

U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Prisons

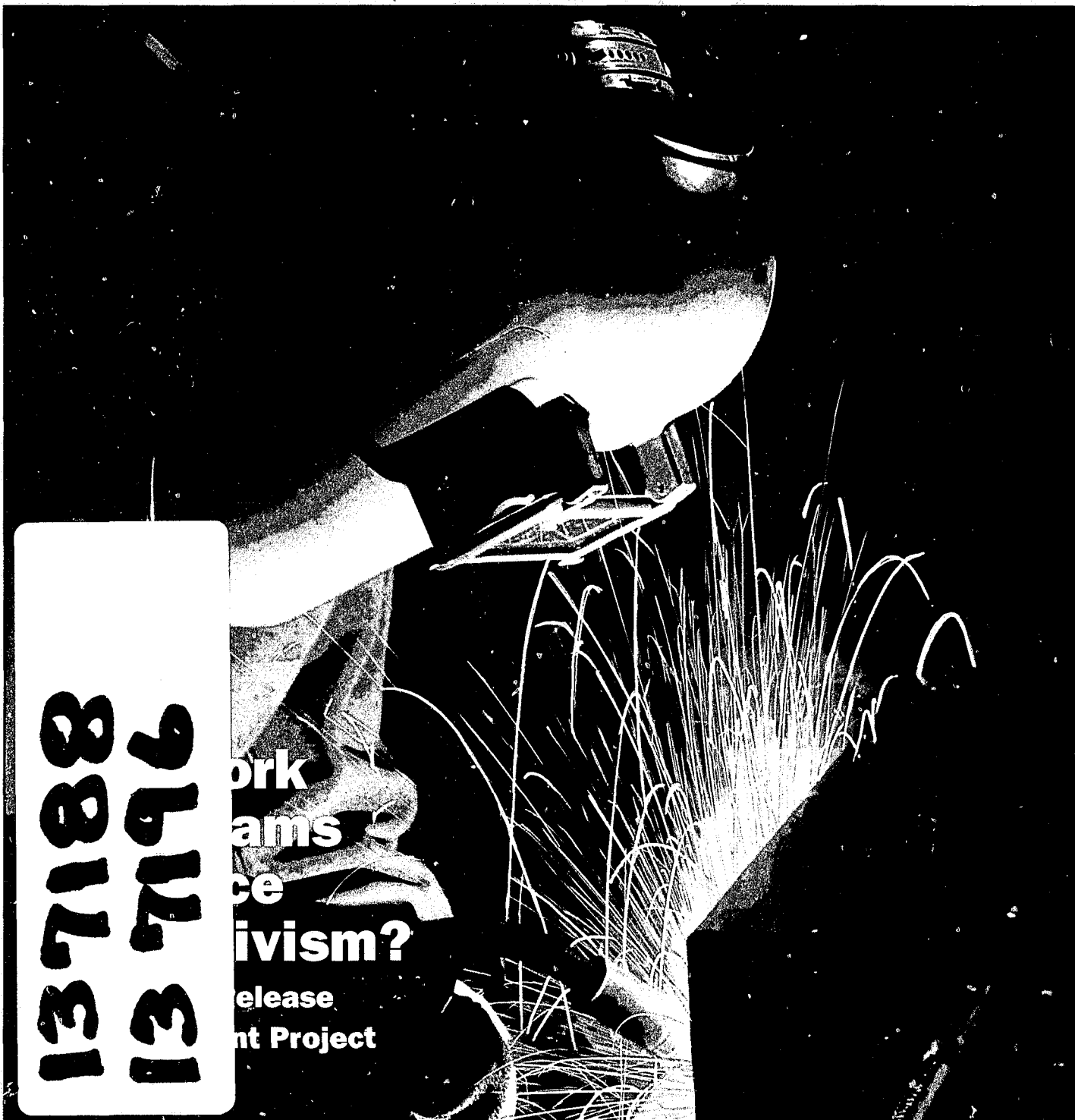


Federal Prisons

JOURNAL

VOL. 2, NO. 4

WINTER 1992



13 7188
13 7196

ork
ams
ce
ivism?
elease
nt Project

137188-
137196

**U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice**

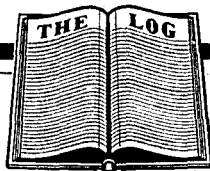
This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this ~~copyrighted~~ material has been granted by

Public Domain/Federal Bureau of
Prisons/US Dept. of Justice

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the ~~copyright~~ owner.



Federal Prison Chaplains: Satisfied in Ministry but Often Undervalued

Bruce D. Stout and Todd R. Clear

Since the first penitentiary was built, religion has played a principal role in the efforts of correctional professionals to reform offenders. In fact, the word "penitentiary" is derived from "penitence," meaning "regret for wrongdoing or sinning." Penitentiaries were originally seen by some as places where offenders could go to atone for their sins. Throughout penal history, religion continued to play an important role, as it does today, and has probably been employed more frequently than any other type of rehabilitative intervention. Yet, despite the fact that prisons (as we now more commonly call penitentiaries) and religion are inexorably intertwined, we know little about the role religion plays in prisons.

In many respects our sociological understanding of the role of the prison chaplain is as limited as our understanding of religion in prisons generally. The chaplain's role is a unique one; the various responsibilities prison chaplains must assume present inherent dilemmas: he or she is a professional representative of the administration and also a confidant, teacher, and advisor to inmates. Often, the chaplain is a liaison between inmates and the prison administration. Most unusually—from the perspective of ministering—the prison chaplain's entire congregation is always at his or her doorstep, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. These circumstances pose unusual challenges for chaplains.

In an effort to investigate the relationship between religion and prisons in some detail, a team of researchers from Rutgers University, with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts, have begun a four-part, multistate research project to examine key issues in the relationship.

As a component of this project, a survey was distributed to all Federal Bureau of Prisons chaplains in attendance at the June 1990 national meeting of Bureau chaplains in Phoenix, Arizona. The survey asked questions about motivations for becoming involved in prison ministry, job satisfaction, working relationships, and other aspects of the chaplains' feelings and work. This article briefly summarizes the responses of the 113 Federal Bureau of Prisons chaplains who completed the survey.*

The chaplains

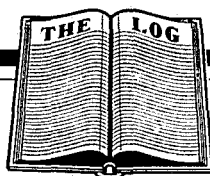
The majority of respondents were white (62 percent) males (89 percent) between the ages of 30 and 54 (80 percent). Only one chaplain was younger than 30. Most nonwhite respondents were black (17 percent), although 6 percent identified them-

*Not all Bureau chaplains were in attendance at the 1990 meeting and not all in attendance completed the survey. To what extent those who did complete the survey are representative of the entire Bureau chaplaincy is not known.



selves as Hispanic and 5 percent as "other." One-half of the respondents were married; another one-third (35 percent) were single and celibate. Not surprisingly, given the nature of seminary training and the fact that 79 percent of the group had attended a seminary, nearly all (93 percent) of the respondents had received some form of graduate education.

Although the chaplains represented 18 faiths, a large number (37 percent) were Catholic. Other frequently represented faiths included Baptist (16 percent) and Assemblies of God (9 percent). Four percent were Muslim. Over one half (52 percent) had been chaplains for 11 or more years. For those with fewer than 11 years of experience, 42 percent had between 1 and 5 years' chaplaincy experience. Many had spent less time as Bureau of Prisons chaplains than in general pastoral experience; all but two of the



responding chaplains had worked in other religious assignments prior to joining the Bureau. All but 11 (10 percent), however, had 1 or more years' experience as Bureau chaplains; the average length of service in the Bureau was 6.1 years.

Reasons for entering prison ministry

We listed eight reasons for becoming involved in a prison ministry and asked the chaplains to rate how important each reason was to their own personal decision to become a prison chaplain. The responses indicated that personal, religious, and pragmatic concerns were important. More than 9 out of every 10 (93 percent) indicated that "job fit my personality" was an "important" or "very important" reason for their involvement in prison ministry. An almost equal number (90 percent) indicated being "'called' to work with prisoners" was "important" or "very important." On the practical side, two-thirds (66 percent) indicated that the "good career opportunity" presented by a prison ministry was either "important" or "very important" to their decision.

Feelings about the work

The work of a prison chaplain was valued by nearly all who responded to the survey: 97 percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "The job I do is very important." The chaplains' self-ratings of their work were also positive: 96 percent indicated that they felt their ministry was "successful with inmates," and 88 percent indicated that their ministry was "successful with staff."

Given those feelings, it is not surprising that the chaplains appear to enjoy

high levels of job satisfaction. In fact, 8 out of every 10 either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I would rather be a chaplain than any



other job I can think of." Similarly, 89 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "I seldom get a sense of satisfaction from my work," and 93 percent indicated that "my work helps give my life meaning."

Yet, despite self-perceptions of their work as important and successful, the chaplains were not as likely to report that they perceived that others viewed their work as positively. More than one out of every four (27 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "The job I do is not valued much by those around me." An additional 11 percent were "undecided" about the statement.

