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SPIRITUAL CARE IN SWEDISH PRISONS: PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES OF SPIRITUAL CAREGIVERS

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on spiritual care and how it is practised and experienced by spiritual caregivers in Swedish prisons. Its goal is to understand how prison conditions of different security classes affect spiritual care practice and what strategies spiritual caregivers use to help prisoners create and maintain their religiosity. The study uses five semi-structured interviews with prison spiritual caregivers from different religious traditions in various Swedish regions. To understand their experiences and practices, the concept of lived religion is applied. Analysis shows that the prison context strongly influences spiritual care practices, especially isolation and strict rules of behaviour and interpersonal interaction. Usually, spiritual care is provided through individual and group conversations. Religious rituals, services, and reading of religious texts occur to a lesser extent. However, spiritual care practices often transcend religious boundaries and have a transformative role in inmates' lives.

KEYWORDS

spiritual care, prison, spiritual caregivers, practice, experience, Sweden, lived religion

In Swedish prisons, spiritual care is available to all inmates regardless of religious affiliation. This type of care addresses and seeks to meet existential and spiritual needs and challenges in connection with illness and crisis, and it is provided by spiritual caregivers (Hvidt et al., 2020). It is organised by the ecumenical organisation Sweden's Christen Council (*Sveriges kristna råd*), which connects the churches and other Christian religious denominations, on the one hand, and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (*Kriminalvården*), on the other (Sveriges kristna råd 2023). Similarly, the Swedish Muslim Council (*Sveriges muslimska råd*) is in charge of the spiritual care of Muslims.

This study focuses on spiritual care and how it is practised and experienced by spiritual caregivers in Swedish prisons. It aims to understand how conditions in prisons of different security classes affect spiritual care practice and what strategies spiritual caregivers use to help inmates create and maintain

their religiosity. Therefore, the study focuses on the experiences and practices of spiritual caregivers who present different religious traditions. The concept of lived religion (e.g., McGuire 2008; Ammerman 2014) is used to analyse these experiences and practices as it views religion as a broader phenomenon beyond proscribed arrangements and patterns (Ensted & Plank 2018).

Spiritual Care in Swedish Prison and Probation Service

In Sweden, the connection between church and prisons has a centuries-long tradition. The rules for the spiritual care of inmates were laid down in 1571. However, it was with the establishment of the cell system in prison, almost 300 years later, that a foundation for individual spiritual care was built (Riktlinjer för kyrkornas arbete inom häkten och anstalter 2015: 3). This was followed by an increased role of priests in prison reflected in providing individual spiritual care, carrying out Sunday services and compulsory Christian education, but also taking responsibility for social issues and inviting associations to the prison to help inmates build new relationships before returning to society. Spiritual care and other religious activities were linked to the dominant state Lutheran church (*Svenska kyrkan*). During the 20th century, spiritual care in prisons declined due to increased secularisation and an intense debate about the place of religion in the public sphere. The prison reform in 1945 minimised the possibilities for individual spiritual care by abolishing the cell system and introducing the prison community. The introduction of the Freedom of Religion Act (*Religionsfrihetslag 1951*: 680) in 1951 allowed abstaining from religion, on the one hand, and the freedom to establish a religious community other than the Church of Sweden, on the other. With intense immigration, the Swedish religious landscape changed, which led to the prison spiritual care becoming increasingly criticised. A thorough reorganisation was done to achieve more outstanding balance and equality between the traditionally dominant Church of Sweden and other churches. Religious committees responsible for the organisation of spiritual care were given an ecumenical orientation, and since then, religious communities have strived to strengthen their activities in prisons.

In 2022, there were approximately 7,800 registered inmates in Sweden. They were placed in one of 37 remand prisons (*häkte*) and 45 prisons (*anstalt*), respectively, where the latter differ depending on the security class (Kriminalvården 2022). There are prisons of three security classes (*säkerhetsklass*), where the first class refers to the highest security level and the third class to the lowest. All inmates have the right to practice their religion (or not to practice any). Sweden's Christian Council employs coordinators and boards for spiritual care (*Nämnd för andlig vård - NAV*), further organising and navigating spiritual care activities in prisons. Approximately 180 priests, pastors, and deacons in the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (*Kriminalvården*) take care of spiritual care among inmates (Sveriges kristna råd 2022). The majority belongs to the Church of Sweden (70) in comparison with those from the

free churches (56), the Catholic Church (10), and the Orthodox and Eastern Churches (4). In addition, 22 imams are responsible for spiritual care among Muslim inmates. Although most inmates who want to establish contact with a religious representative are Christians or Muslims, there is always the opportunity to meet representatives from other religious communities for those who belong to another religious tradition. Spiritual care providers' work is framed by training organised by Sweden's Christian Council. In addition, they have to follow several relevant guidelines based on ecumenism (Riktlinjer för kyrkornas arbete inom häkten och anstalter 2015).

