



Touchstone

Best Practices to Expand Your Reach



Best Practice (BP) | Best practices are specific, discrete ministry activities that measurably increase program scale, effectiveness, and/or efficiency, and can be replicated by other National Ministries. Best practices should be supported by evidence (data).

BP#11: Connect Churches with Prisoners and Their Families

Benefits:

Once you have sensitized churches to the needs of prisoners and their families, you get to be the connector. Your role is a prison ministry, the local church's role is pastoral.

The time that you spend interacting with prisoners and with prisoners' families – getting to know them and to know their stories – is essential in helping to connect them to churches who can provide spiritual guidance, direction and connection locally. The goal is to have congregations who are mobilized. By connecting churches with prisoners and their families, you are helping to build direct lines for personal care.

What is the unique contribution a congregation can make to address this crisis?

Congregations can help make their communities safer, while also deepening and strengthening their faith and the bonds among one another. They can heal the hurting and the exiled; love the stranger as well as those whom all have held in scorn and contempt.

It can start by reaching out to just one person in your congregation. Or one family. That's all it takes because that person's or that family's sorrows and struggles – when embraced by the faith community – will illuminate not only what must be done to help them, but also the many problems with the system and how it needs to be changed.

A community of faith can support the person accused, the victim of crime and the families of both. By not taking sides, by not blaming but forgiving, the church can create a climate that fosters reconciliation and redemption. Beyond spiritual and psychological support, it can use its own social networks to support the families in material and practical ways.

**Excerpt from "Balancing Justice with Mercy: An Interfaith Guide for Creating Healing Communities," from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.*

POC (contact for more info):



Brazil



Chile



Colombia



Philippines



Sri Lanka



Uruguay

Planning Considerations (*How to do it*):

- Engage with Church Pastors and Leaders to be advocates of prison ministry and mobilize their congregations.
- Invite church volunteers and leaders to your events – TPJ courses, discipleship courses, Angel Tree events, trainings, gatherings, prison visits, etc.
- Physically introduce churches to prisoners and their families.
- Schedule and facilitate meetings between church volunteers and prisoners and between church volunteers and families of prisoners.
- Develop and deliver presentations about how the churches can support the prisoners and families.
- Provide context/background information to churches about prisoners and families and to prisoners/families about churches.
- Provide a list of do's and don'ts to churches as they get involved in prison work.
- Conduct trainings for churches about working with prisoners and families.
- Develop, schedule and plan for multiple congregations to get together to work for mutual support.
- Develop a working group with churches to share best practices and how your prison ministry and their work can better align and be effective for prisoner and their families.
- Regularly communicate with churches to encourage them to focus on their role in bring redemption and healing.
- Gather similarly concerned people into prayer groups. The enormity of the challenges of reconciliation requires faith leaders and institutions to come together to support one another in this healing work.
- Introduce churches to prison officials.
- Help to organize church services at prisons.
- Develop an initial "needs" inventory for prisoners and prisoners families, Work with the churches to transition ownership to them.
- Encourage the church to address the family's material needs.
- Work with the church to develop ways to address housing, employment, treatment, peer support.
- Help the church to develop release/discharge accountability and reintegration plans.
- Involve the families of prisoners in reintegration planning.

Required Resources (*What you need to do it*):

1. Human Resources.

- Someone will need to coordinate with churches and prisoners.
- Someone will need to build and be able to conduct training on prison ministry
- Someone will need to be available to facilitate meetings with churches, prisoners, families and prison officials.
- Someone will need to lead prayer groups.
- Someone will need to follow-up with churches on their experience and provide support as needed.

2. Collateral

- Training presentation on prison ministry
- Prison do's and don'ts.
- Invitations for program activities.
- Develop communication pieces to distribute in the churches (brochures, etc.)
- Establish digital communication channels with the churches.

3. Time

- Time to meet with churches and prisoners or families.
- Time to lead prayer groups.
- Time to meet with prayer groups and multiple congregations.
- Time to walk with churches as they catch the vision.
- Travel time to churches.

4. Space You will need space to conduct presentations with churches or church leadership.

5. Cost The cost varies. Considerations include types of collateral (web or print), presentation types, meal/snack expenses, travel expenses, types of communication (email, phone, text).