for in their home when their mother was sent to prison but the majority of children continue to be cared for in the home when a father is imprisoned.

2.7 International research suggests that the effects of imprisoning women are different to the effects of imprisoning men. International research on women in prison identifies that many women lose their homes within the first few weeks of being imprisoned and in many cases their children are more likely to be placed in care.<sup>8</sup>

Given the vulnerability of the women in custody, coupled with the awareness of the negative community ripples and effects – particularly on children – of women’s imprisonment, it is imperative that we do much more to support pro-social activities and create as normal an environment as possible within the prison. A more restrictive regime has a knock-on effect throughout the services in the prison and their ability to meet the needs of the women, not to mention the difficulties faced by volunteers in accessing the prison.

It is noteworthy that a range of services are made available to the women of Dochas for their wellbeing and rehabilitation. Among these are comprehensive healthcare services, addiction counselling, in-reach from the Rape Crisis Centre, in-reach from the Central Mental Hospital, IASIO and resettlement services and access to numerous diversion and work placement programmes. This is not an exhaustive list and I acknowledge the very significant work done to allow women to progress within their sentences in Dochas.

However the Dochas Chaplaincy service is calling for a review to the restrictive measures that have been put in place, subject to a multidisciplinary discussion of how we can best work toward the flourishing of our inmates.

Unfair Treatment, Favouritism and Complaints Procedures

### **If I Were a Song**

If I were a song, I'd be clear and loud  
 I'd throw my words in the middle of a crowd.  
 I'd roar like thunder at each rising wrong,  
 And scream like a siren at any injustice.  
 I'd drum like the rain on stubbornness,  
 And stab like lightning at vanities.  
 If I were a song I would be firm,  
 But most important of all,  
 I would be heard.

G.C.<sup>9</sup>

Over the course of 2019, a number of women approached the Chaplaincy service to discuss individual incidents of unfair treatment by staff. These complaints included verbal abuse, xenophobic remarks, threatening language and pointed exclusion/favouritism of others. In all cases these incidents caused

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Reilly, “Standards for the Inspection of Prisons in Ireland - Women Prisoners’ Supplement” (Dublin: Inspector of Prisons, 2011), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Glenda Cooper, et al, “Voices from Within: The Poetry of Women in Prison.” *The Radical Teacher* no. 6 (1977): 47.



emotional upset and distress, often triggering memories of mistreatment in other contexts, creating a re-traumatising effect.

It is important to note that the vast majority of uniformed staff provide a very high level of support and care to prisoners. These incidents constitute a small number, but they cannot be ignored.

In most cases the women involved did not feel safe to make complaints in writing to the Governor for fear of further penalisation from the staff involved.

It is essential that a culture be fostered within the prison community whereby a vulnerable voice can be heard. Our complaints procedures must remain robust and transparent, but it is also important that ongoing training and support is offered to uniformed staff in appropriately managing their very challenging work environment. The women are here as punishment: they are not here to be punished, and it is crucial that this awareness be at the forefront of our work lest we leave prisoners further traumatised than when they arrived.

#### Prisoner Poverty

The prison community reflects the wider community and as such it is made up of haves and have-nots. Many women come to us without family support and find themselves deeply embarrassed with the sheer visibility of their poverty. Attempts are made within the prison to alleviate this; for example in 2019 the women of Dochas each received a Christmas care package of toiletries from the Dochas governors. This was warmly and gratefully received by the women.

Prison clothing is perfectly adequate to provide cover and warmth, but it also creates intense stigma. Poverty in all contexts is relative. Women arriving receive one full outfit of clothing and may find themselves wearing that same kit for weeks. [REDACTED] work to alleviate this poverty but are limited in what they can do.

I wish to propose a change in the provision of prison clothing to women; namely that a store of basic but *varied* leggings, t-shirts, sweatshirts and footwear would be acquired so that the women are not subjected to the shame of wearing identical tracksuits. This shame is deeply felt and exacerbated by the taunts and bullying of peers that accompanies wearing this clothing.

Women who do not have their own clothing may struggle to attend school and other pro-social activities as they try to remain unseen. This in turn impacts their ability to engage in the incentivised regime and progress within their sentence. As such, while the provision of prison clothing as it stands is important and appreciated, I believe that the current provision is insufficient to meet the needs of our prison community and is damaging to their dignity.

#### Prison Visiting Difficulties

Families of prisoners report that attempting to book visits by phone has become close to impossible. The level of distress that this creates amongst both the women and their loved ones, particularly children, cannot be underestimated. The Chaplaincy service is inundated with phone calls from families at their wits' end who have been ringing for days to try to book a visit without success on a regular basis. Distress amongst older parents and grandparents of prisoners is particularly high as online bookings are not a realistic option for them.