Relationships to religious institutions

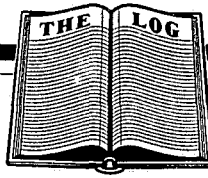
The chaplains reported ambivalence in their relationships to their religious denominations. While more than two-thirds (70 percent) indicated that they "sometimes" or "often" "feel integrated in the spiritual community" of their

faiths, more than one-half (51 percent) also indicated that they "sometimes" or "often" "feel isolated from [their] chosen religious community." Simi-

larly, while nearly two-thirds (61 percent) "often" or "sometimes" "feel integrated in the intellectual community" of [their] faith, one-third (34 percent) responded "sometimes" or "often" to the question, "Do you feel you are a second-class citizen among your clergy?"

Prison ministry practice

In terms of the practice of their ministry, the chaplains' responses indicated that, as a group, they were generally comfortable ministering to inmates of faiths other than their own and felt they were effective in doing so. Only 7 percent agreed with the statement, "It troubles me to help prisoners practice religious orientations I do not share." Similarly, only 4 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "It is hard to hold my own religious views in check and help inmates explore their own spirituality." Nearly all (92 percent) either agreed or



strongly agreed with the statement, "I am effective in working with inmates of faiths other than my own."

The chaplains indicated that they put in long hours in their prison ministries—more, at times, than they felt was appropriate. Sixty-four percent indicated that they "often" or "sometimes" work more than 40 hours per week. Nearly 7 out of 10 (69 percent) indicated that they "often" or "sometimes" work more hours than they should.

The chaplains overwhelmingly characterized their working relationships with others favorably. The survey listed six individuals or offices—warden, regional director, Central Office, corrections captain, program director, inmates (generally, and religious inmates specifically), and volunteers—with whom Bureau chaplains must regularly interact. At least 75 percent of the responding chaplains characterized the quality of their working relationships with each as "very good" or "good."

Conclusions

The responses to this survey indicate that Bureau chaplains become involved in prison ministry work for a variety of reasons, including practical assessments of the work as a good career choice. Chaplains tend to feel that their work is important and valuable and also that they perform their jobs well. They report a general sense of comfort in ministering to inmates, including inmates of faiths other than their own, and characterize their professional working relationships positively. Not surprisingly,

given these findings, Bureau chaplains also seem to enjoy very high levels of job satisfaction.

Despite these positive findings, there are indications that difficulties do exist. A troubling percentage of the chaplains indicated that they felt their work was not valued by others. Additionally, chaplains report that their work requires long hours and that they sometimes feel isolated from the mainstream segment of their faiths.

It seems plausible that these problems could be favorably resolved. Efforts to educate other prison staff about the purposes and activities of the prison ministry and to involve volunteers in its work, for instance, could improve the apparent value others attach to the work. Involving community congregations in the prison ministry, or instituting policies that allow Bureau chaplains to increase their involvement in community congregations, could improve the relationships of chaplains and their faiths.

Todd R. Clear, Ph.D., is Professor and Bruce D. Stout, Ph.D., is Research Associate at the School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University.

Editor's note: In November 1991, the Federal Bureau of Prisons sponsored an Issues Forum on programs involving religion and the chaplaincy. A summary of the Forum is available from the Bureau's National Conference Office; call 202-307-1202.

To the Editor:

I just read with interest the article, "Conditions of Confinement Suits," which was published in your Summer 1991 issue.

It appears, unfortunately, that BOP General Counsel Wallace Cheney has inherited the myopic views of his predecessor, Clair Cripe, that consent decrees in prison conditions litigation are terrible "evils" and should be avoided at all costs by prison administrators. I would point out to your readers that a contrary view is held by the former state corrections Directors of California, Utah, Virginia, Texas, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Colorado, Arizona, Maryland, Minnesota, Kansas, Oklahoma and Missouri, as well as the former Chair of the U.S. Parole Commission and the former Director of the National Institute of Corrections. The aforementioned officials all are parties to a friend of the court brief filed in a case currently pending in the Supreme Court of the United States in which they argue that consent decrees are most important for prison officials and that they "contribute to the safety and security of correctional institutions."

I enclose a copy of the *amicus* brief of Allen Breed, et al., and urge you to print the entire brief as an educational service to your readers.

Sincerely,

Alvin J. Bronstein, *Executive Director*
The National Prison Project

Editor's note: In January, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the correctional agency in the case Mr. Bronstein mentions, *Rifo v. Inmates of Suffolk County Jail* (Massachusetts). The Court stated that the "less stringent" standard, rather than the "grievous wrong" standard, will be used in deciding whether institutional reform consent decrees may be modified.

Under the "less stringent" standard, a consent decree can be modified if (1) a significant change in facts makes compliance substantially more onerous; or a change in the law either makes performance of the consent decree illegal, or makes legal what the consent decree was designed to prevent; and (2) the proposed modification is suitably tailored to the changed circumstances.