PRISON MINISTRIES: A GUIDE TO RESOURCES

Community of Christ
This resource was developed through the wisdom and experience of many members and friends within the Community of Christ and other organizations. Special thanks go to those who have experienced firsthand the criminal justice system in the United States, including felons, families of the incarcerated, victims, and those who work within the system itself who were willing to share their stories and encouragement.

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**OVERVIEW**

This practical resource offers ways for you and your congregation to engage in prison ministry. You’ll find ideas, lists, some background material, and practical tools for starting and increasing your discipleship and congregation’s ministry in prisons. You may read from start to finish or go directly to a section that relates to your congregation’s current exploration. Contact information and sources are provided. While this resource is focused primarily on the criminal justice system within the United States, it is hoped that the ministry ideas and resources offered may be helpful in other contexts as well.
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When people hear the words “prison ministry,” they imagine going into a prison to talk with a prisoner. If a person has never been in a prison, they imagine scenes from television and movies, which often offer a frightening prospect. Beyond going into a prison, there are many ways to respond to the sacred call to care for others through prison ministry. This resource will help you get started and give you ideas to expand your congregation’s ministry.
Since ancient times, societies have dealt with people who hurt others or cause harm to a community. The usual human response has been to punish the wrongdoer by isolating them from others and/or causing them pain. As Christians, we are challenged by the grace of God that offers good news to all sinners, and by Jesus’ words to forgive, to judge not, and to restore right relationships with other people. We struggle to find the best ways to restore relationships among people. We show concern about the competence of fallible governments to provide justice.

In recent years, all these issues are growing at an alarming rate because the population of incarcerated people of all ages is growing around the world, according to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (see http://www.unodc.org/unodc/search.html?q=global+prison+population&x=4&y=3). United States leads the world in this growing trend. U.S. Justice Department statistics indicate that one in every 100 U.S. residents were behind bars in the summer of 2008. (See http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/prisons.htm.) This is a total of over 2,300,000 offenders behind bars (USA Today, March 2, 2008). The United States has 5 percent of the world’s population and 25 percent of its prisoners. The facts show alarming trends, with the numbers heading in the wrong direction. It is imperative that real solutions are found to this crisis.

A combination of reasons causes growth in the population behind bars: the effect of changes in laws in the late twentieth century related to drug offenses; the increasing number of laws enacted by local, state, or federal legislatures that are ever-expanding the criminal code; a lower tolerance for repeat offenders; privatization of prisons by businesses for profit, resulting in increased building of prisons and a greater number of prisoners; in all parts of the world, a growing population of refugees who try to escape violence and insecure living conditions; today’s current prison system that offers very little in the way of corrections or rehabilitation due to the lack of staff and funding, and overcrowding; other chronic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, and racism.

It is easy to become overwhelmed by this complex issue, but there are many ministry options for congregations. Start with one or two. Be encouraged by the example of Jesus, who extended God’s love, healing, and reconciliation to each person in his sphere of influence. We are called to join Jesus in communicating with and visiting those in prison.

The concept of restorative justice is a scripture-based understanding of healing relationships that holds individuals responsible for their actions. Restorative justice:

- pays special attention to victims and the community in addition to the offender and the government;
- aims to put things right, encouraging outcomes that promote responsibility, reparation, and healing for all;
- has brought an awareness of the limits and effectiveness of punishment;
- explores the harms offenders may have previously experienced;
• prefers inclusive, collaborative processes and consensual outcomes;
• is rooted in respect for everyone;
• is based on an older understanding of wrong-doing and putting things right.

An adult study on the concept of restorative justice is called Restorative Justice: Moving beyond Punishment (See page 22).

**A CALL FOR A CHRISTIAN MINISTRY RESPONSE**

This resource is for Christian congregations and individuals who recognize the call from God to be involved in ministries of justice and mercy. In Nazareth, Jesus prophesied:

God’s Spirit is on me; he’s chosen me to preach the message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, to announce “This is God's year to act!”

—Luke 4:18, 19 The Message, emphasis added

Jesus also said, “I was in prison and you visited me.” To which his hearers responded, “When was it that we saw you...in prison and visited you?” And Jesus replied, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25: 36–40 NRSV). We who claim to be the church, the body of Christ, are called to carry on this ministry in the world today.

In the Old Testament, the words of the prophet Micah tell how we should live before God. “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8 NIV).

As you prepare to begin prison ministry, a scriptural base is very important. Prepare for prison ministry with study and continue to read the sacred scriptures for encouragement and insights. God has a unique ministry for you and your congregation that will utilize the gifts and resources of all disciples. The crux of prison ministry is rooted in the compassion of Jesus and the examples found in the gospel message.

Movies, books like *Dead Man Walking*, and DVDs like *Repairing the Harm* have inspired people to follow the example of those who care for others. Other media suggestions are found on page 23).
Many people of faith share a concern for the criminal justice system. You will work more effectively and make a greater impact when you partner with other groups. Begin and continue prison ministry by partnering with other congregations to care for families, to provide for children, to visit in prisons, to correspond with prisoners, and to help bring justice and reconciliation in your community and state. You can develop prison ministry by partnering and practicing reconciliation with community and state agencies. Another way is to develop ministry by building a network among several faith communities and civic groups in your area.

