

GLOUCESTERSHIRE AREA QUAKER MEETING JOB DESCRIPTION

Title: Quaker Prison Minister at Leyhill Prison

General Context of the Role (Quaker Faith and Practice: 13.44 -13.51):

A Quaker Prison Minister has four tasks; to visit and minister to those in prison who [are Quakers or] have registered themselves as Quakers, to assist the work of the Prison Chaplaincy, to be a Quaker presence in the prison, particularly in relation to staff and to be a channel between the Prison Service and the Area Meeting, keeping Friends aware of prison issues.

In his paper “Theology of Prison Chaplaincy”, Professor Gorrington also mentions four ways [headings] under which the Chaplain operates in a prison; Courtesy — showing respect for all, “even the most wretched and unlovable”, Judgement — not there to judge, Hope — a bearer of hope; often in short supply in prison, especially in a Christian context and Power — “he or she has to speak truth to power”.

The QPM at Leyhill:

The QPM at Leyhill is a member of an ecumenical Chaplaincy team and was a signatory to the ecumenical partnership document. At present the team numbers eight, led, as in all prisons at the moment, by an Anglican. The team meets monthly, on the fourth Wednesday, at 10am for about 2 hours. The depth of involvement in Chaplaincy activities is up to the individual, as is how you choose to exercise your Quakerism. Much depends on how you are perceived, what you feel able to offer, and on how ecumenically minded you, and the other members of the team, are.

As a QPM you will be able to develop your own skills in listening and communicating; learning much more about the prison system and how individuals cope with it. At present those registered as Quakers, or having a tendency that way, meet on a Tuesday evening, 6.30-8.15pm one week and on a Sunday afternoon, 2.30-4pm, the next. Usually the last 15-20 minutes is a time of worship.

The QPM is encouraged to visit the residential units, time permitting.

Experience and qualifications sought:

There are no formal qualifications. Being “of good standing with your faith community” is important. Being a good listener, non-judgemental and having a willingness to explore issues of belief are valuable. Having experience of “normal” life may be sufficient in a situation where normality is unknown. An ability to maintain calmness in the face of indifference, anger or confusion will be valuable.

About Leyhill:

This is a Category D — an open-prison. Do not be misled by the attractive surroundings; it reminds one of the old sanatoria, with attractive gardens, no building more than 2 storeys and no high walls or barbed wire, not even a gate! It contains all the stresses, fears and anxieties of any prison and the same security requirements. The general over-crowding of

the prison system is having its effect on Leyhill. A year ago, August 2001, the number of prisoners was around and often below 300, now it's over 400, with two prefabricated buildings being erected to accommodate a further 80, bringing numbers eventually up to 500, causing a lot of anxiety to both staff and inmates. The number of "lifers" having been steady at 80-90 for a long time is to increase to 150, but there's quite a rapid turnover in short termers. Leyhill is the only open prison that takes sex-offenders.

Rewards and satisfactions of the job:

This comes with a health warning, being QPM at Leyhill is addictive!

Ruth Langley
Approved Nom. Com. 1st Oct 2002