

A Quick Start GUIDE

PRISON MINISTRIES COORDINATOR



A Quick Start Guide for the Prison Ministries Coordinator

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Introduction

Welcome to one of the least visible ministries in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Because those who are incarcerated are often “out of sight, out of mind” the importance of ministering behind prison walls has sometimes been overlooked. Yet the significance of prison ministries cannot be underestimated.

According to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, one out of every 31 adults in the United States is currently incarcerated, on parole or probation, or under correctional supervision, and over 2.3 million inmates are confined to state, federal and local prisons, while correctional supervision of offenders and ex-offenders exceeds 7 million.

**The power of Christ can
break every yoke of
bondage and deliver the
soul of every inmate from
the iron grip of Satan.**

Prisons can be dark, gloomy places unless prison ministries volunteers are willing to take Jesus—the Light of the World—inside. Jesus Christ can change the behavioral patterns of inmates. The redeeming power of Jesus re-orient's an offender's personality and changes the master motives. He or she becomes a new creature in Christ.

Organizing Prison Ministries

The goal of prison ministries is for every inmate and his or her family to have the opportunity to know Jesus Christ and be saved. This goal is facilitated through the volunteerism of church members implementing various programs such as worship services for inmates, pen pal friendships, Bible studies, counseling and services to assist inmates and their families upon release.

Prison Ministries Coordinator Job Description

Prison ministries in the local church falls under the umbrella of the personal ministries department, so communication between the leaders of these areas

is essential. The prison ministries coordinator is responsible for overseeing all aspects of prison ministries, including relations with Corrections Department personnel, selection of programs and staffing of key positions, communication with church leaders and members, and volunteer training.

As with other ministries, volunteers are a core component. However, due to the nature of prison ministries, specific and thorough training of all volunteers is crucial. In fact, recruiting, screening and training volunteers is a foundational part of the coordinator's role. He or she also conducts annual program evaluations and devises means of recognizing the contributions of volunteers.

Prison Ministries Coordinator Qualifications

Any person who has a real concern for lost humanity can become a successful coordinator of prison ministries. True conversion and dedication are the only prerequisites. These qualities, followed by an abounding love for individual souls, will be manifested through a desire to serve, and through patience and perseverance. The coordinator should also have faith in God's promises and a steadfast prayer life. Tact, wisdom and genuineness are also desirable traits.

Beyond these traits, the ability to communicate clearly with multiple audiences will be helpful. A prison ministries coordinator also needs a determination to maintain the ministry despite hardships.

**"Remember those in prison
as if you were their fellow
prisoners." Hebrews 13:3 NIV**

Responsibilities of a Prison Ministries Coordinator

The outreach of prison ministries has several basic objectives. The spiritual objectives can be summarized as:

- Presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ
- Sharing the love of God
- Expressing the meaning of faith
- Showing the power of prayer

Some of the social objectives include:

- Providing a link between the community and persons confined in correctional institutions
- Preparing a person for re-entry into society (physically, mentally, morally and spiritually)
- Serving the families of persons who are confined
- Helping a person to both accept and grant forgiveness
- Helping a person to understand the meaning of being loved and loving others

Especially in cities where there are several churches, it is essential that a coordinator arrange for compatible people to work together. The coordinator meets with the superintendent of the correctional facility and the prison's chaplain during the planning stage. In some cases, the coordinator will also work with the program director of the prison. The coordinator is the liaison between the church(es), the prison administration and the local conference prison ministries director.

Building a Team

In order to function well and prevent burnout it is wise to organize a team of 5-25 volunteers. In smaller churches one individual may fill more than one of the following roles:

Leader – implements the agreed upon program. He or she is at the door or gate of the correctional facility to supervise the team while signing in. Along with the coordinator, the leader evaluates the progress of the team and submits reports of the work to the local conference. The leader is responsible for planning the weekly programs and making sure volunteers adhere to all penal restrictions and group regulations. Having an assistant leader is helpful if there is a large group.

Music Leader – should be a dynamic musician. He or she should choose music that reflects high standards and should encourage inmates to form singing groups.

