

Steps to Starting a Correctional Ministry with Your Church

Step 1: Pray

Prayer should be the foundation for ministry. Pray about what God wants for the specific institution, your individual role, and the role of the church. Share your heart's call to correctional ministry with others and recruit them to pray with you. If possible, create a team who also feel the same call to correctional ministry.

Step 2: Consult your Spiritual Leaders

Most jails and prisons require a letter of recommendation or support from your church leadership. Share with them your burden, your vision for the church in correctional ministry and how it fits in with the mission and other ministries of your church. Share with the church leaders the Biblical mandate for correctional ministry. Be willing to submit to those in authority -- this is Biblical. Your spiritual leaders may be able to provide valuable insights to you. Having the support of your church leaders is KEY! If you don't have their support, your efforts will most likely be in vain.

Step 3: Conduct an Analysis (See *Sample Analysis Form*)

Use these questions to guide an analysis of correctional ministry opportunities.

- What types of institutions are in your immediate area?
- Collaboration is important. What other churches or Christian ministries are providing correctional ministry?
- Who is the chaplain or volunteer coordinator at the institution?
- What is needed for clearance?
- What needs exist in their institutions? Will you minister to inmates, correctional officers, or inmate families?
- What needs can you or your church fill? Try not to duplicate efforts of other Christian organizations. Christians should compliment, not compete with one another.
- Familiarize yourself with the rehabilitation programs offered in local institutions and the profile of the inmate population.

Step 4: Explore Program Options

Your church may want to adopt a particular correctional institution and meet the needs there. Examples of programs and services used in correctional ministries are listed. Be creative, if you discover a need in your analysis, create a program or service to fill it.

For Inmates

- Cell-to-cell visits
- Worship services (Music, testimony, teaching)
- Bible Studies
- Teaching Life Skills

- Addiction Treatment Programs
- Pen Pal
- Mentoring
- Tutoring
- Grading Bible Study lessons
- Storybook Project (Record inmate reading a book and give book and tape to their child)
- Ask inmates what they need

For Families

- Transportation for families to visit inmate
- Housing when families visit an inmate
- Information about the criminal justice system
- Information for visiting the jail or prison
- Basic needs: housing, food, clothing
- Childcare during jail/prison visit
- Programs for children in visiting room of jail/prison
- Emotional support (they need help with how to face the shame, embarrassment, depression, life issues)
- A Church home
- Presents on Christmas or Birthdays
- Ask families what they need

For Correctional Officers

- Prayer
- Encouraging notes
- Water/Cookies at work
- A Church home
- Ask correctional officers what the need

For Chaplains

- Financial support if not employed by the institution
- Prayer support
- Committed volunteers
- Ask chaplains what they need

Step 5: Prepare a Program Proposal (See *Sample Cover Letter and Program Proposal*)

When preparing a program proposal, it is important to consider the following factors:

- **Purpose:** What is the goal of your program? Description of the program.
- **Target population:** Who is the program focused for? (men, women, juveniles, families)
- **Benefits:** How will your program benefit the inmates and the institution?
- **Leadership:** Who will direct your program? What are his/her qualifications and experience?
- **Volunteers:** Who will be volunteering to work in the program? What type of training will they receive?

- **Facilities:** What type of facilities will you need? Do you need the Chapel, day room, classroom, visiting area? You may not be given options, it may be whatever is available.
- **Schedule:** What days and times do you want to meet? How many weeks is the program?
- **Equipment:** Will you need an overhead projector, video/DVD player, musical instruments, songbooks, tape/CD player? Does the institution provide these or do you need to get permission to bring them in?
- **Materials:** Bring enough copies with you. All Bibles, books, tracts, and handouts must be approved by the institution.

Step 6: Submit Proposal

Submit a copy of your proposal to your church leaders for review, then submit a copy to the chaplain or volunteer coordinator at the institution and wait for their response. They may want to meet with you to discuss your proposal. If so, be on time, dressed in business casual, and prepared for your appointment. If you do not receive a response to the proposal after a reasonable length of time, take the initiative and schedule an appointment yourself with the person to whom it was submitted.

