

Introduction

The Need for the Gospel and Discipleship in America's Prisons

The United States of America has an incarceration rate of 743 per 100,000 of its national population, the highest in the world. This works out to about 2.4 million people, or about 1% of the adult population. Over 10,000 ex-prisoners are released from America's state and federal prisons weekly. More than 650,000 are released from prison every year. The recidivism rate in America is between 60% and 70%. This means that approximately two-thirds will likely be rearrested within three years of release.

Compelling evidence shows that recidivism is reduced dramatically for persons who are disciplined in prison, have kept bridges to their families, and who are integrated into caring communities upon release. The Church has a role to play in preventing inmates from returning to prison by honoring God as we engage the Word of Truth - the Gospel - to disciple Christian inmates in the faith, and by God's grace be instruments through which others may hear it for the first time and be transformed.

Another shocking statistic is the number of adults under correctional supervision in the United States. At the beginning of 2010 this had reached more than 7.2 million, or more than 3.1% of the adult population. Correctional supervision includes all persons incarcerated (in jail or prison), or supervised in the community (probation or parole). It would be helpful for all of us to understand these terms, defined below:

Jail - confinement in a local jail while pending trial, awaiting sentencing, serving a sentence that is less than 2 years, or awaiting transfer to other facilities after conviction.

Prison – generally involves confinement in a state or federal correctional facility to serve a sentence of more than one year.

Transition Facility – no longer time-building; temporary quarters while still remaining under care prior to release.

Probation - court-ordered period of correctional supervision in the community generally as an alternative to incarceration. Probation can be a combined sentence of incarceration followed by a period of parole and community supervision.

Parole - period of conditional supervised release in the community following a prison term.

Indeed, the work of our volunteer mentors is a very high calling. Neither harsh prison conditions, nor training programs, nor educational curriculum breaks recidivism's back as does the Gospel. Through presentation of the Gospel message and the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, hearts are transformed and lives are made new. Inmates who learn and apply Bible-based life skills are equipped to handle extended periods of incarceration living for God and experiencing the joy of His salvation, even while remaining in these dark places. Many more pass through periods of parole or probation well equipped and with a new purpose - living for God in their families and communities with an everlasting hope that only comes by knowing Jesus as Lord.

Sources: Bureau of Justice, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov>. Correctional Populations in the U.S.,

2009 (NCJ 231681); Pew Charitable Trust, Prison Fellowship International, Christian Assoc.

for Prison Aftercare, and the Barna Research Group.

Understanding Prisoners

I. The Prison Itself

We can ask the question, “Is there anything special about mentoring a prisoner?” The answer to this question is somewhat complex. In order to answer it, we have to figure out who the prisoners are. Prisoners are a special class of people unlike any other. They have their own culture, language, customs, values, etc. They also live in an environment unlike what we live in out here on this side of the fence. When you are walking out of the prison and back to your car to drive home, you should be aware of what the prisoner is walking back to. Compassion is defined by Webster’s as “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to help alleviate it.” We need to understand what the environment is for prisoners before we can begin to walk with them as mentors.

Living quarters. Imagine a place in which you live in a box that is about half the size of a small bedroom. In that 7’ x 9’ cell, you have two beds, two lockers, a small writing desk with stool, a sink/toilet combination, and whatever property the two occupants have. Oh, yeah, you also have two grown adult men or women men in there. Most of us have sheds for

our lawn mowers that are larger than most prison cells! This cell is in a building with scores of others. There may be several buildings on the “yard”. This yard is enclosed by one or more fences topped with razor wire with towers scattered about manned with gunners. This is the environment in which prisoners live their lives. Some prisoners live in dormitories instead of cells. Now, imagine yourself a Christian in this environment, surrounded by prisoners who have broken every law known to man. You once were one of them, but now you are a new creature in Christ Jesus. What sort of fellowship does light have with darkness? You can get the idea that prison isn’t a fun place to be, especially so for a Christian. Many inmates live in over-crowded dormitories where privacy is non-existent.

Culture. The culture of prison is dark. Prisons are filled with wicked persons who have done wicked things, and many of them relish in their wickedness and revel in the “glory” of their evil deeds. The Christian, whether a mentor from outside or a Christian prisoner, must walk as light in this darkness. As mentors, we must make sure that we don’t get caught up in this culture and partake of the wickedness that we may find there. The prison culture loves its evil deeds. Prison is also a culture that is filled with gangs of every flavor (Black, White supremacist, Hispanic, other ethnic, etc.). Most of the gangs are racially-based. The prison culture is highly racist and full of hatred. Other points to think

about:

This is like a foreign society / sub-culture

It can be a very violent place (stabbings, rape, fights, fires, suicide)

Prejudice prevails

No freedom – demeaning treatment destroys self worth

Single sex environment

Suspicion is everywhere. Prisoners work to try not to be vulnerable.

With whom can they share their deepest thoughts and feelings?

Possibly no one.

Survival of the fittest / hardest / most manipulative - whatever gains control or power

Evidence of what we call the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, kindness, etc.) are signs of weakness in the prison culture

Environment. Something that is unique to prison is what some term the “fishbowl existence”. This means that prison is, in many ways, like living in a fishbowl. Everyone can see you at any time and in any circumstance. Even in your cell you don’t have privacy, and this includes when you need to use the toilet. Any person can walk up to your cell at any given time and knock on the door, so you really have no escape from the environment.

Noise is an issue in prison. In the early morning hours, you might get moments in which things are relatively silent. Some prisoners make

their own ear plugs to try and drown out the constant din of the prison. Others just get used to the noise and it becomes secondary.

Prison “speak”. The language of prison is pretty interesting. What you find there is a mixture of urban ghetto slang, country bumpkin speak, educated institutional language, foreign words and phrases, and some made up stuff that is quite interesting. Keep in mind that every jail or prison is different. Women are not immune from falling into this pattern of communications.

In addition to this sort of unique language, you will hear a lot of profanity and vulgarity. It makes one wonder if some prisoners take pride in knowing every third word they speak is profanity.

Inmate values. The value system of prison is about as backwards as it can be. What is meant by this statement is that prisoners have a ranking system based on how bad a person is rather than how good they are. So, a murderer is high on the food chain while a petty thief is down low. Think about that for a moment. The prisoners can look up to the person who has done worse deeds and look down on the “white collar” guy.

With this being said, there are two areas in which prisoners are typically right on track with the outside world: patriotism and family. You might

be surprised to find out that a good number of prisoners are former military. Prisoners are very patriotic and this includes foreigners. Many foreign prisoners identify strongly with their nationality and heritage. Equally strong is the concept of family. Nothing is as sacred as a man or women's family in prison. Generally they are off limits when there are issues between rivals. When something happens to a prisoner's family member (illness, death etc.) many of his or her fellow prisoners are there for support. There are many cases in which sworn enemies gave something to help an enemy when something happened to family members.

II. Inmate Characteristics

When it comes to individuals in prison, you will find everything under the sun. You will find uneducated people who can't read, and medical doctors who won awards in their field. You will find athletes and businesspersons, gangsters and hoodlums, prostitutes and pimps. You will find individuals who lived on the streets and some who lived in mansions. The spectrum is very broad.

Any sin that can cause a person to be incarcerated you may encounter at the prison where you serve -- murder, violence against another person, sexual assault, child molestation, forgery, robbery, you name it... We will not ask our mentors if they will or will not accept mentees based on their crime. Neither will we ask mentors if they will or will not accept persons of an-other race as mentees. We have come to serve brothers and sisters in Christ who desire a life changing relationship with Christ. Let's look at a cross section of the prison population we may encounter.

Women, in particular have needs that are different than men when it comes to mentoring since in addition to the criminal behavior, they have a disproportionate amount of victimization from sexual or physical abuse in their pasts. Furthermore, males have tended to abandon their families while women maintain responsibility for children in addition to caregiving roles. Women have a greater likelihood to be addicted to drugs, and have mental illnesses. Not only are the needs of women so much greater, unfortunately they are often last in receiving services.

Education. Most prisoners are not high school graduates. According to an Oregon organization called "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids", 68% of state prison inmates do not have a high school diploma. You will find persons with nine years of schooling who function on a fourth or fifth grade level. Many inmates will have little or no vocational training and

many will have worked for minimum wage, if they worked at all.

While it does not hold true in every case, it has been Metanoia's experience that the longer the sentence prisoners have, the more they will work to educate themselves in prison. A person who has a two or three year sentence typically will not think about getting his / her GED or other education. But an inmate who has 10 years or more is very likely to get a GED and probably some additional education if available. A mentor will encourage them to take advantage of every available educational opportunity.

Drugs/Alcohol. In February 2010, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University published a report entitled: "Behind Bars II: Substance Abuse and America's Prison Population". In this report, the researchers concluded that 85% of prisoners are in prison due to alcohol and/or drug related crimes! "It is no coincidence that of the 2.4 million inmates in U. S. prisons, 65 percent--1.5 million--meet the DSM-IV medical criteria for alcohol or other drug abuse and addiction. Another 20 percent -- 458,000 -- even though they don't meet the DSM-IV medical criteria for alcohol and other drug abuse and addiction nevertheless were substance involved; i. e., were under the

influence of alcohol or other drugs at the time of their offense, stole money to buy drugs, are substance abusers, violated the alcohol or drug laws, or share some combination of these characteristics.” What this means for us is that it is highly likely that you will be mentoring someone who has sin issues related to drugs and/or alcohol.

Pride. Pride is a sin that has been the downfall of man since the Garden of Eden. When one looks at Lucifer as told in Isaiah, we see the pride come out of him, “I will do this and I will do that”. Pride is a besetting sin that many of us struggle with, but prisoners take to a different level. Many prisoners wear their tattoos as symbols of their pride. Fights and arguments break out when one person beats another in a particular game or sport. Chess matches often look like boxing matches as the two players taunt each other verbally across the board. Our women mentors should not be surprised to see the very large proportion of women in prison wearing tattoos. If Christ can look beyond external adornment, can we find it in our hearts to do the same?

Pride is dangerous because it doesn't allow inmates to ask for help. It doesn't allow us to ask for clarification if we don't understand something. It doesn't allow us to lose or to be seen as weak in any way. We Christians know that pride is a killer and a liar and we must

constantly fight against it.

Talent. You will find some of the most creative and talented people in prison. This includes artists, musicians, poets, etc. Mentors should look for areas of talent and encourage prisoners to use their talents for God's glory. If prisoners are musicians, then perhaps they can play music in the chapel or write songs for God. If poets, perhaps they can write poems or songs. Artists can draw for God's glory.

AND, normal. Perhaps one of the biggest things that strikes people as odd is that prisoners are normal like everyone else. **We are all sinners.** Prisoners are sinners who have committed sins that result in prison sentences. Some of us are guilty of sins which would have resulted in prison sentences in other generations. Prisons are made up of a wide range of people from all walks of life. Mentors must realize that in God's eyes, the sins for which an inmate was incarcerated is no different than any of us on the outside harbor on our hearts at this instant.

III. Inmate Needs

Mentors will want to watch for the times when inmates may be preoccupied, worried or stressed. It is in such times that mentors are worth their weight in gold. If ever there was a need for a mentor it will be in crisis times such as these:

Going before judge or parole authorities

Death or severe illness in family

Returning to society

Being threatened / fighting

Marital / girlfriend - boyfriend / problems

Times when other important routine life events go on with families

(births, etc.)

Problems with sons and daughters

Sexual approaches

Inmates have other needs, too. They differ from what you will find in open society. Understand these needs and you will be able to navigate your way into special enduring relationships.

Inmates need Christian friends who can show genuine concern, without leaving the impression of being “better than you”. This friend may be a chaplain, another inmate, or a friend from outside. Seldom will it be a correctional officer. Even in faith and character-based programs there will be an arm’s length relationship here and elements of mistrust. Keep in mind the value of your friendship to the inmate. For many this is their only outside contact. We must be people who keep our word. We must show up when we say we will. This helps model a Christ-like life.

Inmates need to be taught how to be disciple makers to live the vibrant Christian lives in obedience to Christ’s call for all Christians to go make disciples. It is part of who the Christian person is and what he or she is

called to do in the Church.

Inmates need people who can listen more than talk and who through wise and loving questioning can lead him or her to explore some alternatives to their problems.

Inmates need worthwhile relationships based on mutual trust, respect, honesty and understanding. Our showing up can stop lives from spiraling down into or returning from “institutional nothingness”.

Inmates need a realistic plan of self-adjustment to their present situation and future opportunities. Mentoring curriculums can include helps to build confidence in advance of release or transition to another facility (if in pre-sentencing facility prior to sentencing.)

Mentors will reassure Christian mentees of the security a Believer has, the personal value that they have as children of God and the knowledge that even though they have sinned they have an “Advocate with the Father”. Much is passed around in the prison culture that is unsound

doctrine and very poor practical theology. Good teaching counters that.

Inmates desire real love and want to love others. The non-Christian inmates need to know that God loves them, that Jesus died for them, and that God wants them to be members of His family of “Born Again Believers.” They also need to know that you love them as persons and the opportunity to share Jesus Christ with them may not come in the first minutes of conversation. Only the Holy Spirit can convict of sin and convert the soul. You will need to be led by the Holy Spirit.

Inmates need continued friendships among other prisoners. The mentor will have the opportunity to foster a “circle of trust” between inmates that they will not find anywhere else.

Inmates need to know they can trust you to care for them and that you will not fall for the games they will try to play with/on you but that you will continue to love in spite of them as God loves us.

Other inmate characteristics so we can understand their needs:

Inmates feel victims of injustice. It is hard for many to face the fact that they are personally responsible for imprisonment.

Guilt – dealing with sin (need to admit, repent, humble themselves)

High incidence of inmates from broken homes – little love or discipline. Accustomed to doing whatever they wanted to do.

See themselves as losers

Loneliness – often first time separated from family and friends; few if any acceptable good relationships. Tends to seek own kind in prison.

Frustration – helpless to control lives

Fear (courts, family outcome, rape, gambling or other debts)

Anger / defiance against law and authority. Has “them vs. us” mentality. “Them” includes police, judges, lawyers, courts, wardens, prison officers, chaplains, pastors, and churches. “Us” includes all other “losers” that have been arrested and imprisoned.

Bitterness – friends and family have forsaken them

Wants out of prison and wants out now

If they had religious training as children, they feel God let them down

Doubts security as believer and are not sure God will hear and answer

prayers

If they have never had any Christian training, assume God and church

are for others

Poor self-esteem and now covers that with an outward bravado

I. What is a Mentor?

Like most words in the English language, mentor means different things to different people. To some the word means teacher. To others, a mentor is a friend who is a bit older. Still others view mentor as a guide or leader of a group. For our purposes, we define a mentor as “A person who enters into a personal relationship with another for the purpose of enriching the other person’s life through their guidance, teaching, encouragement, example, accountability, and love.”

Several important characteristics that make up a good mentor:

The Mentor is personal. The mentor is entering into a personal relationship with the mentee. Personal means that we must take time to get to know the person. We must find out about them. This takes time and effort. It also involves telling someone about ourselves and

allowing them to get to know us. When Jesus was choosing His apostles, He called them individually by name and entered into a very personal relationship with them. He knew each of them and they knew him. These men had a different relationship with Jesus than other people had with him.

The mentor is life-enriching. The mentor is entering into a personal relationship that is enriching to the other person. While this may seem something that is a given, it bears mentioning here. All too often it is possible to enter into a relationship for the purposes of “fixing” someone or “setting them straight”, and such relationships end up being damaging rather than enriching. One of the characteristics of a good mentor is that they are always giving of their time, talent and treasure in such a way that you don’t realize it. In other words, they take the time to get into the car, drive down to the prison and visit, but never say, “Do you know

how much time I've invested today to come here and see you?"

Enrichment always involves the thing or person being in a better state than before.

The mentor guides and teaches. These two things are very similar, yet

worlds apart. It is probably accurate to say that they belong together on the same coin. Teaching is done in various ways and so is guiding, but they are not synonymous.

Guiding involves leading and direction. It is a big picture sort of thing.

One could say that teaching involves the minutia. Teaching is instruction; guiding is moving what is taught. Drawing an analogy from baseball, you can teach someone the fundamentals of the game: how to hit, bunt, field a pop fly, and take a grounder and how to slide. This is done through repetition, practice and memory. You can also teach them

all the rules. However, it takes good guidance to lead a team to victory, or a championship. Often times it isn't the team with the best players who win championships. Rather, it is the team that has the best leader who can guide the team through a good start in April as well as the dog days of August. He can lead through a five-game losing streak as well as a seven-game winning streak. This guide isn't teaching his players anything. Rather he is guiding them utilizing their strengths and weaknesses. He points them towards the right decisions and allows them to use their skills to maximum benefit. A mentor does both the teaching and the guiding. You may teach someone how to go through a job interview or how to eat a three-course meal. You also may guide them towards singing in the choir because they have a gift for singing.

The mentor is an encourager. This is one of the most important aspects,

if not the most important aspect of the mentor/mentee relationship. We

live in a fallen world inhabited by sinners. According to the Apostles,

we live in a war zone, continually behind enemy lines. We are called to

fight the good fight of the faith. This world is, with all its beauty and

blessing, a cursed place. As such, it can often be a discouraging place.

For the prisoner, prison is a highly discouraging place. It's a place

where you are reminded every minute of your sin and its consequences

on this earth. In the midst of this, the prisoner needs encouragement.

The Apostle Paul tells us to encourage one another and to bear one

another's burdens. We are called to speak the truth in love to one

another. We all probably know the person who is Mr. or Mrs.

Discouragement. No matter what someone is going to do, it won't

work, or isn't good enough, or not the best idea, etc.

The mentor sets an example. This is another great characteristic of a mentor. People are often more influenced by what we do than by what we say. We are called to “be witnesses” for Christ. Let’s be continually aware that we are being watched by everyone around us, and, most importantly, by God every second. When visiting your mentee, don’t start talking badly about the correctional staff that made you wait ten minutes to get into the visiting room. Don’t talk about ways that you may have skirted a bad situation by not complying with the letter as well as the spirit of the law. Don’t exhibit rude or sinful behavior. There should be a consistency of character that is seen by everyone.

Mentors are accountable. A huge part of the mentor/mentee relationship is accountability. Christians should have accountability partners. This is someone you know well and trust enough to discuss your sins and shortcomings. Our hope is that you will develop such a relationship with your mentee so that he feels comfortable enough to allow you to be their accountability partner. In some sense we are all our “brother’s keepers” (see Genesis 4). In other words, we all are accountable to each other as Christians. This concept has lost a lot of luster in recent years, but it is true nonetheless. What does it mean to hold one another accountable? This involves both doctrine and practice.

Mentors model love. Love is the motivating factor that compels us to be mentors. If you are involved for any reason other than love, then perhaps you should step back and reconsider mentoring. Everything we

do ought to be done out of a motive of love: love for God and love for our neighbor.” You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” (Matt. 22:37-40) Mentoring works the best when those being mentored are aware that the mentor has a genuine concern and care for their development & success.

When you look at what a mentor is more closely, you’ll find that, at the end of the day, we are talking about a disciple-maker. A good mentor is really one whose goal is to disciple people for Christ. In his book, “The Mentor Leader”, Tony Dungy writes, “At its core, mentoring is about building character into the lives of others, modeling and teaching attitudes and behaviors, and creating a constructive legacy to be passed along to future generations of leaders.”

Mentors help inmates heal themselves. Teach them how to forgive.

Forgiveness is a decision to treat other persons like something never happened, while still holding them accountable for their actions.

Accountability is to insure that it does not happen again.

Forgiving themselves requires that they admit their wrongs to the people involved and accept the consequences of their own behavior.

They pay their debts to their family, their victims, and society by doing their time, changing their lifestyle, and making any needed restitution.

Then, help them to accept the fact that they now have a clean slate.

Show them how to stop punishing themselves and start living the rest of their lives as if their moral failures never happened. Inmates must understand that this may be hard to do. It becomes especially hard when

they face unforgiving people who constantly remind them of their failures.

Give the gift of self-esteem because of who they are in Christ:

We are created in the image of God...

We have been forgiven...

We are salt and light in the world...

We have been crucified with Christ and we no longer live, but Christ lives in us...

We are a new creation...

We are dead to sin and alive to Christ...

We are children of God, adopted as sons...

We are fellow heirs with Christ...

We have direct access to God...

We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit...

Self-esteem and the feeling of completeness that follows, has four aspects: feeling loved, feeling accepted, feeling competent, and following ethical Biblical principles. Mentors can help inmates develop self-esteem by explaining who they are in Christ, then giving or showing them respect and acceptance as brothers and sisters in Christ. Helping them to develop areas of competence and teaching them how to practice Godly living will give them the ability to achieve the others.

Men and women will be better prepared to return to their communities as contributing members of society. They not only will become church members, they will improve the churches in which they enter.

Men and women leaving via transfer to other prison facilities will be equipped as disciple makers. Their mission will be to reveal Christ in those places and then to nurture and mentor men themselves.

II. What are some additional qualities of a Mentor?

Mentors:

... prepare thoroughly and well for each session they lead.

... encourage mentees to take advantage of every program, Bible study

and Chapel service offered at the facility or prison. We will not be

doing formal Bible study. We will be modeling Christ and engaging

with the Gospel. You will find that formal Bible studies are provided

by other volunteer teams at the prison where you serve.

... help inmates deal with guilt realistically. Mentors do not defend their

crimes and failures. Point them to the “Great Physician” who can

make them whole. Tell them that God’s “Whosoever” includes them.

Mentors do not judge.

... will encourage inmates about future plans. What does he really

want to do? You may discuss and even facilitate plans for achieving

realistic goals such as employment, schooling, and so forth.

... don't defend what they have; don't ask crime; point them to God

... are listeners. You will get plenty of opportunities to talk, but you want to listen carefully to the mentee. They NEED to express themselves. You may be their ONLY outlet. Listen for the positive and commend them for it. A little praise goes a long way. Don't feel that you must have an answer to all the inmates' problems. Instead, try to understand how they feel. Most people can solve their problems when they believe that someone cares and understands.

... challenge mentees to proper attitudes and behavior and expect them to accept responsibility for themselves. They may be looking for others, including you, to do things for them that are his responsibility.

This is a natural, but self-defeating, response when one is down.

... listen for repetition (problem areas).

... are not shocked or surprised.

... are real and do not put on a façade of any sort. Prisoners are

generally pretty good at spotting fakes. What you are and how you relate may mean more than what you say.

... act like themselves. Much like the item above, it is important to be who you are.

... are consistent. If you are scheduled to be at the prison on a day and time, please make every effort to be there. Many prisoners come from homes where they didn't know their father or the male figure in their life was inconsistent. Many have only known chaos.

... are friends.

... treat mentees as they, themselves, wish to be treated.

... encourage inmates to become involved in a church upon their release.

This is so very important in the lives of returning inmates.

... are flexible. You might want to discuss something but the conversation doesn't go that way. That's OK. There will most likely be another time to discuss it.

... are patient. It may take a little time to develop a relationship with someone. That's OK. The inmate may not know how to relate well to others. Expect them to distrust you at first and be patient while they learn to trust you. Expect great things to be accomplished because with God all things are possible! Don't become discouraged if you don't see immediate results.

... work with the institution. Observe the rules for visiting and for correspondence. Almost never agree or disagree with criticism by the inmate, but try to help him consider all sides of the issue. Things are not always as they seem.

... pray for the mentees, mentors, coordinators, chaplains, staff, etc. Remember, it is God's power that changes lives, not our cleverness.

... abide by all the rules established by the facility or prison. Breaking these rules could be a felony.

Mentors do not:

Mentors do not ask the mentee about their crime. If they wish to discuss it at some point, that is their prerogative.

Mentors do not believe everything they hear

Mentors do not give legal advice

Mentors do not bad-mouth the system in front of prisoners.

Mentors do not enter into any business arrangements with prisoners.

Mentors do not give inmates gifts in person or through the mail.

Mentors do not major on the minors. Some of us can get into discussions where we have to make our point no matter what, and at the end of the day, the point doesn't matter that much.

Mentors do not think that they have to have all the answers.

Mentors do not talk about other prisoners or mentors behind their backs.

This can have dire consequences.

Mentors do not bad mouth other groups. As my mother used to say, "If

you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything." We aren't there to put down a politician, or a TV preacher, or anyone.

Mentors are not there to promote our denominational religion. We bring Christ. Do not debate predestination vs. Arminianism. Do not argue forms of Baptism. Do not argue eschatology (end times), etc.

Remember what has been attributed to Augustine: "In the essentials - unity; in the non-essentials - liberty; and in all things - love." There are things Christians must agree on and about which inmates must learn if they are to have a solid foundation such as the Divinity of Jesus, the accuracy and authority of the Bible that Jesus is the only way to salvation, etc. But we should be gentle when disagreeing.

Mentors do not give out personal information such as home address, phone numbers, etc. Establish a post office box or a church address for this purpose.

Mentors to not discriminate against anyone based on anything! (i.e. race,

religion, socio-economic background, educational background, crime committed.)

Mentors do not think of the prisoner/mentee as a project. They are Christians who need our love, encouragement, kindness, etc.

Mentors are not surprised by Christian prisoners who know more of the Scriptures than they do. These prisoners have a lot of time to study and meditate on the word.

Mentors don't make promises they will not keep.

III. Some Accountability Aspects Mentoring Inmates

As a volunteer mentor you probably be asked to agree to:

Notify the facility or prison chaplain, staff or mentor coordinator of any change in your volunteer schedule, any change in your address and/or phone numbers, or if you need to be absent during the time you

committed to serve;

Be accountable to the mentoring ministry team for your activities by

submitting any required attendance or monthly report forms;

Emphasize what we hold in common as Christians concerning

salvation and spiritual growth rather than denominational issues /

distinctives, and other controversial interpretations that may cause

division / confusion with the inmates (In many prisons, Christian

inmates form “camps” and volunteer teaching stimulates division

rather than unity.);

Abide by the rules and regulations of the facility where assigned;

Resign as a mentor volunteer if at any time you are unable to follow

these guidelines.

If you are not a “rule keeper”, then prison ministry is not for you.

Engaging in the Prison

I. Dress Code for Mentors

Volunteers entering most correctional institutions are encouraged to dress comfortably and in casual attire, and shall be expected to dress in good taste. Simple decency and modesty without excessive external adornment should be the norm. Wardens and Directors will further define these requirements in local policy on a prison-by-prison basis.

Volunteers will find that most prisons hold to similar guidelines:

Clothing shall fit appropriately, and be neither too large nor too small, creating no obvious gaps or exposure.

Open toe shoes or sandals may not be permitted in certain facilities.

Steel-toed shoes, shower shoes, and flip-flops, may be prohibited.

Make sure you know the specific guidelines of the facility in which you serve before showing up in shorts or skirts as you may be denied entrance.

Other clothing that may not be permitted includes:

Any clothing that is transparent or translucent in nature;

Sleeveless shirts and blouses;

Dresses or clothing exposing a bare chest or midriff;

Camouflage attire;

Worn or tattered clothing with holes;

Clothing with logos that contain pictures, slogans, or vulgarity; or contain signs or symbols of security threat groups. The association may be made by color combination, designs, or logos affixed to the clothing, or the manner in which the clothing is worn.

Bandannas;

Volunteers may not be allowed to wear excessive clothing such as two pairs of pants or an extra shirt under their top layer of clothing.

This prohibition is necessary in order to prohibit the exchange of clothing between inmates and visitors.

II. Calling in Sick or Missing Commitments

If a mentor is sick or for some reason cannot report for their volunteer work, they should call the mentoring ministry point of contact in sufficient time to make alternative arrangements. Failure to do so is disruptive to the program and especially to the offenders. Volunteers who are repeatedly absent may be dismissed.

III. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an ever-present issue that concerns both the mentor and the prison staff. It is imperative that the mentors respect the confidentiality of the verbal and written information about an offender obtained by the mentor.

A mentor must report any information obtained that might involve possible injury to any person or about any activity which may jeopardize security or safety in the institution. Such information must be reported as soon as possible to correctional officers.

IV. Basic Rules for Mentors While in Prison Facilities

You are a guest. Being a mentor is a privilege; not a right. You are here to support the staff and the institution.

Keep to your Christian witness before inmates, guards, facility staff and everyone with whom you come in contact at the penal institution.

One of the easiest pitfalls for a mentor is being on the inmate's side "against" the institution.

Inmates will play one individual against another. "That officer John Wayne mentality – he's always nitpicking and tries to enforce all the meaningless rules. Not like you, who uses good judgment when it comes to dealing with inmates."

As a volunteer, your relationship and how you relate to inmates will be different than staff. Don't undermine security staff because of the role they must maintain. No matter how good your intentions may be

the institutional staff knows more about an inmate than you.

Arrive 15 minutes prior to your scheduled service.

If the facility requires you to call in advance, you must do so.

Park only in the parking lots designated and lock your car.

Leave everything in your car except your volunteer badge (if issued), car keys, driver's license and what you will need to perform your service.

Most facilities have you sign in at a security desk where you indicate the location where you are going to provide your assigned service.

Remember to go only to your scheduled service location. Stay with your group and escorting officer at all times.

Stay at the facility only for your allotted time.

You may be asked not to neglect signing out.

Be sure to follow all entry/exist rules of the facility.

Alcohol, tobacco, and drugs will be strictly prohibited on the grounds

of any correctional facility and their possession, on your person or even in your vehicle is a criminal offense. Mentors shall not enter the institution if under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

NO CELL PHONES ARE ALLOWED IN THE PRISON.

No firearms or knives or matches/lighters are allowed. This includes persons that may have firearms carry permits issued by the county, state and/or federal government.

Do not attempt to bring anything out of an institution that you did not have with you when you first entered.

Only come to the institution for scheduled services.

All materials that will be used by your group for volunteer activities should be approved by the chaplain, staff or mentor coordinator prior to your visit.

Over involvement and over identification with inmates are the most prevalent reasons for the downfall of a volunteer.

Report any inappropriate behavior immediately to correctional officers, chaplains or mentoring ministry coordinator.

Don't argue with correctional personnel; obey all institutional rules at all times.

Many prisons may say there is to be no extra contact by phone.

Mentors should not to add money to inmates' accounts.

If inmates need large print studies or Bibles, contact your chaplain or coordinator. Do not purchase reading glasses for them.

Don't discuss problems concerning the institution, prison system or personnel with inmates. We do not "take sides".

Don't touch, shake hands, or hug inmates unnecessarily. You will find that warm greetings will become commonplace. Nevertheless, physical contact is to be kept to a minimum.

It is proper to show care and concern, but do not over do it.

Don't enter into a romantic or financial relationship with an inmate.

Don't send inmates anything from the outside that they might request.