The booking of visits for the Dochas centre is the remit of Mountjoy male prison, and therefore the difficulties with this service lie there. It is noted that staff absenteeism and being pulled from their normal duties to court and hospital escorts has a detrimental effect on staffing figures. Adequate staff need to be designated to answer the phones in the booking office as a matter of priority.

### Tuck Shop

The women often complain of the high prices of tuck-shop items. This is inconsistent with their meagre means and ought to be addressed.

Secondly, the women are unable to acquire greetings cards from the shop. When the school is open, they have the facility to make home-made cards but during holidays this is not possible. The women are dependent on the Chaplaincy service to provide greetings cards which we do, and in vast numbers. Letter-writing is challenging for many with literacy issues and the ability to purchase cards in the tuck shop would meet a deeply felt need that aids communication with families, particularly children.

### Staff Shortages

Throughout 2019 the ramifications of staff shortages have been felt in a wide number of areas, not limited to but including:

- The cancellation of neutral venue visits at the last moment;
- The inability to escort a prisoner to a care facility to visit a dying relative;
- The inability to escort a bereaved prisoner to a funeral home to view the remains of a loved one;
- No or slow responses to attempts to book family visits;
- School closures;
- Increased stress and pressure experienced by staff coping with an overcrowded environment and large work-loads.

It is imperative that staff shortages be addressed and Dochas be adequately staffed, particularly towards the end of each quarter, in order for equitable treatment of prisoners and a fair and manageable work environment for officers. The school is a crucial element of prison life and its regular closure is a point of frustration and disappointment for students and teachers alike.

It is also worth highlighting that Dochas has no PASOs or governor's secretaries. This adds significantly to the workloads of our ACOs, Chiefs and Governors.

### Inadequate Worship Space

Weekly worship takes place in a space (the Oratory) that can hold approximately 25 women, or typically less than 20% of the prison population. Women who find crowded spaces difficult tend to avoid attending worship, despite their faith convictions. Officers also do not feel comfortable to attend religious services, preferring to offer the limited seating to prisoners. A more spacious venue for worship needs to be provided so that all members of the Dochas community feel free to attend worship services. Weekly worship is facilitated by a number of supportive presiders, as well as regular liturgical and musical volunteers. As such communal worship in Dochas is a robustly pro-social activity that provides contact with outside communities that should be encouraged by means of the provision of more physical space.

The gym is kindly made available by the prison management for special Chaplaincy events. However, the use of the gym requires significant time and manpower to be set up and taken down and the space itself does not lend itself easily to stillness and reflection.

### Restorative Justice

In 2009, the National Commission on Restorative Justice published the following statement: "On the basis of its considerations, the Commission is unanimous in its recommendation to the Minister for

Justice, Equality and Law Reform that a restorative perspective be introduced nationally into the Irish criminal justice system.”<sup>10</sup>

As chaplains, we are committed to the values and practices of restorative justice that allow for the rehabilitation of offenders and the restoration of harmed parties. Such values are coherent with the Christian practices of repentance and forgiveness. It is with some disappointment therefore that I note the lack of restorative justice practices here in Dochas in spite of substantial fledgling efforts in the past. I would be keen to see restorative justice training and practices become a key focus of prison life once more, offering the possibility of enormous benefit not just to inmates, but to staff, victims, families and the wider community, with the potential to reduce rates of recidivism amongst participants from 73% to 38%.<sup>11</sup> This makes for safer communities and safer prisons.

## Aims for 2020

It is my hope that in addition to providing our usual supports to the women, the Dochas Chaplaincy service will establish a well-resourced bereavement support group that can run concurrently throughout the year for those who lose loved ones while in custody. Bereavement in custody is an enormously difficult experience and it is imperative that the grieving of the prisoner is acknowledged in a substantial way so as to prevent untold turmoil upon release.

## Acknowledgments

The vitality of the Chaplaincy service in Dochas is bolstered, sustained and diversified by our large team of committed retired chaplains, volunteers, community religious leaders and befrienders. Their contribution to the quality of life of the women here cannot be underestimated and to this cohort I am intensely grateful. Finally, the work of the chaplains is only ever made possible by the commitment, collaboration and professionalism of uniformed staff, management, healthcare team and our other talented service providers. Without these agents we can achieve nothing and I am extremely grateful to my Dochas colleagues for their unflagging support, good humour, humane responses to painful realities, and commitment to a safer prison community and ultimately, a safer Ireland. Thank you for your referrals, wisdom, compassion, cups of coffee and companionship in 2019.

**Dochas Chaplaincy Service**

**2019**

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Martin et al., “National Commission on Restorative Justice: Final Report” (Dublin: Department of Justice, 2009), 3, <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/NCRJ%20Final%20Report.pdf/Files/NCRJ%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Martin et al., 51.