Literature Secretary – responsible for bringing and distributing all literature, including Bible lessons and Bibles used in the correctional facility. The literature secretary needs to keep accurate records of all literature used and report to the church or group contributing the literature.

Recording Secretary – records all aid extended to inmates, ex-offenders and their families. Copies of the records should be available to the program director of the correctional facility.

Health and Welfare Secretary – works directly with the Adventist Community Services director of the local church in supplying the needs of inmates and/or their families.

Volunteer Coordinator – gives volunteers a copy of the volunteer policy and acquaints them with the Department of Corrections' policy as it relates to volunteers. It is important to specify lines of authority, volunteer responsibilities and accountability.

Bible Instructors – dedicated Bible students who can make regular visits, even during the week if prison regulations permit midweek services or Bible studies.

Types of Programs

After you have assembled your team you need to meet and discuss what types of programs you can offer. Can your group plan and conduct meaningful worship services? What types of Bible studies can you give? What types of educational seminars? What about counseling services or 12-step recovery programs? Can you offer some kind of vocational training or career development? Perhaps you want to develop pen pal mentoring friendships or provide services for children of inmates.

Find out what other community groups are doing and what the needs of the correctional facility might be. When you've decided on one or more programs, you can find detailed information for developing them on the Florida Conference Prison Ministries website at www.floridaprisonministries.org.

Sample Programs

Lamb Baby Program

The Lamb Baby program, pioneered by Florida Conference Prison Ministries, provides necessary items (layettes, blankets) and spiritual materials (such as *Our Little Friend* and *My Bible Friends*) for babies born to female inmates. These items are sent to the home where the baby is living, and new items arrive periodically as if being sent by the mother. This program is for children up to 6 years of age. Volunteers also work with the mothers to teach relationship and parenting skills. For more information, visit the Florida Conference Prison Ministries website at www.floridaprisonministries.org.

Pen Pal Ministry

Pen pal ministry with inmates is a good way to involve church members who want to participate in prison ministries but are unable to go to the facility. Because prison is a volatile environment, pen pals must be screened and complete a training program before entering this ministry.

The prison ministries coordinator connects inmates requesting spiritual correspondence with appropriate mentors. For safety reasons all correspondence is funneled through the coordinator so inmates never have their pen pal's home address. The church should obtain a post office box for this ministry.

Pen pals should not give out their address or phone number, or anyone else's. They should not give or receive money or gifts. Spiritual literature can be sent through the Adventist Book Center.

Gaining Entrance

In every community there are two extremes of care, custodial and spiritual—the prison and the church. The doors of churches are open to all parties interested in their functions and benefits. This is not true of prisons.

There are a limited number of methods used in gaining acceptance by correctional institutions as a valid religious program, particularly if you do not represent a major religion. Because some denominations have more members than others, it is natural that some will have a higher representation of their adherents in jail. While the law states that inmates must have access to the services of whatever persuasion they happen to claim, since there are fewer Seventh-day Adventists in jail, you may need to explore other methods of entry.

One recommended process is to offer in-house seminars for inmates such as smoking cessation, health education, parenting skills or GED preparation (many inmates are functionally illiterate).

If requests to enter the facility are denied, church volunteers may be able to help with work release programs where inmates are allowed to live outside the prison setting. Volunteers at halfway houses can offer to assist these individuals with finding employment and suitable permanent housing. Adventist Community Services can provide food and clothing. This type of help is appreciated by prison officials and may in time open doors that were previously closed for working inside the prison.

Ministering on “The Inside”

A prison is a city within a city. The same crimes that transpire outside the prison walls also transpire on the inside. The inmate population is filled with men and women with both noble and ignoble intentions. Denial, manipulation, dishonesty and the violation of human rights follow them into the prison.

Many inmates have burned all bridges with their families and find themselves with no connection to the outside world. Being thrust into such a lonely position and surviving in the prison environment can be unnerving at best. Façades and the appearance of being macho are developed as survival mechanisms in a subculture that often lends itself to violence.