Despite the long tradition of spiritual care in Swedish prisons, research about it is largely missing, except for a few separate articles and general overviews (Carlsson 2010, Larsson 2011, Roxell et al. 2016). At the time when Arner (1963) wrote his overview of the relationship between the church and prison care, The Church of Sweden was the state church deeply intertwined with the political and social structures. Sixty years later, much has changed; the church and the state are separated, and the society has become diverse, multicultural, and multireligious. The relationship between the church and prisons has changed. Prisons have become public institutions, and spiritual care has been organised by Sweden's Christian Council rather than directly by the church. Hence, Petterson's (2015) study focuses on the relationship between the state and the church, examining different public institutions, such as hospitals, the military, and prisons. He argues that this use of religion in prison illustrates a certain ambiguity of the Swedish secular state institution. However, the Swedish official policy is that state authorities should be religiously neutral. In 2022, a study that offers an up-to-date view of spiritual care in prisons based on an overview of its history and organisation was published (Hadzibulic 2022). However, there is still a lack of thorough knowledge on this topic, especially concerning spiritual care practices and experiences. Therefore, the significant contribution of this study is to provide a new perspective on spiritual care in prisons by exploring the experiences and practices of spiritual caregivers. Their standpoint is central, as is how they adjust their practice in circumstances characterised by constraints, isolation, and uncertainty. The concept of lived religion is applied to understand these experiences and practices.

Lived Religion

Lived religion focuses on how religion and spirituality are practised, experienced, and expressed by people in everyday contexts (McGuire 2008). It is created through individuals' and groups' interaction and creation of meanings in a concrete context. It is "constituted by the practices people use to remember, share, enact, adapt, create, and combine the stories out of which they live. Moreover, it comes into being through the often-mundane practices people use to transform these meaningful interpretations into everyday action" (McGuire 2008: 98). By looking for religion in practices and narratives, we gain a new perspective that allows us to see how spiritual resources are generated,

nurtured, and deployed across the many religious and secular contexts in which people live their lives (Ammerman 2014: 7).

Enstedt and Plank (2018: 14-16) suggest seven recurring and overlapping dimensions to approach different domains of lived religion where the sacred is created, met, and shared in life. *Materiality* refers to interaction with and creation of objects, bodies, places, artefacts, clothes, hair, make-up, and food. One can communicate and interact with the transcendent and absent through material culture. At the same time, material practices and bodily behaviours are created and disciplined in interacting with sacred objects and places. A dimension closely connected with materiality has to do with the *body*; it is itself a material and a symbol but also interacts with the material. Other aspects of this dimension include the body's social and cultural belonging, identity (habitus and habituation), and emotions – both social-religious and emotional regimes. *Praxis* is a dimension that includes rituals, ceremonies, calendar-related rituals, and everyday rituals and activities at home, work, or elsewhere. This can be studied on both individual and group levels. *Relations* make an essential dimension of lived religion and refer to interpersonal relations between people, animals, and things, as well as those with holy persons, God, and different supernatural creatures. A part of it relates to belonging to one or even more religious traditions since people sometimes combine elements from other traditions. *Power-dimension* is often inseparable from relations. Within the study of lived religion, power is about different forms of leadership and norms and values that influence people's lives. An essential aspect of this has to do with gender and how it interacts with sexuality, age, ethnicity, and class belonging, especially when it comes to creating unbalanced relations in society and religious contexts. *Spatiality* has to do with place and space in religion in the context of practising religion at different locations, in terms of religion in the private and public spheres, and the positioning of sacred buildings. Finally, a key site of analysis within lived religion research includes *stories*. Listening to stories of everyday religious life means listening for the canonical storylines that come from shared religious traditions and how they are improvised in new circumstances (Ammerman 2014: 8).

This study focuses on spiritual care as seen through key dimensions of lived religion from the perspective of spiritual caregivers. However, some dimensions will be analysed more than others, which has to do with unique experiences and ways of practising religion in prison. At the same time, these dimensions often overlap, making it challenging to present and analyse them separately but in connection with other dimensions. Lived religious practice “is closely linked with the teachings and practices of an official religion” (McGuire 2008: 98), and hence, their religious affiliations provide an orientation and a frame within which lived religion should be studied. However, as argued by Nyhagen, “the power and meaning of institutional forms of religion in individuals' lives must be studied empirically and not be taken as given” (Nyhagen 2017: 496).

Method

For this study, five semi-structured interviews were conducted with prison spiritual caregivers working in different Swedish regions in April and May 2023. The interviewees were recruited through Sweden's Christian Council. An e-mail with a detailed study description was sent to the Sweden's Christian Council's consultant, who then forwarded it to all employed spiritual caregivers. Those interested in participating contacted the researcher afterwards. Four interviews (No. 1, 2, 3, and 5) were conducted online due to the interviewees' different locations in Sweden. One interview (No. 4) was conducted at the local church. The interviewees were asked to talk about their prison experiences, various practices, and unusual situations. The interviewing language was Swedish. Typically, an interview lasts about one hour. They were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English.

In the following, five interviews with spiritual care providers will be presented. The interviewees are men between the ages of 45 to 65. Four represent different churches, whereas one is an imam who provides Muslim spiritual care. In the analysis, they are called the Protestant priest, the Catholic deacon, the Orthodox priest, the Free church pastor, and the imam. With the help of these five interviews, the goal is to display the most comprehensive possible range of experiences, practices, and adaptations (or not) in prison circumstances. Therefore, the "analytical generalisation" strategy is followed (Kvale 1996: 233).

The Swedish Ethical Review Authority (*Etikprövningsmyndigheten*) approved the study's conduct. All the interviewees were thoroughly informed about the research goals and issues. They gave informed consent to participate in the project and publish the descriptions and interview quotations for research purposes. When the study was written and before it was handed in for the journal review, the interviewees read it for further validation.

Results

Interview 1: The Swedish Church Priest

The Swedish Church priest works in the Stockholm region and visits two prisons of different security classes and a remand prison.¹ He has almost a three-decade-long experience of providing spiritual care in prisons:

Strict rules and restrictions shape the everyday life of inmates in remand prisons. They are not allowed to meet other inmates. Isolation is interrupted only when they meet a lawyer, an investigator, or a Red Cross representative. [...] Once per week, there is an opportunity to meet a spiritual care provider through a private one-hour-long conversation. Those conversations can be challenging because of the circumstances – inmates do not know how long they will stay,

¹ Rules and restriction in remand prisons are defined by the Swedish Prison and Probation Service but in some cases also by the district court.

and everything looks pretty complex. [...] They usually take up existential issues, such as the meaning of life or their stay in prison, or they want me to help them understand how the Church sees their situation.

In security class prisons, the atmosphere is different, and group conversions are more common. Exceptionally, the priest is available for individual conversations and confessions. Sometimes, he talks to inmates of other religious affiliations than his own, which he explains by describing prison conditions and how spiritual care is organised. Namely, spiritual care providers from all religious communities are only sometimes available in prisons because more resources are needed to organise spiritual care. Therefore, those who happen to be there are open to meeting all inmates. It is part of their prison work to talk to anyone interested and give a helping hand to those who need it.

As for other practices, the service is usually organised once per month in security-class prisons. In some larger prisons, there are many separate departments, so gathering all interested inmates in one place becomes impossible for security reasons. Therefore, the number of inmates attending the service is usually low, although the service is shared among and led by different churches.

In his attempt to explain his view on the role of spiritual care in prisons, the priest mentioned a project carried out in the highest security class prison, Kumla, in mid-Sweden.² The Swedish Christian Council established a monastery within the prison for conducting a 30-day-long retreat modelled after the Jesuit founder Ignatius of Loyola's work *Exercitia Spiritualia*. Caregivers ran the retreat with 15 places from the Church of Sweden. In addition to the participants, three people were in the monastery – retreat leader, retreat leader assistant, and monastery host. While the assistant and the host took care of the practicalities, the leader took responsibility for conducting individual dialogues with the participants five days a week. The rest of the time, the participants spent in isolation and devoted themselves to reading the Bible.³ The priest, although not himself included in the program, shared his perception of it:

Kumla Monastery was our attempt to provide spiritual care and help inmates further. We were quite positive about this initiative, and it brought good results. It was open to everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation. [...] It was a positive experience, so it was expanded to two other penitentiary facilities but did not survive.

