

REACHING OUT

Remember me

In Preparation:

- Download accompanying slide show
- Prepare appendix 1 (Printable cards for slide 11)
- Prepare appendix 2 (Printable cards for slide 12)
- Consider what the follow on from this introduction will be

Slide 1: A call to radical love, A call to merciful love

Slide 2: Who We Are

The St Vincent de Paul Society is dedicated to serving those in need with compassion, generosity, and practical help.

Our mission is simple: we seek out and support anyone in need, whoever they are, wherever they are.

*This October (2025), we mark Prisoners' Week with the theme:
"Jesus looked at him and loved him" (Mark 10:21) — and he looks at you and loves you too.*

Slide 3: The Range of Work the SVP Does.

Our mission: to seek out and support anyone in need.

We help in many ways:

- Supporting people experiencing homelessness
- Visiting the lonely and isolated
- Offering debt advice and practical help
- Supporting prisoners and their families

Slide 4: Why Support Prisoners?

A question we hear: "Why would you work with prisoners?"

Our Vincentian values give us the answer:

- No one is beyond God's love or mercy
- Prison ministry is part of our call to serve those most in need
- We follow the example of St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frédéric Ozanam

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Slide 5: Inspired by Church Leadership

Pope Francis showed how we should reach out with compassion:

- Visited prisoners during the Jubilee Year of Mercy
- Celebrated Mass in prisons
- Washed prisoners' feet on Holy Thursday
- Shared words of dignity and hope, reminding the world no one is defined by their mistakes
- Gave out ice creams as a simple gesture of joy

Pope Leo has given us further examples:

- In June 2025, invited two inmates from a Rome prison to attend his Papal Audience
- Shared words that deeply moved his prison guests
- Received a silver cross handmade by them in prison as a token of gratitude

Slide 6: Bishop Richard Moth

Bishop for Prisons in England and Wales, supporting Catholic prison chaplains across 142 prisons.

He reminds us:

"God always loves us, even when we make wrong choices. Pray to always see God's presence in others, whoever they may be, and reach out with understanding."

Slide 7: Discussion

In your groups (or smaller groups), discuss and answer:

- What is the main purpose of criminal justice and the prison system?
- Why do they exist?
- What do we expect our prisons to do?
- Write your thoughts on post-it notes and add them to the board.

Slide 8: Key purposes of prisons (as outlined by government)

- Public protection – Keep society safe by securely holding those convicted of crimes.
- Punishment – Enforce penalties set by the courts as a consequence of crime.
- Rehabilitation – Help offenders change through education, training, and support to reduce reoffending.
- Deterrence – Discourage crime by showing the consequences of criminal behaviour.

Slide 9: Common Views on Punishment in Prisons

- Many believe prison should focus on punishment
- Offenders "shouldn't have it easy"
- Emphasis on retribution and justice
- Concern that support undermines accountability

But remember: most prisoners will one day return to society.

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Slide 10: Rehabilitation: The Goal Beyond Punishment

- Help prisoners change and not reoffend
- Education, skills, and personal growth are key
- Rehabilitation requires dignity, respect, and hope
- Breaking the cycle reduces harm and protects communities
- If we want those coming out of the justice system to have any chance of change, we must shift our mindset from punishment to rehabilitation – it's the only way to equip people with the tools and skills to live differently.

Slide 11: Examples of Catholic Social Teaching in Action

Hand out cards to groups (a set per group or 1–2 cards per small group/pair).

Give groups 10 minutes to:

- Match their card to a picture on the presentation.
- Answer the questions on their card.

Allow time for each group to:

- Summarise their story or quote.
- Share their reflections with everyone.

Slide 12: Life in Prison

Living in prison isn't easy, conditions aren't ideal, with overcrowding being prominent (you may have seen this on the news). Using the data we have from the government website for 24/25.

Give groups 5 minutes to match the statistic to the statement (Cards provided)

Slide 13: Group feedback

- Which statistics shocked or surprised you most?
- Did any group match them all correctly?

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Slide 14: Challenges and Reflection

- Prisons face complex issues: overcrowding, high costs, human dignity
- Behind the statistics are real people with worth and potential
- We are called to reflect on mercy, justice, and second chances

Key Facts

- 88,000 people in UK prisons — enough to fill Wembley Stadium
- 81,000 will one day be released and aren't in for life.
- 50% find work after release showing many can be a force for good with the right support.
- 25% live in overcrowded conditions
- £6.85 billion a year spent on prisons – enough to buy Buckingham Palace twice

Questions

- Is this money being used for rehabilitation and dignity?
- How do we balance justice with compassion?

Slide 15: How the SVP Supports Prisoners

- Clothes, books, musical instruments
- Funding family visits
- Christmas cards & Easter eggs
- Spiritual accompaniment
- Prison visits

Slide 16: Voices from the Field

Des, SVP Member (North East):

"I've been with the SVP since I was 14... simple acts — Mass, music, a chat about faith or football — build trust and friendship. It keeps me grateful for my blessings and mindful of those with fewer."

Brother Paul, Prison Chaplain:

"Prisoners can't go to church, so church has to come to them."

Their words remind us that prison ministry is not about fixing people, but about presence, friendship, and bringing Christ's love into places often forgotten.

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Slide 17: Potential responses and calls to action.

- Awareness – Intro to prison ministry; reflect on dignity.
- Prayer – Prayer board/book; write intercessions.
- Supporting Families – Craft packs for children; partner with PACT.
- Donations – Toiletries, books, stationery, clothes.
- Education – Workshop on Church & prisoners.
- Reflection – Group sharing; plan ongoing projects.

Slide 18: A closing reflection

Just to finish this time together a short reflection and then the final word and challenge will come from Raihan and Nathan.

The Father's Heart — The Prodigal Son from the perspective of the Father

He came to me one morning — eyes bright, voice steady,
asking for his portion, as if my love was something to be measured out.
And though my heart broke in that quiet way hearts do
when they know they must let go — I opened my hands. I watched him walk away.
The days passed. The seasons turned.
Each sunrise, I scanned the road, each sunset, I whispered his name into the night.
I heard stories. Of coins wasted.
Of wild living, empty nights, silent mornings. And still I waited.
Until the day came! Dust rising on the horizon,
a figure, worn, small, coming home.
Before he could speak shame, before the weight of regret could fall from his lips,
I ran. I ran like a man who had everything to lose and everything to gain.
Bring the robe. The ring. The sandals. Tonight, we celebrate.
Because mercy isn't earned. It's given. Because love waits at the gate... always.
And when my eldest stood apart, wounded by the joy he didn't understand,
I called him close: All I have is yours. But this, this is grace.
Your brother was lost, and now he's found.

And that's the story I keep telling —
to myself,
to my sons,
to the world:
Love waits.
Love runs.
Love welcomes home.

Slide 19: Closing video

A reflection on what happens when we choose to judge in the best possible light in our everyday. Let that be our challenge today.