Prison Subcultures: Powerful Realities

Drugs. Every prison has drug dealers and users. The proliferation of the drug culture behind prison walls is aided by family members, disloyal employees and

Want To Do More? Become a Partner in Transitional or Guest Housing**Transitional Housing**

Correctional agencies across North America are looking for a way to safely transition prisoners from prison to the community. Your church can assist by offering transitional housing where ex-offenders can receive lodging and other services such as drug treatment and job counseling in order to reestablish themselves in society.

Guest Housing

Your church can assist families of inmates by acquiring a two or three bedroom guesthouse to accommodate families when they are in town to visit their relative who is incarcerated in a local prison. The accommodations would be free of charge. The house should be stocked with clean bedding, soap, towels, toiletries and food.

ingenious smuggling methods through the mail system. A number of inmates run drug operations from behind the walls by phone.

Alcohol. Inmates sneak sugar, bread, fruit and other items from the dining hall to make a prison brand of alcohol. The smuggled items are placed in a hidden distillery to ferment, then the brew is sold to the prison population for a modest price. Prisoners have made alcohol that is 85 percent proof or higher. Prison wardens would prefer for inmates to be strung out on drugs rather than inebriated because prisoners who are intoxicated present a serious management problem.

Scams. Prisons are supposed to be cashless, yet green money (cash) is present in all prisons. Poker games and loan sharks are a vital part of this economy. Loan sharks make 100-200 percent on the money they loan to other inmates. Inmates run stores called commissaries out of their cells.

Gangs. Today's prisons are saturated by gangs and gang violence. Gangs are so entrenched in some prisons that they have become a management challenge for prison staff and administrators. In the culture in which inmates live, gangs give them a sense of family and protection.

Sex. Same-sex relationships, gang rape and sexual exchanges for money or other purposes are all too common in inmate subcultures. Some inmates have been the victims of gang rapes that have resulted in traumatic medical problems.

Violence. The dining hall can be the most violent spot in the prison community. Inmates try to sit with their backs to the wall in the dining hall. Watching their backs and being vigilant is essential to their survival. Some of the most atrocious killings have occurred in the dining hall. What should be a place of enjoyment is a nightmare for many inmates. Most inmates try to eat in about 10 minutes so they can move on as soon as possible.

Inmates soon discover that any desire to change prevailing attitudes and to be better people when they return to society seems to fade away. Hopes of developing skills, trades or gaining education sink into oblivion. Unless there is an inner spark that creates a personal desire to make something positive out of life, inmates will drift with the tide. The only basis of a positive life for an inmate is an encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ. .

Relating to Inmates

The typical inmate is poverty-stricken, has little education, was unemployed at the time of arrest, and if a youth, was charged with a drug-related offense. Few have any kind of plan for dealing with their situations.

Yet to conclude that all inmates are hopeless would be a gross error. Many inmates have been exposed to Christianity at some point in their lives by attending church with someone in their family. There are men and women behind bars whose knowledge of the Scriptures is simply amazing. God needs ambassadors to encourage those who know about Jesus, and to deliver the good news of the Gospel to those who are trapped in the grasp of Satan.

In your ministry to inmates, don't let their appearance be a hindrance. Some inmates will be physically ill-kept. Their personal hygiene will not include the use of soap or deodorant. Their speech and delivery may not fit the accepted patterns of grammar.

Weave through the visible, seek understanding and accept each inmate as a child of God, just as God accepts you without any inhibitions in spite of your past or present. Let the love of Christ that flows through you provide you with the insight to look beyond an inmate's faults and provide for his or her needs. When inmates allow Christ to take over, He will clean them up and fit them for heaven.

It is important to be fair and honest when you minister to inmates. They will respect you if you maintain a high level of integrity. As long as you are fair, inmates won't have a problem with you being frank with them. Just be yourself. They can detect a phony.

Volunteers must be friendly without being overly friendly. This is especially true when working with the opposite sex. Inmates have a way of reading something into nothing. An inmate can misconstrue a smile or compliment. If you receive a compliment, say thank you and advance the conversation to another level where the focus will be on Christ. Be extremely cautious about romantic entanglements with inmates. These attachments are counterproductive, ultra-risky and they usually fail or result in an unpleasant liability.