Education and reentry programs are effective sources to help change today’s alarming trends. Christian-based ministry is an area, within or outside the prison, that can help bring true change of the heart and soul.
• SHARING YOUR CONCERN WITH OTHERS

Many concepts about the criminal justice system come from media like television, newspapers, movies, and the Internet. We hear about prison abuses and overcrowding of prisons, and we keep death row watches. More and more often, individuals know personally someone who is accused of a crime, incarcerated, or has suffered from violence. As one’s experience with the criminal justice system becomes personal, individuals will have a variety of responses. One response might be a desire to bring healing to the brokenness of the situation. This is one way God calls us into ministry. Effective ministers in a prison setting are persons who are resoundingly truthful, compassionate, honest, and straight-forward. They call it like it is and earn the respect of those in prison. They offer hope. Those who choose, by God’s grace, to share in prison ministry need to treat inmates with the same respect as they treat any member of a local congregation. They see them as a person rather than as a number or as someone who is identified by their actions. Jesus is interested in lifting people up and not continually beating them down.

• CONNECTING HUMAN NEED AND SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES

The first step to any active ministry is for individuals to recognize the need. As Christians, we are challenged by the words of Matthew 25:35–36 (NRSV):

…for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me… Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

The Hebrew Scriptures include psalms that describe how God views those who are imprisoned:

For the Lord hears the needy, and does not despise his own that are in bonds.—Psalm 69:33 NRSV

And those who struggle:

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free.—Psalm 146:5–7 NRSV
Modern scripture within the Community of Christ repeats the same direction to those who hurt. Doctrine and Covenants Section 161:3a offers this counsel:

> Open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all.

Section 163:4a of the Doctrine and Covenants is quite clear in its description of God’s response to God’s creation:

> God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God’s will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

While such scriptures may be the basis for action for many disciples, others might feel a sudden jolt of personal impact primarily when they or someone they know is touched by crime. Both victim and offender are affected along with their families and loved ones. Others grow in awareness through a scripture study, a study of contemporary issues, or a situation like the building of a prison in the community. Still others might be exposed to prison ministry through a mission project such as collecting gifts for children of prisoners.

People become aware of the potential for ministry by a study of the prisons in the area. There are many kinds of facilities: municipal, county, state, federal, and private prisons, as well as prisons for specific populations such as women, men, juveniles, elderly, and special needs medical units. Technically, in the United States, only state, federal, and private institutions are called correctional centers. Municipal facilities are usually called “lockups,” and county facilities are generally either jails or workhouses. Juvenile and immigrant prison-like facilities are usually called detention centers. Gather a list of facilities near your congregation. Visit or invite the volunteers, coordinators, chaplains, and social workers in those institutions to your congregation to learn about their needs. Find out the legal requirements and government regulations for visiting people in these kinds of facilities in your location. Gathering first-hand knowledge about the people and the prison in which you feel called to share ministry is vital. Visit a prison with someone. Attend, observe, and participate in programs already functioning there.

You also need to learn about prison ministries that are already taking place so that your efforts may partner with and not duplicate existing programs. You need to identify the needs of families of prisoners and find opportunities to help with aftercare.

Congregational prison ministry requires both raising awareness of the need for prison ministry and helping people connect the human issues with faith. Remember you can engage people where
they are by listening to their concerns. You may speak with passion and provide information, but remember that God is the one who calls people into ministry action. In every congregation people are gifted for different kinds of ministry.

**• COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE!**

- Invite volunteers and ex-inmates to share during worship the ways the ministry and a relationship with Christ has impacted their lives.
- Invite persons working on behalf of restorative justice principles to share with the congregation.
- Invite a prison chaplain to preach and teach about their work.
- Prepare an attractive bulletin board and update it often with new information.
- Provide newsletter articles and bulletin announcements that inform people on the issues of the criminal justice system.
- Create a focus Sunday with special prayers, sermon, and bulletin insert.

**• BUILDING A DEEPER AWARENESS**

- Prepare to offer a Sunday school or weekday class or series about some aspect of the criminal justice system. The class might be a scriptural study, a current events study, and/or an introduction to restorative justice and peacemaking techniques.
- Host a movie viewing with follow-up discussion
- In the congregation lead a study of contemporary social issues, especially family violence and abuse, addictive behaviors, juvenile justice, criminal and restorative justice, capital punishment, international criminal court, and peace with justice.
- Scriptural studies focused on restorative justice are described in this resource (see page 21).
• STARTING AN ACTION MINISTRY

• Collect materials for prisoners. This requires calling the chaplain or social services office of a facility to ask what they need and to learn about any restrictions on materials.
• Collect gifts for children of prisoners. Learn about the Angel Tree (see page 21).
• Contribute to Kairos Prison Ministry International (see page 21) and other ministries in your area. Each Kairos weekend requires dozens and dozens of home-baked cookies!
• Befriend a family or child of a prisoner. Often the prisoner is the family breadwinner and the families have specific survival needs.
• Write letters to approved offenders.
• Mentor a child who is struggling in school.
• Connect your church youth group with a juvenile facility for a sports day.
• Provide supplies for a geriatric prison unit, similar to a nursing home. Check with the chaplain about specific needs.
• Volunteer for restorative justice teams.
• Partner with groups that minister with ex-offenders and their families and friends.
• Volunteer for community sentencing panels and reparative boards.
• Get involved or start WINGS ministry or WINGS FOR L.I.F.E. (Life-skills for Inmate Families & Education). (See page 22).
The suggestions in this resource are intended to start or revitalize your congregation in the area of prison ministry. Work with the prison chaplain and the institutional activities coordinator as a team. Research existing services and determine the best way to become involved. Pray about such ministry and involve the whole congregation in prayer. Ask God to guide your ministry. As you study scriptural principles and learn about prison ministry needs in your area, you will be able to minister to specific needs.

You may belong to a small congregation where you are the only person interested in this area of ministry. If so, use the ideas in this resource to help you find the area best suited for your abilities and needs. In a congregation with only two or three volunteers, begin with this core group. Soon you may need to find places for many more people to be involved. When your church does any of these things your people will become interested. You will be on the way to obeying the scriptural command to “remember those who are in prison, as though [you are] in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body” (Hebrews 13:3). Invite, at the onset, the inmates to participate in the planning and implementation of these ministries. To be effective, prison ministry should be both presented to and received from the congregation.