If your request is denied, try to find out the reasons in a non-defensive manner. For example, don't ask "Why was I denied" but rather "My request for volunteering was denied, can you help me understand why I was denied and what I can do to get accepted?" This may be a test of your commitment, dedication, and patience. Administrators and chaplains quit, retire, or transfer and someone else may be more favorable to your program.

RLUIPA: At present, in the United States it is the responsibility of the institution's administrator to ensure that all residents are able to exercise their constitutional right to practice their religious beliefs. The only way this right can be denied is that substantial justification can be shown to limit or regulate it, for example a security breach. This law does not guarantee you will be approved or give you a right to minister in the institution. The correctional facility can meet this law through other ministries.

Step 7: Recruit and Train Volunteers

After approval of the correctional ministry by your church leaders and the correctional institution in which you plan to minister, you need to secure volunteers to conduct the program. A volunteer is important:

- To the inmate, as a link to the outside world, a friend, and a model of mature Christian life.
- To families of inmates, in providing information and practical and spiritual help as they cope with their dilemma.
- To the chaplain, by assisting and supporting the programs.
- To the correctional administration, as an additional resource for helping with rehabilitation and transition back into society. The volunteer can provide services the institution cannot provide because of limited staffing and budget.
- To other volunteers, as a source of encouragement, training, and example to follow.

- To the local church, as a channel of communication, increasing awareness of the need for jail and prison ministries.
- To herself, as this ministry provides an opportunity for using her spiritual gifts and putting her faith into action.

Recruiting Volunteers

- Invite friends.
- Put a notice in church bulletins.
- Make announcement in church services.
- Recruit at small group meetings.
- Prepare posters and place them in strategic locations in the church.
- Host a “Correctional Ministry Day” in the church or churches you plan to involve in the ministry. Have a speaker who is actively involved in prison ministry and include testimonies from former prisoners. Outline the program you plan and announce a meeting (date, time, place) for those who are interested in participating. In addition to recruiting volunteers, the “Correctional Ministry Day” will prepare churches to receive former prisoners into their fellowship.

Screening Volunteers

Have them complete a short volunteer application (See *Sample Volunteer Application* sample). This information must be kept confidential.

- Has the person had prior jail or prison ministry experience?
- Does the person have any musical talents?
- What languages do they speak?
- Do they have the ability to lead a small group?
- Have they had any personal witnessing experience?
- What is their spiritual gift? Teaching and counseling are two important gifts for correctional ministry.
- Are they an ex-offender? If so, check to be sure they will be allowed access to the prison.
- Determine where their interest lies and where they will be most effective:
 - Writing an inmate
 - Visiting an inmate (Mentor, Cell-to-Cell)
 - Leading a Bible study
 - Teaching life skills, addictions recovery, etc.
 - Ministering to an inmate’s family
 - Worship services
 - Post-prison ministry
 - Ministering to inmate families

Note: When ministering to the opposite gender, it is vital that dress is modest and conduct above reproach. When possible, have husband and wife teams. This prevents potential problems from arising and provides a positive role model of a husband-wife relationship.

Train Volunteers

- Areas of ministry training may include:
 - Writing an Inmate (visit www.bgcprisonministries.com for Pen Pal tips)
 - Visiting Inmates (mentoring/discipling)
 - Cell to Cell Visits
 - Conducting Bible Studies

- Conducting Worship Services
- Teaching Life Skills
- Ministering to Inmate's families
- Post-Prison Ministry
- Ministering to Death Row inmates, HIV positive inmates, and the terminally ill.
- Review your correctional ministry proposal with them.
- Discuss where they would fit best in the program.
- Contact the *Institute for Prison Ministries* for volunteer training seminars and attend training provided the agency you are working with.
- Be sure to obtain proper clearances for volunteers to enter the institution.
- Complete any training required by the chaplain or the administration of the correctional institution where you will be serving.

Step 8: First Ministry Event

When working with a group, it is important that they are dressed modestly, bring a valid Driver's License or State ID, understand the rules of the facility and are willing to obey all the rules, and understand their role and the group's goal for the ministry. Remind them that if they disobey the rules, it could jeopardize the ministry.

