**WCCM Meditation in Prisons Report**

**The Missing Peace**

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**Introduction**

The aim of this report is to share information about WCCM prison meditation groups worldwide, provide useful information about existing groups and hopefully inspire and encourage new groups to be established.

**Method**

Questionnaires were sent out in December 2021 to the nine countries where it was understood there were WCCM Prison Meditation Groups. The questionnaires were sent via each WCCM countries’ prison or national co-ordinator with follow up emails to non-responders from Mary Devane, the WCCM International Prisons Co-ordinator.

There were 11 responses received in total from 5 countries: 4 from Australia, 1 from Italy, 1 from Trinidad, 3 from the UK and 2 from the USA. Although contacts were supplied, there is no provision in Ireland or the Philippines at present nor any plans. There were no responses from Belgium or Poland so it is unclear if there are any prison groups in these countries.

**Prison information – name, type, location**

**Australia**

1. Yatala Labour Prison, Adelaide – maximum security male
2. Beechworth Correctional Centre, Beechworth, Victoria – minimum security male
3. Alexander Maconochie Centre, Canberra – mixed: maximum and minimum security and remand male and female
4. Silverwater Correctional Complex, Silverwater, Sydney – mixed; minimum security male and maximum security female (meditation group in female section)

**Italy**

1. Casa Circondariale di Prato, Prato near Florence – mixed security male

**Trinidad & Tobago**

1. Six prisons connected to one group leader via zoom – Maximum Security, Remand Yard, Women’s, Youth Prison, Golden Grove Prison and Carrera Prison

**UK**

1. HMP Pentonville, North London – Category B, C, Remand and Young Offenders 18-21 male (no longer running)
2. HMP Wandsworth, South London – Category B local prison male (not currently running)
3. HMP Styal, North West England – Women’s Local and Resettlement Prison

**USA**

1. Ellis Unit, Huntsville, Texas – maximum security male
2. Ramsey Unit, Rosharon, Texas – minimum – maximum security male

What follows is a report of the collated findings from the questionnaires.

**Report from the Survey of WCCM International Prison Meditation Groups**

**Background information**

Prison meditation group leaders’ personal experience of meditation ranges from 18-44 years. Several of the prison group leaders have also been running meditation groups in the community for up to 26 years.

Meditation groups run in the full range of prison types – male and female, adults, young offenders 18-21 and youth under 18, maximum security, minimum or low security, resettlement and local/remand prisons for unsentenced prisoners.

Groups have been running from 20 years to the newest group established in February 2022. The Covid pandemic resulted in the suspension of many of the prison groups to date however are resuming and have resumed in Australia and the US. The newest group in Trinidad has bypassed Covid restrictions by holding meetings online reaching six prisons at once.

**Establishing the groups**

Some group leaders were already working in prisons or were invited in. The reasons for starting meditation groups were based on their own or others’ personal experience of meditation and in some cases from studies and research and all believed it would be beneficial for prisoners. Several leaders believed it would help with anxiety, stress and anger management. 1 group leader was also offering meditation groups for prison staff.

Over half of the prisons did not have an existing meditation group, 2 had meditation groups and 3 had relaxation therapy or mindfulness groups.

Most prisons did not run Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous groups however 2 prisons did. The AA and NA programmes are spiritual programmes based on 12 steps the 11th step of which focuses on prayer and meditation which could be used as a natural route into establishing a meditation group.

Over half of group leaders had previously worked in prison.

The majority of initial contact was through the prison chaplaincies either through an invitation from a principal chaplain, bishop or minister or making direct contact with a chaplain or head of chaplaincy in the prison. One, however, initially contacted the prison governor and another the Prison Volunteers Association.

The approach to describe the WCCM offer of meditation was also varied. A number of leaders of groups had close links with or already worked in the chaplaincy in the prison and described it as Christian but anyone of any or no faith welcome. One leader described it as silent prayer as the group was a Christian group and would understand that. A secular approach was promoted by a few prisons and in one case this was due to anti-Christian feeling in prison related to historic child abuse by church members. Another leader underlined the universality of the practice of meditation.

The meditation sessions were promoted in several different ways for example recommended in chaplaincy leaflets or induction for new prisoners, promoted after Christian services, posters on wings and in chapel, or basic information provided by activities/programmes staff. In some prisons it was promoted through word of mouth, via the prison intranet for prisoners, by invitation only or a general call out for all prisoners in the area when the meditation session was running.

The time it takes to obtain security clearance to be able to work in prison varies considerably from 2 weeks to 9 months. Information and checks included police checks and DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service in UK) or working with vulnerable people checks and an hour test.

Briefing or training offered by the prison or organisations working within the prison before starting delivery, ranges from a standard prison induction and security training given to all new non-prison staff, plus key training if key holders, to none at all. In one case an initial talk was given by the chaplain about prison rules, in another within the first 6 months of starting there was a training day for all volunteers around potential grooming and blackmailing of staff by prisoners.

Ongoing training and support is again very varied from regular to none at all. In 2 cases the principal/area chaplaincy provided regular very useful support and training, in US prisons volunteers have to repeat the original 2 hour training session including a 1 hour test every 2 years. In another prison occasional information was provided by the programmes department; in another, support consisted of informal talks with other volunteers. One group leader said support was provided if and when required. One received no training or support at all.

The main contact for support in the prison was through the chaplaincy as many groups are linked with the chaplaincy: usually chaplains in the prison or the head or principal area chaplain. One leader received support from the Prison Volunteers Association and teachers in the prison.

Prior to release, group leaders said they refer prisoners to the WCCM website for further information and groups, some also give information about community groups or prepare a list for prisoners (as long as the group does not meet in private homes). Several leaders had links to WCCM groups in their local community or led a WCCM group in the community.

**About the groups**

Ages of prisoners range from 18-70, both male and female, from mixed ethnic backgrounds and all faiths or no faith. Sentence lengths were from 3 months – life.

In more than half the prisons the prisoners could not mix freely from all areas however in 3 they could. In one prison, newly arrived gang members were not allowed to participate in meditation sessions but could later on.

**Logistics of the meditation sessions**

Sessions run on most days of the week except Saturdays, and run either morning or afternoon but not evening. The session length ranges from 30 minutes – 1.5 hours.

Sessions are being held in different locations. The majority are in the multi-faith chapel or in one prison in a room in the mosque. Alternatively, sessions are held in other rooms for example in the programme rooms in each section of a prison, a 1-1 interview room if unavailable, a family meeting room or a room that could accommodate the size of the group.

Prisoners get to the group session in a number of different ways either going during free flow prisoner movements to activity, or walking there themselves in one low security prison. In one case the group leader goes to the participants in their area where the session is held; in 2 cases the group leader collects them in person or they are collected and escorted by prison officers.

5 group leaders had keys and could move about unaccompanied. 3 had no keys with one having to be assisted by staff but the other 2 could move around the prison unaccompanied and get staff in the area to unlock doors.

No prison officers or guards are in the sessions from a security perspective however in some prisons WCCM volunteers carry personal alarms. There are also alarm buttons in some rooms. 2 prisons have guard stations just outside the room where the sessions were held. Most prisons also have closed circuit surveillance of main areas. In other cases, officers may check during the session that all is ok or lock the group leader and prisoners in and let out at the end. However, in 1 prison no officers were near and in another there were no personal alarms or panic buttons.

Regular meditation for prisoners in prison outside of the session can be problematic due to distractions and noise and the difficulty of finding a quiet time to do it especially if they share a cell. However, a number of prisoners do overcome the obstacles and get creative: a few meditated before going to sleep at night or in the garden area if they had access, or when their cell mate was out and the TV was off. A few were known to be still meditating on release.

IT and electronic resources can be a challenge to obtain or use in prisons and usually group leaders cannot bring anything in. Several used prison-owned CD players to play CDs during their sessions and a couple could access DVD players. Perhaps the most innovative way is in Trinidad where 6 prisons are taking part in online zoom meditation sessions. Several prisons have their own internal radio and TV networks that have been accessed to broadcast sessions or talks. Prisoners have also been allowed to borrow CDs from group leaders.

**The content of the meditation session**

The content of meditation sessions is varied. All groups meditate from 5 – 30 minutes. If newcomers are in the group there will be a brief introduction to meditation. One group always starts with a recap on how to meditate. Some sessions begin with a relaxation exercise for example breathing or visualisation and attention to posture. Additional content may include listening to a WCCM talk on CD, doing lectio divina or a reading from scripture or other reading. Some used the WCCM meditation prayer at the beginning and end of meditation. There may be a talk by the leader and usually at the end, time for reflection, discussion and feedback. One prison had a break with refreshments.