**BUILDING A PRISON MINISTRY TEAM**


Follow these steps to build a prison ministry team:

1. Clarify what prison ministry entails so that people know how to respond. Help stimulate ideas from those involved in the discussion.
2. Clarify the specific ministry you want to be involved with.
4. Talk with those who you have identified to check out their interest and ideas for prison ministry. Pray about the ministry and ask God’s guidance and then invite other disciples to join you in exploring this ministry.
5. Select a team leader and bring the team together. An option for a smaller congregation is to consider forming a mission center team or partnering with other congregations. Then work through these steps:

- Begin by deciding where the ministry effort will focus.
- List the gifts and skills needed for this ministry. List the gifts, experience, and passion each one brings to this ministry. For example, does this ministry require teaching skills? Will volunteers need to be recruited and, if so, for what specific activities? What supplies, if any, will be required?
- Build a timeline for starting the ministry by first deciding the launch date.
- Consider whether to build support teams to handle parts of the ministry.
- At the end of each meeting be specific about who will do which task and set a date for the work to be done.
- Decide the date and place of the next meeting.

• PREVENTION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS, CONGREGATIONS, AND COMMUNITIES

Mentoring children is an important way of preventing future crime. Here are some ideas.

- Disciples and/or congregations can volunteer to mentor children in schools and churches.
- Congregations can partner with schools, congregations, and community centers to provide space for after-school programs for children. Congregations can organize volunteers and provide supplies for existing programs.
- Build assets among young people by creating or supporting a partnership of congregations, schools, and communities.
- Incorporate the principles of family peacemaking in your Christian education ministry for all ages.
- All efforts toward decreasing poverty, racism, and violence by congregations work toward crime prevention. Examples include working for restorative economic justice, advocacy for indigent mental health, efforts for preventing homelessness, and campaigns for reducing media violence.
- Provide space for classes, treatment programs, counseling, and special education programs. Examples include anger management, domestic violence treatment, twelve-step and other recovery programs, support groups for children such as divorce care and parent education.
• **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND MEDIATION**

Restorative justice is a process whereby an offender is held responsible for their actions against a victim or victims in ways that seek to bring healing for all rather than inflict more wounds. This process reflects the call of God to restitution and healing of victims as recorded in the Hebrew scriptures as well as the New Testament’s story of God’s incarnation, Jesus Christ.

- Learn the principles of restorative justice. Monitor and support legislation on restorative justice principles and practices. Section X includes curriculum and websites (see page 21).
- Everyone benefits when members of congregations learn skills for communicating about difficult issues.
- Consider providing mediation centers for victims of offenders.

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**V - BEHIND THE WALLS: DIRECT WORK WITH INCARCERATED PERSONS**

In general, background checks and other methods of screening are required for volunteers who go into prisons or send materials to prisons. Special training will be required and is strongly advised for those who will have direct contact with prisoners. Requirements about what you can do and how long you may stay vary from institution to institution. Remember that the first concern of the staff is security. This requires training and orientation, along with good sense and wisdom. A volunteer is a visitor and must follow the procedures or that individual will be barred from returning. Always contact the prison chaplain and/or administrator to learn about specific requirements and regulations.
• FRIENDSHIP VISITOR PROGRAM

Church members may simply “adopt” an inmate and become their friend. This new friend writes letters, sends birthday and holiday cards, and visits at least once a month. Start with a few people who are willing to make a commitment to participate in the program for at least one year. Call the chaplain of your local prison to discuss what you have in mind and the number of visitors you have available. Ask the chaplain to select a matching number of inmates, such as those people who get no visitors but would like to make connections.

The visitor should send the inmate a letter of introduction, keeping a friendly tone to describe family, hobbies, and interests. After exchanging letters, the inmate may add the new friend to the visitor list at the prison so that the new friend can get in for a visit.

On the first visit spend sufficient time getting acquainted, talking about interests, current events, family, or whatever else comes up. This is a ministry of sharing Christ’s love through your actions, not preaching.

Know the prison rules governing visitors, especially what if anything a prisoner may receive. Most prisons have websites that explain the dress codes and if you can bring money in for vending machines, etc.

This ministry can have a positive effect on all the people participating and the congregation. If you have several people visiting in the same prison, suggest they carpool for their visits. It will allow them a time of fellowship while traveling and they can compare notes or ask for advice—to the extent that they can, without betraying a trust. In addition, have jail visitors meet regularly for prayer, support, dialogue, and study. Over time they will begin to see patterns and issues in the system that they might collectively address for change.

Don’t let the idea of visiting a prison intimidate you. Prisoners are people just like you who have the same needs for friendship and dialogue.

• PEN PAL PROGRAM

Pen-and-ink correspondence is a vital ministry that is possible for a single disciple or everyone in your congregation. There are a number of do’s and don’ts that must be followed. Have everyone agree to these basic precautions at the beginning of this ministry.