As a rule, mentors shall not make calls, contacts or perform any services for inmates. Don't send or carry messages, written or verbal, to an inmate's friends or family. AS A RULE, THERE IS TO BE NO DUAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH INMATES AND FAMILIES. You do not know if court orders prohibit such things or if continued relationships are bad for the inmate.

Any proposed plan or idea for an event (i.e., refreshments, DVD, etc.) must be discussed with your mentor coordinator or prison chaplain before mentioning it to an inmate or group.

REMINDER...

I MAY BRING IN...

-- NOTHING BUT WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THE

MENTORING SESSION;

-- NO CELL PHONES;

-- NO MEDICATIONS;

-- NO CAMERAS OR ELECTRONIC DEVICES;

-- NO FOOD;

-- NO MONEY;

-- NO CIGARETTES; and

-- NO CHEWING GUM.

V. How Can You Tell If An Inmate Is Getting To You?

You feel anger towards the system and see yourself as an advocate for the inmate (losing your professional distance).

You often are irritated at officers or staff for delays in getting you to your volunteer site, for not letting inmates / residents out of their cells or living areas in a timely fashion, etc., to the exclusion of considering that there may be valid reasons for delays (for example: a count has not cleared, the officer's must do several at the same time, the shift is short-staffed, etc.).

You presume that staff causes a delay, not considering that an inmate or inmates may not assume responsibility for being ready on time.

You begin favoring an inmate over others and show it by spending more time with him / her or by sharing personal information with some but not others (if in a group class setting).

You enjoy hearing stories of how other volunteers are awful and you are wonderful.

You begin to think about bending rules for the inmates, or do bend a rule for an inmate.

You feel a strong sense of pity for inmates, often to the point of wanting to rescue them from the natural consequences of their actions.

You feel superior to other helping people or have an inflated view of what impact you can have on an inmate.

You fail to report questionable behavior or requests because you do not want to get an inmate into trouble.

You unquestionably believe stories about cruel officers and find Yourself buying into the “gossip”.

You are susceptible to inmate interest in you – Inmates will engage you in long conversation about what you like, dislike, or other

personal matters.

You are overly empathic or sympathetic with inmates – Inmates will tell you truthfully and sometimes untruthfully about the problems that they have such as a sick child, a dying mother, etc.

You believe the “us/them” syndrome – Inmates will try to put you and them against the system, especially if they can determine that someone or some organization has treated you unfairly. They will point out a similar thing has happened to them and try to establish a commonality.

You have trouble resisting inmate requests – Inmates will ask for certain things, some of which may be acceptable and others which may be illegal, to see what you will allow them to do. Inmates will break minor rules to see how you react.

You are overly impressed by inmate actions or words - The inmate will suddenly offer favors, do extra work, and be excessively nice

and/or overly complimentary.

You are manipulated by comments such as - “You’re the only one who understands.” “You’re the best teacher, preacher, counselor, etc, they have ever had.” “You’re the only one who can help.”

VI. Manipulation

Manipulation Definition: To manage or control artfully or by shrewd use of influence, often in an unfair way; “to con”.

Why do inmates manipulate?

They live in a deprived environment and many will use any means to make their stay as comfortable as possible. Many inmates view people as a means to whatever it is they want, as objects to be used and not respected in their own right. Thus, they see themselves as powerful if

they are successful manipulators. That was their lifestyle before prison and remains their lifestyle today. It can become a game and a means of entertainment. Most of us have or do manipulate at times.

The following may help to recognize such behavior and to avoid it

Realize that some inmates will take advantage of you if you let them.

Do not do anything you would be ashamed to share with your peers.

Keep everything out in the open.

If an inmate's actions are questionable, ask for advice and assistance.

Know the policies and procedures you are required to follow.

Learn to be assertive and use the word "No" appropriately.

Be aware of verbal and non-verbal messages you send out, particularly body language.

Confront manipulative behavior; take action as issues arise.

Verify information before you take action.

Know your personal and volunteer goals.

Understand your value system.

Be firm, fair and consistent.

Understand your strengths and weaknesses.

Realize that inmates view themselves as victims.

When an inmate is told “maybe”, this often is taken as a promise.

VII. Other Security Matters for Prison Mentors

As a volunteer, you will be exposed to the potential for emergency situations. During your orientation, training and certification at the jail, prison or detention facility you will receive specific instructions about how to act in situations including but not limited to:

Fight between inmates;

Altercation between inmates and guards or staff;

Major disturbance including riot (in jail / penitentiary setting);

Loss of power;

Coming face-to-face with a hostile inmate;

Fire;

Hostage situation; and

Contact with blood and body fluids.

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