**Evaluation, research and support**

Group leaders commented on what worked well including making sure the meditation session was the priority, lending CDs to prisoners, being flexible and able to say the same thing in different ways.

Improvements group leaders suggested included having a dedicated meditation space or suitable rooms being made more available. Some group leaders wanted more support from prison management and awareness amongst prison staff of the mental, physical as well as spiritual benefits of meditation.

To make the sessions even better suggestions included having 2 facilitators to run the session, more science-based evidence and educational materials on the benefits of meditation for prison staff and the inclusion of the topic as part of formal training for them. Some leaders wanted more time per session and separate sessions for those new to meditation.

No group leader or prison had conducted evaluation or research on the impact of meditation on prisoners. However, all group leaders had positive verbal feedback on the benefits of meditation from both prisoners and staff but this was not formally recorded. 3 prisoners on release were known to be still meditating and one has found employment with a faith-based organisation.

Group leaders thought the knowledge skills and experience prison meditation group leaders needed were a sound personal experience and understanding of meditation, an ability to communicate well with prisoners and to listen and understand where they are at. Leaders also advocated flexibility, patience and an awareness of security and regime requirements which can change due to the nature of prisons.

Group leaders requested support from the WCCM to inform and educate prisons at national and international level on the benefits of meditation. From the prison perspective they would like to establish a direct line of contact to the governor of the prison. Several requested funding and access to free prison specific and other resources and to share resources and ideas with other prison meditators.

More than half of the group leaders would welcome being connected with other prison group leaders via zoom or email for discussion and support.

Further comments and suggestions were to improve the WCCM website by clearly identifying a section for Meditation in Prisons including prison resources, as well as information from scientific research on the benefits of meditation.

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***Appendix – Blank Questionnaire & Summary of Responses***



1. ***Background Information***

***1b How long meditating?*** *Range from 18-44 years*

***1c Type of prison?*** *– max security male x 3, min security male, max security, min security, remand male & female, female max security, female local & resettlement, mixed male, male & YOI Cat B/C remand & local, 6 prisons Trinidad – max security, remand, female, youth under 18.*

***1d how long group been running?*** *From a few months to 20 years; in one prison also running meditation groups for prison staff as well as prisoners on and off for 7 years and delivering 1-1 sessions as well as groups.*

***1e Current situation with Covid?*** *Mixed – shut during full Covid restrictions; one still shut but one open in US; a few in Australia have reopened where possible when restrictions lifted; Trinidad online zoom meditation*

***1e Run groups in community as well? –*** *6 group leaders have also been running community groups for up to 26 years and 1 had previously run a group.*

1. ***Establishing the group***

***2a Why did you start the group?*** *Keen to try as community group going well; Saw the good it did me and was keen to share it; believed there was a need based on experience, research and formal studies; invited to go in as a way of helping with stress/anger management; had been involved with prison libraries and felt drawn to take meditation in; from personal experience of meditation and also as I was the prison chaplain I could set it up; invited by prison chaplain to teach in prisons; after personally discovering the ‘distancing’ effect of meditation wanted to introduce it in prisons where ‘anxiety is a permanent disability’; wife a prison chaplain and thought it would be good for the men; request from Catholic Prisons Ministry and Archbishop.*

***2b. Are there any other meditation groups running in the prison?*** *No x 3; occasional relaxation therapy groups (CBT) run by mental health; a Buddhist Group; Buddhist groups in other prisons in Italy; Prison Phoenix Trust (meditation & yoga) & secular mindfulness.*

***2c Are there any AA or NA groups running in the prison?*** *6 no/not sure, 2 yes*

***2d Had you worked in a prison before?*** *6 yes, 4 no, 1 one previous visit*

***2e Who did you initially contact?*** *Didn’t need to as was already chaplain in prison; invited by Principal Chaplain for South Australian Prisons; invited by local Bishop; contacted Chaplaincy; contacted the Governor of the prison; Prison Volunteers Association University Faculty Co-ordinator initially; contacted Head of Chaplaincy; invited by Catholic Prisons Ministry.*

***2f How did you describe what you were offering? Did you provide any written info or resources in advance? Was your approach secular, multi-faith or Christian? –*** *depends on culture/spirituality but ultimately focussed on Christian spirituality; didn’t have to as was in situ & anybody welcome; chaplaincy multi-faith approach had to be secular; - ‘at the place of harmony of body, mind and spirit at our centre, people of faith also realise that they are in harmony with the divine’, had to tread softly as anti-xnity feeling in prison due to child abuse by church members; if knew prisoner Christian and committed then loaned books etc used Christian resources; took some resources in as invited by RC Chaplain – described it as Christian but anyone welcome; underlined how universal the practice of meditation is; says it’s silent prayer as group Christian and understand what that means; the approach was Catholic and promoted and supported a valid form of prayer through the Catholic Deacon in the prison; described verbally how WCCM could help prisoners; groups for prisoners run as part of Catholic service using WCCM CD, 1-1 offered to any – faith or no faith, groups for staff secular offered as ‘Relax, Rewind & Recharge’ session,*

***2g How did prisoners find out about the group, how promoted?*** *Word of mouth; prison intranet (for staff?); by invitation only; general call put out to all prisoners on section when session runs; initially chaplain prepared a leaflet for 1st timers and publicised at Sunday service; recommended in Salvation Army’s programme run by chaplain; in basic info on activities provided by chaplaincy to all new prisoners; promoted at services; posters on wings and in chapel; programmes staff gave info to prisoners – very simple offer of opportunity; talk amongst prisoners prompted others to come along; promoted by chaplain running session and also after finish worship services; made own promotional leaflets for prisoners and staff.*

***2h How long did security clearance take? What info or checks were done?*** *Australia: 6 weeks – 9 months; Police Check & Working with Vulnerable People check and also in one case needed their faith denomination sponsor to accept indemnity; teaching registration including police check, Italy – 6 months, UK – 3 months; not sure but considerable personal information required & searches conducted; US – to become an Approved Volunteer took 2 weeks and had to take a tw hour test; ID & background checks.*

***2i What briefing or training did the prison (or other organisations working within the prison) offer you in advance of starting?*** *Initial talk by chaplain about prison rules; within first 6 months a training day for all prison volunteers around grooming and blackmail by prisoners; regular prison induction process; no briefing or training (Italy); standard security training given to all new key-holding volunteers; security training; several events & key training; 2 hour training session including a 1 hour test; none possibly because on zoom.*

***2j Do you receive ongoing training and support?*** *Principal chaplain v supportive; regular training session for all prison chaplains in area and WCCM was included – to help them support prisoners, support them and to communicate changes within prison and to feedback to prison; no training or support but occasional info by Programmes Dept; no support except informal talks with other volunteers; none; if and when required; repeat 2 hour training session and test every 2 years sometimes online; no.*

***2K Who is your main contact in the prison who supports you?*** *Principal Area Chaplain; Staff; Prison Volunteers Association and in prison the teachers; part-time lay Catholic Chaplain; Chaplain in charge; Head of Chaplaincy or other chaplains; Chaplain in the unit; the Deputy Commissioner of Prisons.*

***2L Do you provide prison group members due for release with info about WCCM and meditation groups in the community where they are being released to? Do you have any links with WCCM meditation groups in the community?***  *Full group list easily available from national website; if prisoner asks prepare a list for groups that don’t meet in private homes as ruling is that anyone with a prison record can’t enter the home of somebody who works at a prison; runs groups in the community at home but prisoners can’t attend as works in prison; yes; yes to both; website; yes provides info and has links to community groups; yes.*

1. ***About the group***

***3a How many in group?*** *Totally unpredictable varies weekly – 1-13; prison highly segregated generally v small groups 1-3; varies – 4-10; group sizes have varied 4-8; 2-12; up to 10; plus new online group with 6 Trinidad prisons – 70 prisoners plus staff; up to 20; 18; 6-8; varies.*

***3b Details of group – age, ethnicity, gender, faith, sentence length*** *wide range;**18-70; remand; mixed ethnicity; most nominally Christian broad range Catholic – Pentecostal; 28-60; 30-60; 50-60; mostly Italian (in Italy) catholic; one group mafia; sentences 4-16+; lifer; 20-70; Asian origin; all faiths and none; 3 months – over 10 yrs; mixed adult varied cultures and spirituality; no access to this information and can change weekly; Catholic prisoners only; open to multi-faiths but mostly Christians; not privy to that information as online group.*

***3c Can prisoners attend from all areas/wings of the prison?*** *4 x No; 3 x Yes; all areas strictly separate; believed VPs were disadvantaged as had to be collected; newly arrived gang members were not allowed to participate but could later*

1. ***Logistics of the meditation session***

***4a What day and time is the session, how long, is it weekly just one session?*** *Thurs & Sun pm; weekly 9.30-11am free flow movement; Wed am – 10 mins med then read book; Mon 4.30-5.30pm ½ hr med, ½ hr review; 3-4 sessions with different clients/gps 1 day per week; Fri am half hour sessions – relaxation then med v limited time; 2 groups on Mondays 30 minutes each; monthly for one hour; Sundays 2-4pm but session really only lasts an hour due to delays with movements; 1 hour session every fortnight 1-2pm; for prisoners every Friday in Chaplaincy for 30 minutes, one to one 30 minute support session can include an introduction to meditation if prisoner willing, for staff every Tuesday lunchtime for 30 minutes- 15 mins of QiGong then 15 mins of Meditation.*

***4b Where held?*** *Programme room in each section of the prison or 1-1 interview room if unavailable; in open area if room unavailable; multi-faith chapel x 4; family meeting room; 1 room in chapel, 1 room in mosque; chapel; small room that can accommodate 16 prisoners; on zoom online.*

***4c How do prisoners get to the group?*** *Group leader calls them; free flow prisoner movement; group leader goes to find participants; group leader goes to participants; prisoners walk there themselves as it’s a low security prison; prisoners collected and escorted 4 at a time by prison officers; collect from cells as not in general movement time.*

***4d Do you have keys and can you move unaccompanied to and from the session or do you need to be escorted?*** *No keys – has to have 5 doors unlocked by staff member; 5 group leaders have keys and move unaccompanied; 2 have no keys but can around the prison unaccompanied; co-facilitator has keys as chaplain in prison or officers sometimes assist if not.*

***4e Does a prison officer need to be in the room or near the room for security reasons? Is there a panic button?*** *No; panic button; no officers near; chaplain co-led or came in the room towards end; no guard but one might open the door and check; no alarm or panic button; no guard but ‘duress’ button – never used it in 18 years of running sessions; guard not in room but alarms available; no-one in room or nearby; locked in room and guards let you out at end; carry duress alarm at all times; closed circuit surveillance; no prisons officers in attendance but have panic buttons in rooms and a personal whistle; guard stations just outside the rooms; prison officer always in room.*

***4f Do you know if prisoners meditate regularly as part of their daily routine outside your session and if so where and when they do so? What problems have they encountered?*** *A few do – and carry on post release; meditate in cell but noisy if cell mate; one prisoner agreed that the other would leave the cell during his meditation period; ref success story – annoying cell mate but didn’t punch him – meditated and calmed down – told guard next day and was given a new cell mate; encouraged to do so but noise and distractions problem; yes some do; one prisoner said meditated early morning if no noise – all find noise disturbing; a few did in cells – problems if cell mates and noise as TV often on all day (‘form of torture’ if cell mate insists on keeping it on); however the ones who wanted to do it were creative about getting round the difficulties; some meditated before going to sleep at night; yes on their unit or garden area; some do; a few do but too many distractions and noise in cells; not sure.*

***4g Are IT resources available to use e.g. DVD, CD player, laptop, networked computers, in cell TV network through which a session could be broadcast, zoom..*** *yes (?) ;didn’t explore possibilities; limited IT resources and not allowed to bring any in; IT – DVD, CD, Education laptops players available monitored use; prisoners have access to the prison intranet and can use CDs provided by group leader; not allowed to take anything in but can use chaplaincy CD player; use ‘Well of Silence’ timing CD as background music for relaxation exercise; prison has own internally run prisoner radio and TV networks as Sunday worship service was pre-recorded and put on this during lockdown; in Trinidad have linked up 6 prisons with online zoom meditation sessions; Prison radio – Radio Wanno – have broadcasted their talks; access to DVD & CD Players.*

1. ***Content of the session***

***5a. How is the session run? e.g. relaxation, discussion, how long meditate, reflection and questions after etc do you use any WCCM/meditation resources and if a Christian group do you read any biblical or wisdom texts?*** *Begin with either intro on meditation or brief further teaching depending if have new meditator, brief relaxation exercise, meditation 5-12 mins depending on who present and their mental state, usually brief time for feedback – no Christian content unless prisoners present known to be Christians; sessions can run for 20 mins – all of above and often will do a lectio divina; 45 min session – brief breathing exercise listen to John Main or Laurence Freeman talk 10-15 mins, then the prayer then 25-30 mins of meditation; currently 10 mins – no music or tapes or gong allowed, previously 20 mins, read A Way in the Wilderness – James Bishop; relaxation, talk about meditation, 20 mins med, reflection time on practice and its effects, didn’t use prepared talks but spoke personally from own knowledge of the tradition and practice. Had a long session so to fill time had a break for drink & biscuits then a group lectio divina on a passage of scripture; follow John Main CD & Laurence Freeman talks – LF has visited a few times and meditated with women; The Meditation is for 20 mins occasionally play a short CD if there is time; I always introduce meditation and how to do it and lead them into meditation, explain posture, the mantra etc.; This is really a one hour Catholic Education program. We simply begin the program with 15 to 20 minutes of Christian Mediation; We start with Lectio Divina –about 10 minutes, then listen to a CD for 8 or 9 minutes followed by 20 minutes of silent meditation and finally 10 to 15 minutes open discussion; teaching, meditation and question & answer – WCCM literature often used; for prison groups during Catholic Service – chant/song, then meditation, then chant/song, for staff QiGong then Meditation, prisoners 1-1 support session could include a range of positive strategies e.g. meditation, practice of gratitude, QiGong etc.*

***b. Do you use any audio-visual resources in your sessions?*** *7 prison groups used CDs for short talks and timing of meditation, music; 1 didn’t and 1 not allowed.*

1. ***Evaluation, research and support***

***6a Overall what has worked and is working well?*** *Being totally flexible, each session a big unknown in which anything could happen, the ability to say same stuff a million different ways. Keep it short as many have a poor attention span and switch off. Ask for feedback; a broad intro to meditation using breath meditation, then creative visualisation, then leading to mantric meditation with a Christian focus; men are able to borrow CDs and DVDs – listen in a group or on their own, works well and they can swap the resources around – be prepared to lose a few!; for prisoners they say they sleep better, the silence and the mantra become rooted in them, they face court easier often saying the mantra whilst waiting; the 20 mins of meditation – that is the priority; Q&A working well; flexible groups for prisoners as well as staff.*

***6b What could be improved?*** *Having a dedicated meditation space in the prison (spectacular) grounds – been asking for years; i. a lot more support from prison management & staff generally including mental health workers on the mental/physical/spiritual health benefits of meditation including in the areas of addiction & habituated antisocial behaviours ii. Increased availability of meditation rooms iii. Prison management to allow more prisoners, normally segregated from each other, to meet together; make the session longer & insist on it being prayer possible with short psalm reading first; would be nice to have a longer session but it’s not possible; we need to engage them with the health and emotional benefits first before introducing the spiritual benefits.*

***6c What would make the group/sessions even better?*** *Having 2 facilitators to run every session – v hard with just one; a range of scientifically based educational materials on the benefits of meditation which can be accessed by prison staff and health professionals & the inclusion of the topic as part of the formal training for all staff; having more time per session, separate sessions for new meditators – no time for this at present; the silencing of the intercom system; keep it simple and make sure the focus is on the practice; more reliable attendance.*

***6d Have you or the prison conducted any evaluation or research of the impact of meditation on prisoners you can share?*** *No x 5; only anecdotal x 2; don’t know – not aware it’s been discussed by the prison authorities; no – isolated anecdotal feedback – principal psychologist seems happy with what doing so must think it’s helpful, for many in High Dependency it’s part of their treatment.*

***6e Do you have any positive testimonies verbal or written from prisoners or staff you are able to share?*** *A prisoner who didn’t biff cellmate but meditated instead; vast majority of verbal testimonies from staff and prisoners are very positive; get the impression many staff members now approve of my presence and aim to help men find a small area of peace within but no-one has ever said anything – did suggest meditating with staff but didn’t come off – 3 prisoners now released still meditate & one has employment with Waldesians; informal comments from staff and prisoners on the benefits; only verbal – no names; some have said silent prayer really helped them; prison staff enjoyed a meditation awareness raising session held on Staff Well-being days and some then some went on to attend and enjoy weekly staff sessions*

***6f What knowledge, skills & experience do you think prison meditation group leaders need?*** *Sound meditation experience and an ability to communicate well with prisoners and understand who they are and where they are at. Sensitivity to the security & regime requirements. Not to be easily discouraged; open mind & heart. I found I learnt mostly from the experience of meditating with the men; very useful to have been a teacher and to love teaching but above all one must learn to talk less and listen more; formal comprehensive training in multi-faith spiritual direction/companionship & a competence or charisma in this ministry demonstrated through experience; Ability to stay within the prison rules, flexibility as the prison is synonymous with constant change, be prepared to travel all the way there (a 45min-1hr drive for each of us) only to find the prison is in lockdown (no explanation will be given for it) and one has to turn around and go home. Accept you can only plant a seed. Most prisoners aren’t around long enough for us to do anything more than that. Once you can cope with all the above, a deep and mature personal meditation experience and discipline is helpful; they need to be an experienced meditator and be able to work in a prison, secure environment and endure the frustrations; good understanding of meditation and lots of patience; My team believes that they have to push the spiritual benefits. I would like them to understand that’s its ok to emphasise the emotional and health benefits.*

***6g What support do you need or would you like from i. the prison? ii. From Meditatio/WCCM?*** *Any help available; Both the Prison and WCCM to believe that what we do is beneficial and therefore they are behind us to help if we need to ask for it. In the prison case, the prison powers more likely to come down on “yes” rather than ‘no” when we suggest something new. WCCM in South Australia has helped with the cost of uniforms, resources. Originally each person who put up their hand for the Prison Meditation ministry was given a copy of “Radical Simplicity”; Re (i) this has already been answered. Re (ii) coordinated effort by the WCCM to inform and educate corrections institutions at the international and national levels on the many varied benefits to corrections bodies and their detainees, in establishing meditation programs as part of the chaplaincy role in prisons. This may involve liaison with national and regional governments; I have excellent support from the Corrections staff in Programs. It’s more difficult to get action from further up the hierarchy. I would like to establish a direct line of contact to the governor. This depends on the mind-set of the governor. It would be good to be sharing ideas with other meditators in prisons. I haven’t done this as yet; We designed a bookmark for prisoners which was readily funded by WCCM in the UK. And we had free copies of Your Daily Practice for inmates who seemed to be taking it seriously and could read. The chaplaincy was very supportive, the more so as they got to understand what we were doing and felt the effect. There are many ways in which the prison could have done things better; I hardly know where to start!; i. support of chaplaincy is essential ii. WCCM has helped with providing resources as and when required. We have written our own appropriate talks ‘In the Stillness of Time’ which they have funded and published; ii. Small WCCM prayer cards explaining meditation (actually, I just print out some on my own printer)*

***6h. Would you be interested in being connected via zoom on a regular basis with other prison meditation group leaders for discussion and support?*** *Might have been useful; Yes – time zones a constraint - maybe every 3 months?; Too old for zoom but would love to be in email contact with other prison group leaders; yes, definitely; No – as think would have a negative impact hearing what others do in less strict prisons, other group leader might be interested. Time differences a problem; It is unlikely that I will continue a weekly commitment to meditation at the prison when I am allowed to go back although I may lead occasional sessions with the prisoners which would be for more than the 30 mins I currently have – so at present I do not wish to be part of a discussion group. If I did it would only relate to UK helpers as prisons vary so much around the world; this would be good but I am on “overwhelmed “ at the present moment; yes – absolutely!*

***6i Do you have any other comments or suggestions?*** *The WCCM website offers quite a lot of resources for meditation leaders/chaplains ministering in corrections systems. However, I would note that the information is spread widely throughout the site. I would like to suggest that the ministry strongly warrants its own identifying title (eg, ‘Meditating in Prisons’) within the website, under which all relevant blocks of information can be placed. This would be of value to corrections management and professional staff who may not be familiar with the discipline of meditation, and could also be used as a training document for some chaplains. I believe further, that the site needs to include the results of current scientific research demonstrating the full range of benefits to the individual and the community, in mind, body and spirit; Thank you, Mary, for this initiative. I’m sure there will be plenty for us to share as fellow travellers. My very best wishes and high hopes.*