Ask them if they have any questions. Describe for them what they might encounter in the process of entering and exiting, contact with the inmates, and remind them to stay with the group. Let them know it is common to feel nervous or afraid. Assure them of their safety and that violence is extremely rare with volunteers.

Pray. This is spiritual warfare and it is important to remember why you are doing this ministry and that you are dependent on God. Invite the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of those you are serving and in your own life.

Step 9: Debrief and Evaluate

Especially those who are ministering in jails and prisons for the first time may need to process their experience. Some potential questions for discussion are:

- What did you think about your experience?
- What surprised you?
- What didn't surprise you?
- How did you feel going in? Now?
- What did you learn about yourself? About inmates?

Doing correctional ministry well is important. Christ calls us to do our work heartedly and for the Lord (Col 3:23). It is a poor witness to provide sloppy ministry. Ask the group:

- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- Did they feel valued in the ministry? It is important to mentor/nurture your volunteers. They need to know that they are appreciated and make a difference.

Analysis Form Sample

1. What jails and prisons are in your immediate area? Types of facility (men, women, youth and security level) and addresses.
2. What other Christian organizations or churches are providing correctional ministry in your area?
3. Who is in charge of coordinating religious volunteers at the jail or prison? Contact information?
4. What do you need to do to gain clearance to minister inside the jail or prison? Forms? Training? Types of required ID? TB test?
5. What kinds of religious services are needed? Worship, Bible studies, Life Skills, Mentoring, etc.
6. What needs can you or your church fill?

Program Proposal Cover Letter Sample

Use letterhead stationery if possible. Fill in the information in parenthesis. If you have previous correctional ministry experience, attach letters of recommendation and/or commendation from jail or prison officials at the institution where you ministered. If you have received requests from inmates in the institution for the specific program you are offering, attach these to your proposal.

(Date)

(Institution Address)

Dear (Chaplain or volunteer coordinator)

We are requesting permission to conduct a prison ministry program at the (name of institution).

Our program will be directed to the inmate population, but we believe it will also benefit the institutional staff by providing inmates with an opportunity for better use of free time and improvements in inmate morale. It has also been demonstrated that inmates who become true adherents of what the Bible teaches makes good citizens in a correctional environment. Their influence positively affects other prisoners and causes them to respect authority and to avoid situations that cause tensions and hostilities between staff and inmates.

Our volunteers must complete a correctional ministry training course that addresses dress and safety codes, institutional and inmate typology, and how to relate to inmates. An emphasis will be placed on knowing and enforcing the institution's rules and policies.

At this time, we are prepared to offer a weekly bible study. Please see the attached program proposal.

I look forward to hearing your response to this proposal. Thank you for your time and all consideration given to this request.

Respectfully submitted,

(Your name)

Program Proposal

Institutions may have a form for submitting program proposals.

Program Type: Religious, Bible Studies

Program Goals:

- To facilitate spiritual transformation
- To assist in the rehabilitation of inmates through understanding and applying moral behavior based on biblical principles.

Intended Audience: Men

Program Director: Marco Garcia (provide credentials)

Days/Times: Mondays for one hour (preferably in the morning)

Facilities: Classroom or meeting room

Curriculum: We will be studying the *Bible* and *The Walk of Repentance* by Gallagher

Volunteers: Listed below are the names and information for each of the volunteers.

Name
Date of Birth
Driver's License Number
Social Security Number

Steps to Starting a Correctional Ministry With Your Church
Church/Ministry Volunteer Application
All information is confidential

Name _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____ Sex _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (H) _____ (W) _____ (C) _____

Employer _____ Title _____

Church _____ Years at the Church _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Languages _____ Musical Talent _____

Spiritual Gifts _____

Have you ever been incarcerated? yes no If yes, indicate date(s), charges, & locations.

Do you have any experience working with inmates? yes no If yes, please list where you worked and what you did.

Availability

Mornings Afternoons Evenings Weekdays Weekends

Correctional Ministry Interests

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Group Bible Study | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Life Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> One on one with inmate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring | <input type="checkbox"/> Cell-to-Cell visits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pen pal | <input type="checkbox"/> Reentry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Families of inmates | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

Population: Males Females Juveniles (M) Juveniles (F)

References:

Pastor:

Friend: