

Dear Friends,

Commending The Welcome Directory to the Church of England

As we walk together in our shared mission to be and share the Good News of Jesus Christ, we are constantly reminded that as disciples of Christ we are called to live radical hospitality—a hospitality that looks past the labels the world imposes and sees the inherent dignity of every human being.

In my role as Bishop for HM Prisons, I am constantly speaking about a kingdom of God vision which is about the transformation of individuals and communities. This vision keeps in focus the needs and desires of offenders, victims, families and communities, and I am often moved by the stories of individuals seeking a fresh start after leaving custody, particularly after their engagement with the chaplaincy team and volunteers. Yet I am also acutely aware of the "second sentence" many face upon release: the isolation, the stigma, and the profound difficulty of finding a community where they are truly seen, not for their past mistakes, but for their future potential.

This is why I am writing to wholeheartedly encourage your church to register with The Welcome Directory.

The Welcome Directory is such a simple, yet powerful idea, which speaks of the possibility of belonging, discovering restored relationships and an ever-greater openness to the generous love of God. The work of The Welcome Directory is dedicated to helping faith and belief communities become places of genuine welcome and support for prison leavers. By registering, your church isn't just joining a list; you are making a public commitment to being a community that desires to engage with the complexities of reintegration and offers a non-judgmental space for healing.

I realise that our "to-do" lists are often long, and our resources can feel thin. However, this is not just another administrative task. It is a fundamental expression of our call to be a people of reconciliation.

Registering is a straightforward process, but its impact can be beyond all that we imagine. It tells someone who has felt forgotten by society that they are remembered by God - and welcomed by us. I invite you to visit The Welcome Directory website today to learn more, encourage church members to sign up for the Prison Awareness Course, and to speak with your Diocesan Safeguarding Team (or the equivalent in your Christian denomination) to begin your registration. Let us ensure that when a person leaves a prison cell, the first thing they encounter is not a closed door, but an open heart.

With my thanks and prayers for your ministry,

+ Rachel Gloucester:

Lord Bishop of Gloucester, the Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, Anglican Bishop for HM Prisons in England and Wales