• DO use the mailing address of the church or prison ministry.
• DO write on a regular schedule, possibly every two or three weeks.
• DO identify those from the church who are incarcerated and write or send cards.
• DO write carefully; prayerfully consider the impact your friendship and words have on an inmate. Discuss some family matters, for example, births, parties, birthdays, and graduations. You may do a scripture study with your pen pal, selecting passages and discussing them just as you would with a friend at home.
• At a specific time DO lift up your pen pal in prayer.
• DO include tracts in your letters but DON’T send anything without permission from the prison authorities. Many prisons have limits on materials they allow inmates to receive from individuals and organizations, except publishers. If permissible, share books and other resources.
• DO ask for prayers for inmates from your congregation.
• DO encourage inmates to share poems, art projects, stories, and testimonies that can be printed in your congregation’s bulletins. (Send them a copy.)
• DON’T stop writing without an explanation. You will injure your pen pal and damage the reputation of the ministry.
• DON’T give any inmate your personal address or phone number.
• DON’T tolerate obscene or abusive language in letters from your pen pal. If the letters start to get offensive or demanding, warn the inmate once with Christian love that such language and topics are offensive. If he or she continues, stop writing, and turn a copy of the offensive letter(s) over to the organization that provided the inmate’s name.

• DON’T send money, stamps, or other items of value without first checking prison rules and conforming to regulations governing these items. Beware of the devices some inmates try to use with well-intentioned but unsuspecting pen pals. Examine the motives behind the actions to determine the intent. All prisons have regulations governing these items.
• DON’T get involved in your pen pal’s legal affairs.
• DON’T take sides if your pen pal is having concerns with the staff. Share empathy.
• WORSHIP SERVICES

A church service in a prison operates somewhat like any service of worship in a local church. However, check with the chaplain or religious activities coordinator before your first service to make sure that you understand the customs of the group. These services are usually interdenominational, so you should not emphasize the doctrinal distinctiveness of your denomination. There is a wealth of scriptural material that you can use without having to go into areas on which different denominations disagree. The members of the Christian community in most prisons get along with each other much better than those on the outside, and many consider the service to be “their” church. You are considered a welcomed visiting minister.

Many members of your congregation who may not become regulars in prison ministry will make occasional visits with you to deliver a program on their special area. For example, youth and adult musicians can offer special music; visitors can show slides or travel programs on the Holy Land or other places they have visited. At a cookout at a youth facility, youth can offer dance, karate, and gymnastic demonstrations. Seek diligently to perceive the ministry or program from the inmate’s point of view.

Always greet the inmates on the way in, shaking hands, if possible, and thanking them for coming to the service. Your genuine greeting and focus on the people you are visiting is important in setting the tone for your acceptance. Follow the accepted custom of the facility when handing out whatever literature you may have, such as tracts, devotional guides, and magazines. Before bringing anything, make sure that the material is allowed, and that you have enough copies for everyone. Treat all equally and as extended congregational members.

There are a few congregations located in prisons, often holding services during visiting hours so that people outside the prison come into the prison for worship. If you are interested in establishing a prison congregation, check with your mission center president for policies and advice. You may contact Prison Ministries of America, http://www.prisoncongregations.org, a group dedicated to establishing mainline congregations in the prison systems of every state in the United States.
• SCRIPTURE STUDY

Regular classes for scripture study offer another opportunity to minister. Study with offenders about restorative justice. While the prison administrator may have limits on study groups similar to the limits placed on services, fewer congregations are interested in leading regular classes. Classes usually take place on weekday evenings for one or two hours, and while attendance will be considerably smaller than for Sunday services, most of the inmates attending will be seriously interested in scripture study. Another option is to share in one-on-one correspondence centered in scripture studies.

To begin a scripture study ministry, have two people work together with each class. Remember that Jesus sent disciples into new places two-by-two. Read Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1.

Do not disappoint the prisoners and do not underestimate them. For many inmates this time will be the highlight of their week, and they will spend the entire week preparing for your class. Remember that the prison environment gives the inmates long hours for reading and studying scriptures. Some will be taking correspondence courses about scripture. One result might be confusion from the hodgepodge of doctrines that they are reading. They may reveal this confusion in the questions that arise in class.

Be prepared to cover the announced material in a thorough and informed manner, but also be prepared to admit when you do not know something. Offer to check it out and have the answer the next time you visit. Make sure you keep this promise. You must be careful not to cause any inmate to lose face with peers. There is no formula for dealing with a problem student because every case will be different. Don't enter into confrontational debates and avoid any divisive challenges by an inmate who is accepted by the inmate’s Christian community. Both of these are no-win situations and may adversely affect your ministry.

• OTHER CLASSES AND RETREATS

As you get acquainted with the staff in the prison where you offer ministry, you will become aware of other opportunities for classes. Volunteer to be a “circle process facilitator.” For example, one woman leads a group of prisoners in writing devotionals for other prisoners. The group has produced Advent and Lent daily devotionals, and some writers have submitted their devotionals to national periodicals. As you engage in prison ministry you will discover other opportunities to teach life skills that prepare inmates for life after prison. Also be aware prisoners can teach you, too.
Juvenile facilities often welcome people who will serve as tutors, recreational volunteers, and companions. This is an ideal ministry for college students and young adults who like to work with junior and senior high age students in these facilities.

As you build relationships with prison staff and inmates, you may be involved in a retreat experience like the Kairos weekend where interdenominational volunteers share in an introductory course in Christianity (http://www.kairospinsonministry.org). Kairos is modeled on the Christian spiritual renewal movements of Emmaus (http://www.upperroom.org/emmaus), Tres Dias (http://www.tresdias.org), and Cursillo (http://www.natl-cursillo.org).

**SOME MINISTRY-CENTERED IDEAS WITH CONGREGATIONS**

When someone goes to prison many other people are impacted. Spouses, children, parents, friends, and other relatives have practical and spiritual needs.

- Provide meeting space for support groups of various kinds for spouses and children of prisoners. These may include twelve-step recovery programs.
- If your congregation is near a prison, set up an intentional program for families of inmates who move to your community to be near their loved ones in prison. A comprehensive ministry would provide basic food and shelter as they re-settle. Offer a genuine welcome from the congregation to these sojourners.
- Provide emergency assistance for rent, food, utilities, diapers, and/or childcare.
- Provide transportation for families for monthly prison visits.
- Provide housing for families who travel to your area to visit a prisoner.
- Support summer camps for children of prisoners with supplies and scholarships. Offer your time as a camp counselor or aide.
- Promote an Angel Tree to collect Christmas presents for children of inmates. Angel Tree is a Christian ministry that reaches out to the children of inmates and their families (www.angeltree.org).
- Provide job training and résumé writing assistance for spouses who need to find employment.
- Look into a faith-based program such as Life Connections Program where inmates participate in religion-specific and inter-faith program components designed to bring restoration with God, family, community, and self (www.changecompanies.net).
- Build a referral network with other congregations, local missions, and social agencies to assist families of prisoners.
The current criminal justice system does not have many resources to help people who have completed a prison term to reenter society. The first few days are especially critical. Many prisoners have lost contact with family and community networks who could help them find jobs, housing, clothes, and food. They often have no means of transportation or money to reestablish an acceptable and responsible life. They have parole requirements that include regular reporting to an often-distant parole officer. There are many con artists who wait at bus stations to prey on newly released prisoners. Many ex-offenders add to the homeless populations. As a result, more than three quarters of released prisoners in the United States return to prison.

Aftercare ministry may be a natural follow-up to the relationships your congregation builds with prisoners and their families. Be hospitable to those who reenter church and community. Aftercare may also develop as a unique call for your congregation. There are opportunities for ministry with ex-offenders, with families, and with victims of crime. Remember while the crime one commits is extremely important and needs to be addressed responsibly, it is also important to sense how the inmate deals with the effects of their crime and new restrictions imposed on their life as they adjust to society.

- Establish a relationship with a local prison to learn when inmates are released and what their needs are. Work with probation and parole officers. Provide a crisis response of work clothes, food, shelter, jobs, and homes.
- Help newly released people get the documents they need for identification.
- Establish a network for finding jobs—both temporary and long-term. A good resource is 99 Days and a Get Up by Ned Rollo (see page 23).
- Provide resources and networks to access healthcare, especially for ex-offenders who need on-going prescription medications. They have no health insurance or resources for the medications they need.
- Establish a mentoring program for support as ex-offenders begin to reestablish themselves in a community. Such support should reach out to the whole family system.
- Individually and/or as a congregation, partner with Project COPE, a non-profit organization that provides assistance to individuals and families struggling with substance abuse issues (www.projectcope.org).
• Offer marriage support, counseling, and marriage enrichment classes for reunited couples.
• Be informed and support legislation related to improving the opportunity for law-abiding ex-offenders to succeed.
• Share thanks with the prison leaders and staff (chaplain, counselors, etc.).
• Offer parenting classes.

VII - CORRECTIONAL STAFF: OPPORTUNITIES
WITH WARDENS, CHAPLAINS, ATTORNEYS, AND SUPPORT STAFF

The staff that carry out the enforcement and correction demanded by our criminal justice system act on behalf of all of us. Their work is stressful as they pay attention to issues of justice, compassion, and personal safety.

• MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGING WITH CORRECTIONAL STAFF

• Offer scripture study for staff.
• Host an appreciation lunch.
• Send notes of appreciation and offer intercessory prayers for all within the prison system.
• Support training for staff to be more effective in their work.
• Be informed and support legislation related to improving the criminal justice system.
• Ask staff what they need.
The scriptures sound a clear and consistent theme concerning responsibility to care for people who are weak, powerless, and/or poor. These themes are evident in the laws of the Old Testament, in the proclamations of the prophets, and in the words and actions of Jesus. His commandment to love one another describes the way we are to live in relationship with each other. As you consider prison ministry, remember that there are many people who suffer as the result of law-breaking, crime, and violence. Some victims are the direct recipients of an act of violence; others are family members or bystanders. Some victims need physical healing, others need emotional or mental healing, and all need spiritual healing.

• **MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCIPLES AND CONGREGATIONS**

  - Offer recovery, support, and healing for victims who may have experienced domestic abuse, sexual assault, elder abuse, and child abuse.
  - Accompany crime victims to court and offer support and advocacy, if needed.
  - Financially support local shelters for victims of domestic, sexual, or other forms of abuse.
  - Offer memorial services and remember the anniversary of a loss.
  - Train Stephen Ministers to provide comprehensive, one-on-one caring support for individuals experiencing life's struggles. See www.stephenministries.org.
  - Support local emergency call lines.
  - Form a corps of volunteers to assist families when their homes have been physically broken into.
  - Lead small groups in the experiential study, *Companions in Christ: The Way of Forgiveness*, a resource published by Upper Room which encourages individuals in small groups to live a forgiven and forgiving life in response to God's call (see page 23).
  - Offer pastoral care to responder teams for 911 calls and emergency medical teams.
As you grow in awareness of the whole criminal justice system, you will develop sensitivity to places where the system needs repair or change. The African proverb “A single bracelet does not jingle” underlines the need for many voices to make the changes that are needed, and community action is one way to bring change to society and to culture. We have the example of the civil rights movement to bring change in race relations, and also the women’s suffrage movement that led to the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States that assures women the right to vote. Strikes against conditions in factories throughout the early part of the twentieth century led to the forty-hour work week and better working conditions for all workers in the United States. Protests against the war pressured the government to end U.S. involvement in Viet Nam. Community action led to the end of apartheid in South Africa.

The three repeating steps to community action are:

1. Education
2. Awareness and sensitivity
3. Action

**MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCIPLES AND CONGREGATIONS TO ENGAGE IN COMMUNITY ACTION**

- Affiliate with the Just Peace movement to bring justice and reconciliation (see www.justpeaceumc.org).
- Gather names and contact information of persons who are willing to call, write, or email legislators and provide information to state and regional groups such as Missouri Impact and Missouri Association of Social Work.
- Learn and teach skills for community mediation.
- Have a congregational or mission-center-wide study of restorative justice and its scriptural basis.
- Offer the church building as a meeting place for community action teams.
- Offer regular worship to renew and inspire people toward ministries of reconciliation and renewal.
SELECTED SUPPORT AGENCIES AND RESOURCES

**Agencies**

**Alpha**, an interdenominational national network of over 8,300 churches that regularly conduct the Alpha course with inmates in US prisons and jails. Alpha provides a referral source for in-prison Bible studies and re-dash entry assistance. See www.alphausa.org.

Bible studies for congregations. **Calvin Institute of Christian Worship** offers a downloadable study article with principles of restorative justice, profiles of individuals, and links for ways to get involved. Go to: http://www.calvin.edu/worship/stories/restore_justice.php.

**Catholic Charities** (Contact any Catholic church in your area.) Celebrate Recovery is a recovery program based on eight principles from the Beatitudes. See www.celebraterecovery.com.

**Center of Justice and Reconciliation**, Eastern Mennonite University, c/o Dr. Howard Zehr, 1200 Park Rd., Harrisburg, VA 22802-2462; Tel: 540-432-4000, Ext 4492; email Zehr@emu.edu.

**Friends Outside** is a nonprofit community-based organization that has been providing programs and services to families and individuals involved in the criminal justice system since 1995. They believe in respect for others, the capacity of human beings to change, and the importance of the family and the community. See http://friendsoutside.org.

**Kairos Prison Ministry International** is the parent organization of a body of ministries addressing the spiritual needs of incarcerated men, women, and children, their families, and those who work in the prison environment. See www.kairosprisonministry.org.

**Navigator’s Prison Ministry**—a prison fellowship that works to share God’s love with these men and women and helps equip them for life outside the walls. They collaborate with churches, volunteers, and ministries to support those who enter the prisons. See http://www.navigators.org/us/ministries/prison.

**Prison Fellowship (PF).** This ministry provides pre-release counseling and support and after-release assistance. Contact Charles Colson; 1-800-552-6435, 44180 Riverside Parkway, Lansdowne, VA 20176; 703-478-0100; Angel Tree 800-322-5527 (www.angeltree.org); correspondence at: http://www.pfm.org.
Restoration Justice Community Network, PFI Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, PO Box 17434, Washington, D.C. 20041; Tel: 1-703-481-0000; Fax: 1-703-481-0003; email: cjr@pfi.org.

Salvation Army (Contact any local Salvation Army group in your area.)

Wings Ministry. The goal is to connect spouses, caretakers, and children of inmates with the nurturing and supporting relationships of Christian people in local churches. See http://www.wingsministry.org/index.htm.

Yokefellows—based on the teaching of Quaker Elton Trueblood, started in 1983 to build one-on-one relationships with prisoners through a visitation and aftercare program. The history, program, and aftercare work is described at: http://www.yokefellowpa.org.

• Books and Magazines


Chicken Soup for the Prisoner’s Soul: 101 Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit of Hope, Healing, and Forgiveness by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and Tom Lagana; Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2000. ISBN: 1558748377; 9781558748378


Ned Rollo has written four books for people involved in prison ministry: *99 Days and a Get Up* (Reentry), *Man, I Need a Job* (Employment), *Crutch: Life without a Crutch* (Overcoming Dependence), and *A Map through the Maze* (Orientation); Open, Inc., P.O. Box 472223, Garland, TX 75047-2223; 972-271-1971; 1-800-966-1966; (fax) 972-278-5884; www.openinc.org; Email: Info@openinc.org.

*In Touch*—FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS—Baptist. Charles Stanley also has DVDs and videos and a series called “The Extra Ordinary life” for a weekly class. In Touch Ministries, P.O. Box 7900, Atlanta, GA 30357.

*Prison Legal News*, dedicated to protecting human rights, 2400 NW 80th St. #148, Seattle, WA 998117.

*Upper Room*—Methodist. Excellent daily devotionals. These are supplied FREE. Bi-monthly. Customer Services, P.O. Box 340012, Nashville, TN 37202; Tel: 800-972-0433.

**• DVDs and Videos**

*The Man with the Golden Arm* shows very forcibly the effects pre-prison friends have on a newly released prisoner’s desires to stay clean and straight.

**• Movies**

*The Power of Forgiveness* (Documentary). Contact: Dan Juday, Tel: 703-519-8200 or visit www.journeyfilms.com.

**• Websites**

http://www.stjamespotomac.org/prisonaftercare.htm has all kinds of study materials and DVDs
TESTIMONY BY ELEANOR ST. CLAIR

Ken was a dental surgeon. He had been drinking, and blacked out for the first time. He became abusive to his girlfriend for the first time, also, and she called the police. A swat team came. They addressed the situation by shooting at him. I don’t know if it was at the windows, but the first thing he could remember was crawling across the floor to a phone, to report the shooting to the police. He was told, “Yes, we are shooting at you.” The shock of this evidently had somewhat of a sobering effect on him; then he was arrested.

I was called to come to the jail where Ken was being held. We talked for over an hour. I learned he was a devout Catholic who took advantage of everything offered by the church, even Bible study. He said he owned a huge home, boat, cars, traveled, and sent his kids to Europe on vacations. They lived the life of those in the elite circle, and he only had to work three days a week. He became divorced at some point. He also suffered from severe arthritic pain, and began to use some of the pain medication that he prescribed for patients. He became addicted.