Be prepared to confront any manipulative behavior of inmates. If you give in to one manipulative act it sets the stage for you giving in again, and this can continue until a serious compromising blunder occurs. When any concerns arise, remember that the prison chaplain is your supervisor. If you have any doubts about anything, ask him or her. It is no crime to ask, but it may be one if you don't.

Communicating with Inmates

In order to effectively minister to inmates, it is essential to effectively communicate with them. Ministering to inmates requires good eye contact. This allows you to learn a great deal about the inmate with whom you are conversing, and will help you assess his or her needs. The eye is the window to the soul. Good eye contact will play a major role in convincing inmates of your sincerity and will help determine the magnitude of your influence as you introduce them to Jesus.

Don't say, "I know how you feel" if you haven't been incarcerated.

While communicating with inmates don't be overly eager to correct them when illogical comments are made. This is the product of defensive listening. Defensive listening will alienate rather than establish the bond of trust you will need to win the confidence of the inmates so you can share the love of Christ in the most efficient manner. Often their ideas are not going to be congruent with your theological ideology, but resist the temptation to interrupt them because you are going to have many opportunities later to share your point of view. Sharing prohibits dogmatism and unpleasant encounters. Sharing is a magnetic agent and dogmatism is a repelling agent.

Avoid argumentative encounters with inmates. Always speak the truth in love, following the example of Jesus. In all your conversations with inmates make Jesus first, best and last.

Avoid breaching the confidence of an inmate unless it involves the safety of another inmate, or is a security risk for the institution. Confidentiality does not

mean keeping secrets, but it does denote respecting the inmate's position, ideas and concepts without making a public display of what has been shared. Refrain from talking about one inmate to another. This could create an unpleasant situation for security personnel, staff and other inmates.

Inmate Attitudes toward God

Prison has afforded countless inmates the opportunity to sit down and think about the destructive course of their lives and seek help from God. Jesus has made a difference in the lives of the most ruthless sinners. Inmates on death row have given their lives to Christ and have been baptized in the power of the Trinity.

In many cases, God had to allow inmates to be put in isolation in order for them to receive a revelation from Him. God saved Jonah in the belly of a very big fish. Sometimes He saves the inmate in the cell of a jail. Inmates have consistently testified that when God allowed them to be locked up it was the best thing that ever happened to them. They say that God saved them through incarceration.

Security levels in correctional facilities play a significant role in the willingness of inmates to participate in religious activities. For example, inmates whose security levels range from medium to maximum are apt to welcome any opportunity to get out of their cells.

Inmates who reside at minimum security institutions tend to have a diminished fervor regarding their relationship with God. These inmates are allowed to work for private and government institutions outside the prisons. They might have access to green money, can freely walk back and forth from the picnic area to the visiting gallery, and have free world clothes. All this makes them feel less of a need for God or religious services.

There are inmates who are strong enough to resist ridicule from other inmates and stand for Christ. There are others who have no interest in spiritual matters. Numerous inmates are under the stronghold of Satan. Truly he claims the prisons as his stronghold—and aims to continue to imprison those under his captivity. Scores of inmates are caught up in the vices of their environment, eclipsing any spiritual inclinations.

Inmates will respond to the invitation to attend religious services for various reasons. Some just want to escape the monotonous drudgery of being locked in a cell for countless hours. Others will respond because they hear that some females are coming into the prison and they think it is a way to establish an acquaintance. Others will respond to the call purely for companionship with friends whom they anticipate will be there. However, there will be some who will come because they

love the Lord and are eager to hear a word from the Lord's messengers. In spite of their motives for coming to the worship services, the transforming power of the Gospel, through the aid of the Holy Spirit, can subdue the vilest of sinners and make them soldiers of the cross.

Working with Prison Officials

Ministering to inmates is a commission that comes from God. Yet this is also a privilege extended to prison ministries volunteers by the Department of Corrections. Consequently, volunteers must obey the rules of the prison as they minister to inmates. Correctional policies, protocols and rules vary from state to state, and in-house rules and protocols differ from prison to prison. Prison ministries volunteers are expected to know and obey the rules and policies of their assigned institutions.

Baptisms and Weddings

Baptisms can be performed in prison. Work with the chaplain to accomplish this. Weddings can also be performed, although this is not recommended. Inmates requesting to get married must obtain the warden's approval and have counseling. Marriage requests often include a lengthy waiting period. No provision is made for consummating the marriage.

Prisons operate on a paramilitary system. The men and women employed there are referred to as security officers, not guards. These persons may view you as do-gooders or bleeding hearts until you win them over by the respect you show (for them, for yourselves and for the inmates) and through the unwavering principles by which you live.

Working with security personnel is not always easy. However, when something does not transpire as it should you have an advocate inside the prison through whom to channel all complaints and concerns. That person is usually the prison chaplain or volunteer coordinator. He or she will address concerns to the appropriate personnel and help to bring a resolution to the existing dilemma. Even if security personnel are in the wrong, do not engage in any kind of argumentative discussion because the experience will usually be unpleasant. Moreover, the prison ministries volunteers may be branded as troublemakers, not only at that institution but at other correctional institutions as well.

Upon entering the prison, follow the directives given by security personnel and proceed to the designated area for the services. Unauthorized wandering around in prison is extremely risky. While walking to the area designated for the service, don't be shocked or intimidated by what you see or hear. There is an eleventh commandment among inmates which says, "Thou shalt not hurt a free world

visitor.” Many inmates are mindful of the fact that free world visitors are their connection to the outside world and their vessels of hope. They are not willing that this connection be severed.

The warden of the prison must give approval if you desire to bring anything into the facility. Shun every opportunity to compromise the rules to bring unapproved items into the prison or to take items out of the prison. Carry only necessary keys, ID badges, materials and other permitted equipment needed to minister to the inmates. Decline any opportunity to exchange phone numbers and addresses. Such could prove fatal if this information ends up in the wrong hands.

Handling Emergency Situations

Riots, fights and fires are all possible emergencies in prison. However, volunteers are unlikely to be harmed because the safety and security of visitors and inmates is the highest priority of correctional facilities. Their staff have planned for and been trained to effectively handle emergencies. In the event of a crisis situation volunteers should remain calm, summon staff members and follow their directions. Visitors should not attempt to stop fights or riots.

Diversification in Prison Ministries

Hearing the slam of doors behind you and entering the domain of convicted criminals can be an unnerving experience for the bravest of people. And certainly it is not a common desire. Yet every church member can participate in some way with prison ministries. It is not a requirement for everyone involved in this ministry to go behind prison walls.

Below are some areas of prison ministries that are available for total church participation:

Personal Hygiene Kits Ministry. Assemble personal hygiene kits and supply them to the chaplain.

Clothing Ministry. Supply clothes for inmates who are being released from prison. Help the chaplain and counseling staff become aware of this ministry.

Van Ministry. Transport inmates’ spouses and children to the prisons to see their loved ones. This ministry is for families who live at a distance and have no transportation. Ask the chaplain to inform the inmates of this service. Keep logs, addresses and phone numbers of those who benefit from this ministry. Share religious literature with them.

Literature Ministry. Support prison ministries with money to keep the ministry supplied with Bibles, tracts, Bible studies and other needed materials.

Prayer Ministry. Organize a group of prayer warriors who consistently pray for the prison ministries team each week.

Support Groups. Start support groups for wives, fiancées and families of inmates. Hold support group meetings at your church once a week for one hour. Free childcare should be provided.

Pen Pal Ministry. Correspond with inmates who are without family or who do not receive correspondence from the outside world. Keep all correspondence above board. Don't write letters that would suggest an intimate relationship. Share no phone numbers, addresses or names except for a pen name. Use the church's post office box address.

Ministry to Children of Inmates:

Angel Tree Program: Provide gifts to inmates' children during the holiday season.

Summer Camp: Send children of inmates to summer camp and introduce them to Jesus.

Tutorial Services: Tutor children of inmates after school to help them improve academically.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of ministries that can be done outside the walls of the prison. Jesus needs church members to prayerfully consider how they can step up to the plate and participate with Him in this all-important ministry.

Working with Inmates' Families

As you minister to inmates who have actively involved themselves in your worship services, the occasion will usually present itself, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to minister to their families. When this level of confidence has been reached, the inmate will disclose information about his or her family. If requested, the worker should attempt to visit the inmate's family (after the inmate has notified his or her family that he or she has requested the visit). As a rule, families will welcome your visit if you approach them with a caring attitude of friendliness and compassion.

Incarceration imposes emotional, psychological, physical and financial burdens upon the family. Often families do not know how to deal with the stress of having a loved one incarcerated. Each family is in need of a support system to help them cope with the strain.

Try to assess their needs and alleviate them through social service agencies or churches. Do not make personal contributions of money. This will protect you from manipulation and scams. For example, if money is needed to pay the electric bill the church treasurer can write a check to the electric company. If the family needs food Adventist Community Services can provide it (not cash).

If possible, organize a family support group. Cover topics such as anger management skills, assertiveness training, money management, job placement skills and healthful living.

Evaluating Prison Ministries

The following questions will be helpful for evaluating prison ministries in your church. Go over this list at least once per year:

1. Is our team well trained and reliably functioning?
2. Are we presenting the gospel of Jesus in appealing ways?
3. Are we positively relating to inmates?
4. Are we working well with prison officials?
5. Are we serving the needs of inmate families?
6. Have we diversified our programs so all church members may participate?
7. Are we preparing inmates for re-entry into society?

Conclusion

Jesus affirmed the importance of prison ministries and its relevancy to the church when He hung on the cross between two thieves. In fact, He was a prison chaplain on death row when He changed the sentence of one thief to receiving eternal life. He took upon Himself a death sentence so prisoners behind the walls, as well as prisoners of sin, might have the opportunity to be paroled into the Kingdom of God.

As sinners who have experienced salvation, we are the best communicators of God's grace to those who are behind prison walls. We are the conduit through which His love flows to those who have been ostracized by society. Jesus admonishes us to throw out the nets and fish. The net will reveal a vast size and variety of fish. Yet it is not the duty of Christ's workers to sort or clean the fish that have been caught in the net. That is the job of the Holy Spirit.

We are "To preach good tidings unto the meek . . . to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that are bound" (Isaiah 61:1, KJV).

Setting the captives free and opening the prison doors does not suggest that they will exit the prison the moment they accept Christ. However, it does suggest that when inmates accept Jesus their minds are no longer imprisoned, but set free. The shackles have been loosed, the burdens lifted, the yokes broken and the power of the saving Gospel of Christ has made them new creatures.

Resources

The North American Division Adult Ministries website has information and links for Prison Ministries. Visit www.NADAdultMinistries.org.

The following resources are available from AdventSource. For a complete list, visit www.adventsource.org or call 800-328-0525.



Prison Ministries Series

By Dr. Cleveland Houser (AdventSource)

This series is for people interested in learning more about prison ministry. Learn how to witness to those in prison and what is required in order to volunteer as a chaplain.

Catalog #456970

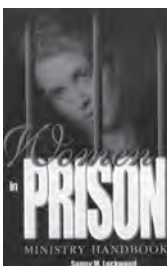


Keys to Prison Ministries

(General Conference)

This book is your guide to starting a prison ministry. It covers the steps to starting a ministry, inmate attitudes toward religion, prison subculture, ideas for outreach and much more.

Catalog #554300



Women in Prison Ministry Handbook

By Sunny M. Lockwood (GC Ministerial Association)

Based on real-life experience, *Women in Prison* is a practical guide for ministering to women living behind bars. Included are checklists of do's and don'ts, cautions, ideas for working with prisoners, outlines of actual programs and other resources to aid your ministry.

Catalog #425615

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