Despite positive results, activities in the Kumla monastery were suspended indefinitely in 2018. The reason was the need for more space and the importance of completing the sentences within a reasonable time frame.

² Kumla prison (*Anstalten Kumla*) is the biggest prison in Sweden, located in mid-Sweden. It is also known as the Kumla bunker (*Kumlabunkern*).

³ These exercises originally took 30 days to complete and were divided into four weeks or acts. The purpose of this classic work of Christian mysticism is that participants, through isolation and silence, listen inwardly and face themselves deeply to see and understand their own reality.

Interview 2: The Free Church Pastor

The pastor is in his early 60s and has worked in prisons in Stockholm for nine years. Besides being a pastor, he is a trained psychotherapist with many years of experience. Usually, he meets all interested inmates for a group conversation in the prisons of security classes. He prefers spontaneous contact, which he forms into a more topic-related conversation. The topics vary and sometimes have little to do with religion. Somewhat different experiences he shares about visits to remand prisons:

The situation in remand prisons is very hectic. They [inmates] are desperate and do not want to live anymore; some even have suicide plans. Many take tranquillisers to cope at the beginning. [...] The whole process is different – they are under correction, waiting for the decision, and it is stressful. Some are isolated; they do not meet other inmates, only priests. And then they want to talk about burning issues. So I take it as it comes, but I want to calm them down and give them hope. [...]

Many inmates have never prayed before. The pastor encourages them to start and usually helps with the first step. Later, they talk about the feelings praying awakes and the role it has in their prison reality. Another critical dimension the pastor mentions is reading religious texts, especially the Bible. This is more common in security class prisons where inmates have well-structured everyday dynamics and hence more time to dedicate to reading and exploring various religious issues. Many start with praying and then feel like deepening their faith:

They say: I do not understand this text; shall we read it together? Alternatively, I want to immerse myself in the faith. Then, I suggest that we read some parts of the Bible together. They read two chapters, and then we talk about them the next time we meet. They also write questions and notes about it. [...] Often, they want a lot but cannot take that much, and sometimes they also have difficulties due to various health issues, which make it hard to focus and read a lot. Then they just do a bit.

The pastor knows of many good audio and video content on the Internet that could be useful within the prison walls as inmates prefer listening over reading. However, that is not possible due to various risks associated with Internet use.

Life in isolation under strict rules becomes even more complicated when inmates face a personal loss with no possibility to process it outside the prison walls. Usually, such situations have to do with a death or life-threatening disease of a close family member and complicated life situations with children. It is often a spiritual caregiver that the inmates want to meet immediately. They are asked to pray, light a candle, or go to a chapel on their behalf. Another kind of emergency mentioned by the pastor is when an inmate succeeds in committing suicide. All inmates are affected by this and usually require more intensive conversations, shared prayer moments, and service. In these joint moments of religious practice, they find meaning and support for the coming days.

Interview 3: The Imam

The Imam, in his mid-50s, is one of two prison imams working in the Skåne region.⁴ He has seven years of experience as a full-time Muslim spiritual care provider in different security-level prisons. In addition, he visits remand prisons daily, often one visit per prison in a week. Usually, inmates initiate conversations with him, and the first meeting is crucial for establishing contact based on trust and understanding. Later, the contact is deepened through regular conversations when more concrete issues are dealt with. Therefore, private conversations concern religious and existential questions about life, death, faith, punishment, and forgiveness.

There are differences between male and female inmates. Women talk more about family and life difficulties. Men are more interested in religious matters. [...] Often, women ask me about how Prophet Muhammad dealt with women who were his spouses. Moreover, they also like to talk about their position in terms of religion - what does Islam say about women?

As experienced by the imam, the reasons that lead inmates who have lost or had no previous connection with religion to turn to an imam are the search for meaning in life, the need for forgiveness, and the desire to change. The Imam gathers inmates from different departments in security class prisons for group conversations. In larger prisons, the contact is regular; spiritual care is provided by phone if necessary. This was common during the COVID-19 pandemic:

It was tough during the pandemic. We were not allowed to enter some prisons. It went back and forth—we could come in, and then it would be closed for a few weeks. Sometimes, they had to call if it was tough or if someone felt bad, usually by phone or Zoom. Someone would be locked up nonstop and get tired, with no light, and depressed. Then I would talk for 30-45 minutes.

Regarding other religious practices, the imam mentions reading the Qu’ran as an everyday activity. He also focuses on advising on how to pray and “talk to God.” In some prisons, Friday is a day for a group prayer for Muslim inmates. If the interest among inmates is significant, then two prayer opportunities will be organised.

Many of them have never prayed before. They start doing it in prison, or they read the Qur’an. [...] It is a huge change. They help each other, and they find meaning. It is the prison with its circumstances that makes them read and change.

The Imam’s contact with inmates often profoundly impacts their lives. After being released from prison, many continue to meet the imam at a local mosque. The Imam sees this as a way to keep with the “right life” and as his duty to help those people reach a meaningful life in their everyday struggles.

⁴ Skåne region, sometimes referred to as Scania County, is the southernmost region of Sweden.

Interview 4: The Catholic Deacon

At the time of the interview, the Catholic deacon was 55 years old and had nine years of experience as a spiritual care provider in Swedish prisons. In addition to theological education, he is a trained psychotherapist responsible for coordinating spiritual care in prisons for the Catholic Church at the national level. He has extensive experience in different prison locations and environments:

Usually, an inmate takes the initiative via email or letter to meet me; we [Catholic spiritual care providers] are not allowed to do that ourselves. [...] We meet and talk about different things. It depends on what they want, but it always starts somewhere. The person may wish to help with a particular issue, but other questions appear soon that are more about their situation, future views, sometimes the crime itself, or whether they will do the same thing again.

According to his experience, there is no typical profile of an inmate who wants to practice religion. Some with a Catholic background wish to continue with the practice. At the same time, some have experiences only from one parent or early childhood, and the stay in prison is an opportunity to revive that experience. Sometimes, young men want a change, so they initiate conversations with the deacon. As experienced by the deacon, conversation as a form of religious practice in prison sometimes transcends the boundaries of Catholicism. It includes inmates of other religious affiliations or those who are not religious. The deacon accepts all interested inmates; these conversations usually address delicate issues about human nature. However, the situation is different when it comes to religious rituals:

Sometimes, someone wants to convert, become Catholic, and be baptised, and they want that to happen immediately. The Catholic Church is quite restrictive about it. We can teach about it [Catholicism] in prison, and then when they are out, they can go to a church and talk about it. If they feel at home there, then they can convert. [...] A person sitting in prison is in a unique world, in a state that is not normal. Teaching is essential, and people can live their Christian lives without being labelled “Catholic.” Through teaching, they see how interested they are. [...] Then some want to get married. It could be a man who has a family and a woman who comes to visit. Then I also say no because making such big decisions is a particular situation. I refuse to respect their freedom since it is limited, so their thinking is also restricted. To marry a couple, there must be freedom to choose. If that freedom exists, I cannot say no. However, how free is a person in prison? Or a woman who has a husband in prison? How free are they to enter into a marriage? Then I usually postpone it. I am not saying no, but we are postponing it.

The Catholic deacon sees inmates' cells as important places reflecting their current condition and interests. Pictures of Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, and heart pictures are standard in the cells of Catholic inmates. How these pictures look depends on the culture an inmate is coming from (“Some have slightly kitschy pictures of Jesus, where he is well-combed with roses while

others do not appreciate those”). Inmates have no right to wear private garments and shoes, and no personal accessories are allowed. However, showing personal preferences is more accessible to some.

Many Muslims in prison show their religiosity: they have their time for prayers, they do not eat pork, etc. That shows they have their religion, and it means something to them. Seeing others take their religiosity seriously makes some think about it [...] So many want a rosary to hang like a necklace. Because then it is a symbol, you see it, and then you know that someone is a Christian. It has a meaning.

For the Catholic deacon, religious practices in prison involve adjusting to strict behaviour and interpersonal interaction rules. Although he advocates new ways of religious practice, such as listening to YouTube lectures or reading religious texts on the Internet, he is aware of the possible risks involved and thus supports inmates in more traditional practices, such as prayer and reading the Bible.

Interview 5: The Orthodox Priest

The Orthodox priest is one of two Orthodox spiritual care providers in prisons of the Stockholm region. Although not a full-time employee, he has provided spiritual care in remand prisons and prisons of different security classes for almost 30 years. Usually, he meets Orthodox inmates but is also available to help others. In larger prisons, he gathers them for a group conversation on a topic they find meaningful. If inmates have special needs, they must be prioritised and activities organised accordingly.

Some inmates want to confess or take communion regularly, but those are not common. More often, they want to confess when they arrive in prison. Everything is new and heavy then, so confession means a lot. [...] Sometimes, I meet someone who cries and cannot calm down, and then confession is a relief. [...] I tend to give communion to inmates in connection with religious holidays, but I also give them instructions on preparing for it.

In prison, the cell becomes an important place that reflects inmates' current condition and interests. In some, Orthodox icons take a central place on the shelf.⁵ That is where most Orthodox inmates pray or stop for a reflection, although icons are sometimes present in the cells of other Christian inmates. Likewise, religious holidays are special occasions for inmates, and that is when the Orthodox priest aims to create a more homely environment by giving inmates small gifts such as Christmas candies or Easter eggs:⁶

5 A typical room in a Swedish prison has a chair, a table, a locker or shelf, a bed, a mirror, a bulletin board, a mug, a clock, and a radio. Although all rooms have a tv, not all inmates are allowed to use it (Kriminalvården 2023).

6 To be able to do that, a permit from the Swedish Prison and Probation Service is needed.

That is something I have always succeeded in doing. I could be swamped doing other church-related matters, but I always find time to visit all the prisons I work in before Christmas and Easter. [...] These people [inmates] are alone; they have no family or friends around them, which is very sad. After all, they are people like us. [...] Many have children at home, so I think about how terrible it might be to be alone when everyone is celebrating. [...] While in prison, I just hand out candies or eggs and leave. However, in prisons, I also talk to inmates. Inmates always appreciate those meetings.

Occasionally, the Orthodox priest receives requests from inmates to celebrate particular Orthodox holidays or celebrations. The most common one is the Slava,⁷ an annual celebration of a patron saint among Serbian Orthodox:

The Slava is a significant celebration for Orthodox Serbs, so I always try to meet the needs of inmates in some way. I cannot arrange the Slava-related props but I can be there for confession or prayer. Inmates need some kind of contact with me so they do not feel bad that day; they are alone instead with their family members. [...] I use this opportunity to talk about the patron saint they celebrate and tell them how they have been challenged many times but have found a purpose in life. [...] Sometimes they [inmates] just like me to be there, so I come and we talk and try to be positive.

The Orthodox priest's experience with baptisms and weddings is somewhat limited. Twice in his long career, he baptised inmates sentenced to a longer term. Similarly, he once married an inmate who had children with his girlfriend but would stay in prison for several years.

Conclusions

The study aimed to research the practices and experiences of spiritual care providers in Swedish prisons. The concept of lived religion was used to show standard practices and how they are adjusted to the prison circumstances and context, especially isolation, strict behaviour, and interpersonal interaction rules. The stories of spiritual care providers created knowledge of both the canonical aspect of a religious tradition and its adaption in prison circumstances was created through the *stories* of spiritual care providers.

All spiritual care providers argue that their practices are influenced by both different prison conditions and inmates' needs. They approach each inmate according to their needs while adhering to prison rules and restrictions. This connects to *spatiality* as a dimension that defines a context in which religion is practised. Typically, spiritual care is provided through individual and group conversations initiated by inmates. These are the only possible resources for

⁷ According to Serbian Orthodox tradition, the patron saint symbolically protects the family and its home and is celebrated annually as one of the most important family events, along with Christmas and Easter. For more on the Slava, see: Hadžibulić, Sabina (2017), Hadžibulić, Sabina and Lagerspetz, Mikko (2020).

dealing with existential issues when conditions in prison are challenging and demand rigorous isolation. Topics that touch on various religious and existential questions related to life, death, faith, punishment, and forgiveness are common in these conversations. The *praxis* dimension is best depicted in religious practices such as baptisms, weddings, services, and reading religious texts, which are less common. This concerns how prisons are structured regarding living conditions and how different religious traditions interpret human existence. The Catholic deacon explained this by referring to the freedom and free choice of inmates, which is always questionable in prison conditions. *Materiality* and *body* dimensions are evident in how some inmates create their space using icons and religious pictures. Although there are various possibilities for reading religious materials and listening to religious lectures, their use in prisons is limited for security reasons. This was also evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when telephone and other newer communication sources were only allowed in extreme situations. However, all spiritual care providers said that spiritual care practices often transcend religious boundaries and have a transformative role in inmates' lives. They create meaning and give hope for a better future. This certainly has to do with *the dimension of relation* but also *power* through religious values and norms that affect inmates' lives. In emergencies, the importance of religion in prison becomes apparent. It helps inmates create meaning and gives them comfort and hope. Through religion, inmates build a capacity to live their lives despite difficult circumstances and intense feelings. Sometimes, this capacity is needed outside the prison walls, so some inmates meet their prison spiritual caregivers after serving their sentence.

Although the study gives significant insights into the practices and experiences of spiritual care, it still faces certain limitations that influence its results. The study focuses only on the spiritual caregivers' perspective, which offers a limited view of practices and experiences of spiritual care. Besides, only the practices and experiences of spiritual caregivers presenting the most dominant religious traditions in Sweden were collected and analysed, which excludes a variety of relevant existing accounts of representatives of other religious traditions. Finally, the study uses semi-structured interviews that provide in-depth knowledge about the topic. However, this lacks dimensions that could derive from different methods, especially observing the spiritual care practices and analysing personal diaries about spiritual care practices and experiences.

Future studies could provide a broader scope on this topic, including different actors relevant to the provision of spiritual care, from those working with the organisation of spiritual care via spiritual caregivers of all existing religious traditions to inmates receiving spiritual care. This type of research could include thorough fieldwork based on various methods, leading to comprehensive knowledge about spiritual care in prisons. Another important aspect could be including a gender perspective that could offer insights into the different experiences and needs of male and female prisoners regarding spiritual care. Besides providing more profound theoretical knowledge, future studies could benefit society by addressing critical issues within the prison

system. By examining the provision of spiritual care in prisons, future studies could enhance the rehabilitation of inmates, which directly contributes to a safer and more humane society. Effective spiritual care can play a crucial role in rehabilitating inmates and helping them to reintegrate into society as law-abiding citizens. By identifying the most impactful elements of spiritual care, future research could inform policy decisions and improve training programs for spiritual care providers, ensuring that inmates receive the support they need to avoid reoffending. Moreover, addressing the needs of diverse religious groups within the prison population promotes inclusivity and respect. It also fosters inmates' sense of belonging and purpose, significantly aiding their rehabilitation. This inclusivity contributes to social cohesion and harmony, as former inmates are likelier to reintegrate successfully into their communities.

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- Interview with the Orthodox priest. May 2023. Records of transcription are in the possession of the author.

Sabina Bodin Hadžibulić

Duhovna nega u švedskim zatvorima: Prakse i iskustva pružaoca duhovne nege

Apstrakt:

Fokus ove studije je na duhovnoj nezi i načinima na koje je pružaoci duhovne nege u švedskim zatvorima praktikuju i doživljavaju. Cilj studije je da razume kako uslovi u zatvorima različitih bezbedonosnih klasa utiču na praktikovanje duhovne nege, kao i koje strategije koriste pružaoci duhovne nege kako bi pomogli zatvorenicima da stvore i održavaju svoju religioznost. Studija počiva na pet polustrukturisanih intervjua sa zatvorskim pružiocima duhovne nege različitih religijskih pripadnosti u nekoliko švedskih regiona. U analizi njihovih iskustava i prakse, studija se oslanja na koncept proživljene religije (eng. lived religion). Rezultati pokazuju da zatvorski kontekst snažno utiče na praktikovanje duhovne nege, a posebno izolacija i stroga pravila ponašanja i međuljudske interakcije. Obično se duhovna nega pruža kroz individualne i grupne razgovore. Verski rituali, službe i čitanje verskih tekstova su prisutni u manjoj meri. Međutim, prakse duhovne nege često prevazilaze verske granice i imaju transformativnu ulogu u životima zatvorenika.

Ključne reči: duhovna nega, zatvor, pružaoci duhovne nege, Švedska, proživljena religija