He said he tried to live by the teaching of his church so that his children would also have faith in God. But now his life was a total mess, and where was God? Why had God abandoned him? Before I left I asked if he would like to share in the sacrament of being anointed for a blessing. He welcomed it. I didn’t feel any special presence of the Holy Spirit; rather I felt compassion and poured my heart out for him. He later told me that a light came down, encircled him, and entered him while I was praying, but that he was in such an emotional state that it really didn’t mean anything at the time.
The next day he was transferred to a hospital for mental evaluation. He said that night a voice called him by name and said, “Ken, sit up.” He saw a pair of hands close to the bed, holding a book. One hand began to flip through the pages rapidly. Ken said he saw every page and recognized every scene. It covered his whole life, and didn’t seem to take more than three seconds. He was puzzled because there was someone on every page who he did not recognize. The hands closed the book and a voice said, “See, I was there all the time.” Ken knew instantly that the person in the scenes and the voice speaking was Jesus Christ. Naturally, he was very excited, but was told to lie down. He went to sleep and had the most restful night he had known in months.

In the fellowship we had every Wednesday night, he learned about the method of the baptism Jesus had and became very angry that his parents had him sprinkled as a baby. He said he wanted to be baptized by immersion. While incarcerated for eleven months, he took Temple School courses, and one in particular, Spiritual Disciplines, by Paul Edwards, had a tremendous impact on him. Ken declared that everyone should take it. His “gimme, gimme” prayers were changed to those of thanksgiving and wanting to serve our Lord.

After his release he went to Missouri to look for property. While he was there he talked of going to the Temple and the Auditorium. I don’t know if he ever made it as he died of a heart attack while there. One thing he was most grateful for was during the anointing prayer he was healed of his addiction and his severe pain, something he didn’t ask for, probably never considered.

Another experience is typical of the needs of the hundreds of inmates with whom I have shared the sacrament of Holy Communion. This experience began for me one afternoon with the “aroma” of Christ (II Corinthians 2:14, 15) awakening me from a nap. It was as though someone had sprayed a strong floral scent in my face.

That evening I was to share communion with a number of inmates. The room was packed and it was impossible for me to move around to serve. When I expressed my concern, Danny spoke up, “Sister Eleanor, you just stay where you are, and we will come to you.” Danny had made several important promises to me that, unfortunately, he failed to keep. Thus, I had kept him at a distance because of his lying. But his suggestion enabled us to share in greater worship.

When we were finished, Brian asked if he could be anointed. He had experienced a blessing from this in the recent past. He shared that he had to go to court on Monday and was very concerned for his mother. He wanted to be calm and composed for her sake. He stood and motioned for him to sit in my chair, but he shoved it aside and dropped to his knees in front of me. I was both shocked and humbled. There was such a power present that I found it very difficult to begin the prayer. At its conclusion, he threw his arms around me and wept while thanking me for sharing this beautiful blessing. Following Brian, others wanted this sacrament and dropped to their knees, also.

Danny was the second one with whom I shared in prayer. I did not feel it a privilege to call upon the Lord for his sake, but Danny was terrified. He would be leaving for prison in a few days. The next Wednesday I asked how Danny fared emotionally before he left. I was told by George, a deacon in his church, that God had blessed him with peace that remained with him as long as he was there.
Another example was David, a Mexican American, who had strayed from his walk with the Lord and asked for prayer. He felt he needed it to remain strong. He had been faithful in studying from a little pocket Bible. When I gave him a bigger Bible after the prayer, he grabbed it and kissed the pages with joy. David said, “Now I won’t have to squint anymore when I read the Word!”

David had brought to the meeting a young Mexican named Juan who was awaiting deportation. Juan didn’t want to come because he spoke no English, but David insisted. He wanted Juan to observe and feel what went on in our meetings. David said Juan requested prayer and wanted David to say that he, Juan, had never experienced power like this before, and he wanted to keep it with him always.

Eric was the last person with whom I prayed, one of the few people who I ever considered evil. His life was a total disaster from taking drugs and an associated personality disorder. He, too, would be leaving for prison in a few days. When he dropped to his knees I felt repulsed and nauseated. I did not want to touch him! I struggled with my attitude. I was able to confess my sinful judgment and knew that I was only the servant, not the healer. Still, it was not easy, but I kept a promise I made to serve Christ, no matter what the cost. At the conclusion of the service, while the men were being ushered out, I was made aware of the presence of Christ again. “Christ, through us, spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him…the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved” (II Corinthians 2:14, 15 NIV). It was the same aroma I had sensed earlier in the day.

About six months later, on a cold March day, with a raw wind blowing off Lake Erie, I found Eric knocking at my door. I knew he wanted to come in but I didn’t feel that I should offer that invitation. He stated that he had come to let me know that with the prayer we had recently shared in, he had received a healing from a chronic health problem that had made life miserable for years.

After Eric left, I wondered how God felt about my reaction. However, the next week I shared my guilt feelings with the female inmates and that I felt I needed to grow. Almost as a chorus, they cried out, “Don’t ever let him in your house.” As servants, we have the promise that God will “go before us into the dark places where we are sent.” I know God loves Eric, but my action may have been for my own protection.

On another occasion, during fellowship I sat next to a man who had been arrested for the murder of a couple for the $50 they owed him. I had my hand on his arm, staring down and talking to the other inmates who appeared ready to attack him. When I looked back at him, I saw the radiant, glorious face of the Christ. Never did I dream such a thing would happen! I learned, no matter how we view another person, we cannot comprehend the unconditional love of God for all of his children.

I want to state that we are blessed by this sacrament and that a physical healing is not always requested. In the ten years I ministered at the jails, rehabs, and prisons, very few asked for relief from an ailment of the body. I have offered anointing and prayer freely over the years because the Lord told me that my ministry would be enhanced by the proper use of the sacraments. It truly has been.
At one time we were a typical small congregation. Our attendance was about thirty-five on a Sunday morning. Community involvement consisted of a monthly meal served at the homeless shelter. The church building was cleaned whenever the volunteer family remembered or took the time. We did have an active youth program.

Using the concepts from the book *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* by Kennon L. Callahan enhanced our growth. We first began to make changes with the functional characteristics of the church. The members of the congregation began to see their congregation as a community-minded church. The pastor joined the local ministerial alliance and served as the secretary of the organization. We contributed on a regular basis to the local food bank and got involved in a project to improve the appearance of houses for the elderly and poor.

When Transformation 2000 began we decided we wanted to become a model congregation, with our emphasis on prison ministry. We joined the Yokefellow program and began our first visits to the men’s prison nearby. First, there was just one man to visit the prisoners, then two men and a woman, and then three women and four men got involved in visiting the prisons. We bring the men and women we visit to the church. The women inmates also visit in their sponsor’s home or go shopping with them. We have given men help in furnishing apartments and/or paying the deposits and first month’s rent for them. The lives of nineteen women and twelve men have been affected. Our prison ministry program has transformed our congregation! Three of the inmates have become members of our church, and one is presently serving as an ethnic outreach minister.

Our attendance on Sunday morning now averages about fifty people with as many as seventy in attendance many times. Our congregation has a rich mix of Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanic people, and you often hear a soft buzz during meetings as translations are being done. The apartment complex where our outreach minister lived was just one block away from the
church. Due to his presence, we were able to develop programs with the children living there. We have had two successful youth activities with eighteen to seventy participating. We have started an after-school tutoring program on Wednesday afternoons. We plan on doing tutoring at least three days each week. Ten children attended the first Wednesday and twelve the next. Mothers from the housing complex are the teachers for the children. We have a ninety-one-year-old retired teacher who drives thirty minutes to help the children read. One of the classrooms has become a computer room. A congregational workshop was held with outstanding results, to share concepts from Stephen Covey’s book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and Rick Warren’s book *The Purpose-Driven Church*.

**CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITY TOGETHER HELPS PROJECT REPORT**

Name of Congregation/Group:

Address:

Phone (H): (O):

Fax: (Email):

Pastor:

Contact Person:

1. **How did the congregation first get the idea for this ministry?**
   A member of our congregation had a friend who served on the Yokefellow prison ministry board. He visited our congregation several times and brought an inmate with him. Their visits piqued our interest and a few of us became involved.

2. **Share simply and specifically each of the steps you took before the ministry was begun.**
   Used concepts from the book *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* by K. Callahan.
   
   - Improved building and grounds to appear community friendly.
   - Became involved in community activities—food bank, Christmas in April, Ministerial Alliance, serving meals.
   - Changed our attitude—began to see ourselves as a community church.
   - Held several meetings determining who we were and who we wanted to become.
   - Chose key people in congregation to first become involved in Yokefellows.
• Prison ministry allowed each member to serve at the level of their comfort—visit person, donate food and apartment items—but all agreed to love and accept the inmates when they attended church.
• Key people attended the required volunteer classes held at the prison.
• Voted $2,000 in church budget for prison ministry.

3. Share helpful contacts, faith groups, agencies, city leaders, and others who were helpful to you in developing the community ministry (list all).
No one helped in developing ministry but these are now supporting our ministry:

• Healing place (home and program to assist drug addicts)
• Wake County resources—assistance in utilities, medical, other
• Wake County Human Services—free medical services
• St. Michael’s Catholic Church—assistance with used furniture
• Three Top Apartments—worked with us and placed three released inmates in apartments
• Chatham Forest Apartments—worked with us and placed four released inmates
• Yokefellow program through prison—able to contact inmates on Monday
• Local power and light company allows church to sign as guarantor, so no deposit is required

4. List the helps you found productive in involving the neighborhood/community and congregation in the ministry; for example, if prison ministry was shared, how did you process this with the prison director and the prisoner?

• By attending Monday evening Yokefellow meeting, we became acquainted with the inmates. From the inmates that came to our tables to talk, we would choose whom to sponsor. This allowed us to take them to church. The prison system only provided the meeting. We have since become involved in a statewide effort to improve care for inmates after their release. We seem to know what is needed, so have helped in developing guidelines.
• Because of prison ministry and our placement of inmates in the apartment complex near the church, we are now involved in an after-school tutoring program for the children there. We provide recreational activities in the summer.

5. List the resource areas and groups (church, community) you found helpful in funding this ministry.

• Limited funding for our type of program. Agencies will give limited assistance for people being evicted from their house but no one is willing to put deposit and first month’s rent down for anyone—especially released prisoners. A lot of our money was spent for deposits and rent. We have received a couple of cars and a lot of furniture for our ministry.
• The world church has been our only source of financial assistance ($4,000 in 2000, $2,000 in 2001).

6. Share any other comments or suggestions.
We have been doing prison ministry for three years. We have 100 percent success—no one has
returned to prison. Several have returned to college, several are ministers. Six male inmates have joined the church—one is serving as an ethnic outreach minister and will be ordained an elder. Several other released inmates attend church regularly and are involved in our church program.

The prison system did not accept us (“the Mormons”) for the first year. They spoke badly about us. Now they consider us number one in prison ministry. They call us when a specific inmate needs our love and support.

World Church Congregations and Community Together Ministries (CCT) Handbook and (CCT) Addendum Handbook: available by contacting: rschaefer@cofchrist.org or 816-833-1000, ext. 2364.

God has a unique ministry for everyone and every congregation. Prison ministry is a service ministry that is needed and is modeled after the One we call Jesus.

Come, you are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you… for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.—Matthew 25:34–36 NRSV, emphasis added