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Prisoner Re-entry
and Aftercare:

Churches as
Stations of Hope

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Becoming Stations of Hope

In November 2005 American Baptist Home Mission Societies (then National Ministries) led the effort to launch an initiative to lift up and encourage American Baptists who are making a difference in the lives of children living in poverty. A major focus of our commitment to this vital ministry is to provide education about the systemic, negative impact of poverty upon children. Not surprisingly, as we began to examine the things which exacerbate the impact of that poverty, family systems came to the fore.

Cradle to Prison Pipeline findings show that African-American babies are almost twice as likely as white babies to be born to teen parents and grow up in single-parent households. Single-mother households are almost six times as likely to be poor as two-parent households. Latino children are 40 percent more likely than white children to grow up in single-parent homes; 56 percent of African-American children, 29 percent of Latino children, and 21 percent of white children live in single-parent households. Simply put, these homes tend to be poor.

While the issues related to incarceration and prisoner re-entry are in no way exclusively associated with poverty, existing data shows that poor persons involved in the criminal justice system have a greater likelihood of being incarcerated more often and for longer periods of time than persons who are economically solvent. Statisticians agree that the United States has the highest per capita prison population in the world. The majority of those released from U.S. prisons and jails each year are low-income minority men, David Kane and Joy Moses say at americanprogress.org, most go home to areas of concentrated poverty, and within three years nearly 50 percent will likely return to prison. In *Women in California Prisons*, Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen tell us that women are among the fastest growing groups of prisoners, their numbers having tripled nationally since 1980.

This reality is even more startling because quite often the men and women who are incarcerated also happen to

be parents. Little hard data exists regarding the effects that having an incarcerated parent has upon a child. However, there is no doubt that this can be devastating for the children left behind. Children of incarcerated parents are frequently forced to live in unstable environments. And once again these, the most innocent victims, are left to suffer from social stigmatization, as well as feelings of abandonment, sadness, shame, and anger.

These hurting children and their families are members of our communities, schools, churches, and the American Baptist family. They sit silently in the pews of our churches, wondering how and if their families will survive while mom, dad, brother, or sister is incarcerated. Because they may have been victims of or witnesses to the crime committed by the family member, they may also wonder how they will be affected when that person returns home from prison.

At the same time, with the mounting issues associated with prison overcrowding, ex-offenders are being released at escalating rates, and they may be wondering what will happen to them upon release. Where will they live? Will they be accepted by friends and family? Will it be possible for them to reintegrate into family and community life after their extended absence? Who will hire a felon? On the receiving end, communities desire to both reduce recidivism and maintain safety. And pastors wonder how to cope with myriad issues, such as how to support the returning citizen and his or her family on the one hand, and keep the church both safe and receptive on the other.

This issue of *The Christian Citizen* seeks to foster awareness and to provide resources, models, and education for persons, communities, and churches seeking to become stations of hope for returning citizens and their families.

The Reverend Marilyn P. Turner serves American Baptist Home Mission Societies as associate executive director, Center for Missional Life and Leadership, and as associate national secretary of American Baptist Churches USA.



Providing a City of Refuge: A Conversation with the Rev. Dr. DeeDee M. Coleman

The church must be a vehicle for restoration, letting the world know there is forgiveness, even in a place like this,” says the Rev. Dr. DeeDee M. Coleman, reflecting on her work in prison ministry. As pastor of Russell Street Missionary Baptist Church on the north end of Detroit, Coleman is well aware that her city has been under siege by astronomical crime rates and economic devastation. She feels there’s an urgent need for churches to play a healing role in the lives of people who’ve been incarcerated—not only while they are in prison, but also after release. “The church has to step up to the plate and make sure that restoration comes to our communities,” she urges. “There has to be an opportunity for people to be forgiven. Otherwise, the crime rate will only get worse.”

Dr. Coleman was the 2007 recipient of the Edwin T. Dahlberg Peace Award for her outstanding work in prison ministry and re-entry services. She is the executive director of The Wings of Faith Inc., a multicultural, ecumenical ministry serving former offenders, substance abusers, high-risk youth, and their families, in the Detroit area. Wings of Faith seeks to strengthen and assist community and faith-based organizations by providing training, technical assistance, and resources for becoming self-sufficient through economic empowerment.

Since receiving the Dahlberg Award at the 2007 Biennial, Coleman has been delighted by the avenues that have opened up for her to share her ministry, allowing her to spread her influence beyond Detroit, throughout the state of Michigan, and across the United States. In 2009, in partnership with National Ministries (now American Baptist Home Mission Societies), the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), and the Council of Baptist Pastors of Detroit and Vicinity Inc., Coleman initiated the first statewide, faith-based re-entry conference in Michigan. With more than 1,300 people in attendance, the conference addressed pressing issues faced by people of faith today, including how churches can help families reunite after experiencing the devastation of incarceration. Participants

explored how churches could minister to and empower citizens returning from incarceration as they confront their needs for employment, housing, spiritual nurture, and support.

Coleman works in partnership with about 200 Baptist churches in the Detroit area, providing them with resources for ministries of prison outreach and community re-entry. On a national level, she’s connected to more than 700 churches through the prison ministry project of PNBC, helping those congregations provide healing and support to individuals within their own

...[T]here’s an urgent need for churches to play a healing role in the lives of people who’ve been incarcerated—not only while they are in prison, but also after release.

communities who are affected by the criminal justice system. With the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, PNBC has produced *What Shall We Then Do?*—a wonderful online resource for churches seeking to reach out to those recently released from prison.

Equipping congregations for prison-related ministry has been challenging in ways Dr. Coleman hadn’t expected at first. As she began talking with pastors about the importance of ministry to incarcerated persons and returning citizens, Coleman discovered that many pastors were living in fear that their own troubled histories of previous incarceration would be exposed. “They were afraid to step out and say, ‘I had a problem.’”

They didn't know how their congregations would think about them!" By helping pastors confront their own fears, and uncovering the power of honest, authentic—not sugarcoated—testimony that reveals one's struggle as well as one's conversion, Coleman saw, again and again, churches being transformed into healing communities.

Citing the March 2009 Pew Center on the States' report, *One in 31*, the 2009 Annual Report of the Commission on Social Justice and Prison Ministry of PNBC points out that one in every 31 people in the United States is under some kind of correctional control—one in 18 men, and one in 11 African-American. In light of those staggering statistics, Coleman says "every member in the church has been affected by incarceration." Yet many people remain silent because of the shame attached to this. But by engaging in prison ministry, says Coleman, "The church is being restored to its rightful place of fellowship. Individuals who are currently suffering in silence in the membership of the church are having an opportunity to voice their anger, their hurt, and their shame."

Drawing on the biblical account of cities of refuge (Joshua 20), Coleman calls on churches to provide a safe, welcoming place for returning citizens. The people of God are called "to go into a prison facility and say that, when you get out, there is a city of refuge waiting for you that will take you in." Coleman goes on to say,

"I know the church is doing great work, and we are being challenged more than ever before because of the economy. But I don't think the church has fulfilled its purpose with this particular population. People are not pushed to service with a 25-minute or an hour sermon. There is just feel-good coming out of worship. But we have got to be pushed into service. And you can only do that if you study the word of God, if you give of yourself, if you share, and if you forgive. That's the only way."

While spiritual support is an important part of being a city of refuge, churches need to accompany prayer with concrete actions. Churches can offer job fairs featuring employers who are willing to hire former offenders and their families, or offer health fairs that provide re-entering citizens and their families with resources for dealing with diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis, which are often brought into families after individuals are released from prison. Wings of Faith runs a Detroit resource center for former offenders that provides not only job referrals and job placement, but also computers for working on resumes. Former offenders are also given one-on-one counseling

and assistance in family reunification. "It's a whole network of activity in one location that has provided the offender population a place where they can go and talk freely about their problems and some of the things that face them as one who is coming out of incarceration."

Coleman sees the work of prison ministry—and ministry beyond incarceration—as only just beginning. As prison populations increase, and as incarceration continues to devastate families and communities, Coleman returns again to her feeling of urgency. "I'm at a point that the message needs to get out at every opportunity. I have to spread the message that this work is a golden, spiritual, Holy Ghost-filled opportunity."

Doug Davidson, a freelance writer and editor living in Pleasant Hill, Calif., is a member of Shell Ridge Community Church (ABCUSA) in Walnut Creek, Calif.



Prisoner Re-entry and Congregational Culture

Suppose congregations responded to incarceration the same way they do to hospitalization? Imagine a congregation—upon receiving news of the arrest of a member, or even a relative of a member—mobilizing the same resources, actions, attitudes, and networks that it would if the individual was seriously ill? Hospitalization musters the power of prayer, summons the church family to cards and visitation, calls the membership to provide support for the sick individual’s family, and continues its ministry of care after the individual’s discharge from the hospital. What if we offered the same response to those who are or have been incarcerated?

The idea is not far-fetched. Jesus lists care for the prisoner and ministry to the sick in the same list of judgment criteria in Matthew 25. Yet, when a congregation ministers to incarcerated persons, it is usually “specialized,” the province of a group of trained volunteers representing that congregation’s “prison ministry.” Why is ministry to prisoners only for particular people, while caring for the sick belongs to us all?

Some cite the specific training required for prison ministry, and clearly instruction in prison proceedings, correctional culture, and other relevant forms of engagement has its rightful place. But in a real sense, we have all been trained to minister to the sick. We know that there are certain hospital procedures, ways of considering the needs of ill people, and ways of engaging with them that make the difference between being supportive and being an added burden. Through experience, we have learned how to care for the sick and their families. Surely we can learn to care for inmates, former inmates, and their families as well.

Many organizations provide services such as job training and placement, stable housing, and drug and alcohol treatment to address the critical needs of the staggering numbers of persons returning from state and federal prisons and local and county jails every year. But one thing that congregations can provide that perhaps no social service provider can is a caring, healing environment for those seeking to successfully tran-

sition from incarceration back into society. Congregations offer two resources to assist in that transition: Christian values and social networks. Our values include love, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. Our formal and informal networks of support create relationships that let the wounded know they are not alone.

Make no mistake—the person returning from incarceration is feeling wounded. Harvie Conn, in his book, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*, refers to



...[O]ne thing that congregations can provide that perhaps no social service provider can is a caring, healing environment for those seeking to successfully transition from incarceration back into society.

this as a population of “sinners who have been sinned against.” True reconciliation requires that the formerly incarcerated acknowledge and be held accountable for their actions. At the same time, they suffer incredible

stigmatization, after experiencing awful prison conditions and lack of rehabilitation services. We even refer to them as “ex-offenders” or “ex-cons,” as if they are being charged interest after having “paid their debt to society.” The late Dr. Lonnie McLeod Jr., who earned his first divinity degree while serving time at Sing Sing Prison, prior to becoming the pastor of the Church of the Living Hope in Harlem, N.Y., often said, “How would you like to be introduced to someone with a reference to the worst part of your life?” And chaplain Michael Smith, of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, addresses the stigma in this way: “If you have a problem with engaging the prisoner, your faith is on trial—after all, an inmate died for your sins!”

The stigma surrounding incarceration must be addressed if we are to become congregations that fulfill Matthew 25 in our care for prisoners—and for re-entering prisoners. Our ethics of forgiveness must expand not only for the prisoner’s sake, but also for the sake of the prisoner’s family. The stigma and shame associated with incarceration extend from those in prison and jail to their family members, many of whom sit in silence on Sunday mornings unable to express their own feelings about a loved one who is separated from them. It extends to returning prisoners as well. When the sick leave the hospital, our care does not end; it should not end with the formerly incarcerated person who is returning home. But shame and stigma run deep.

For this reason, the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) adopted the Healing Communities model for congregation-based work with the incarcerated, the formerly incarcerated, and their families. PNBC’s method of operation is simple—they begin their ministries by identifying affected families within the congregation. Through sermon, Bible study, and testimony, they address the stigma and help break the silence. The congregations let it be known that their churches are safe places to testify and ask for help: “My son is in prison, and I need prayer”; “My daughter is coming home from jail, and we need help with the adjustment”; “My grandson is locked up, and I need a ride to visit him”; or “I just returned from prison this week, and I need support.” In 14 cities across the country, PNBC mobilizes its congregational resources of pastoral care and support to those individuals and families affected by incarceration.

A good number of PNBC congregations using the Healing Communities model are aligned with American Baptist Churches USA. The lead congregation in this national movement, Russell Street Missionary Baptist Church in Detroit, is aligned and works with American Baptist congregations and staff to teach the model. Russell Street’s pastor, the Reverend Dr. DeeDee M. Coleman, and other PNBC leaders have trained a number of congregations using the handbook titled *What*

Shall We Then Do?: A Family Freedom Kit for Creating Healing Communities, which is available for download from American Baptist Home Mission Societies’ Web site, at www.abhms.org > Justice Ministries > Prisoner Re-entry and Aftercare. The training sensitizes congregations to the challenges of ministering to re-entering former inmates and their families, and helps those congregations become “Stations of Hope”—a designation that signals a promising future for individuals and families often trapped by the “ex-es” of the past. Your congregation can become a Station of Hope for those in need of the Healing Communities ministry. The resources, values, and networks are available to make the way. God help us to add the will.

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PROJECT 25:36:

Providing Christ-Centered Care on the Road to Restoration



Incarceration is a family issue affecting parents, children, spouses, and siblings. One family member may be confined, but the entire family does the time, to some extent. This reality influenced the formation of *Project 25:36*, the incarceration/re-entry ministry I created as associate pastor at First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, N.J. Matthew 25:36, “I was in prison and you visited me,” is the scriptural foundation for this ministry, and the concepts on which it is based are similar to those included in *Balancing Justice with Mercy: A Toolkit for Creating Healing Communities* by Linda Mills. The impetus was an increasing number of members interested in “prison ministry,” and the design stemmed from a desire to be atypical in our approach.

Churches engaging in prison ministry often take one of a few possible approaches. In one approach, members volunteer to conduct worship services inside facilities. In another, members mentor the children of incarcerated adults. A third and common approach is to provide re-entry support to former prisoners. *Project 25:36* is designed to support incarcerated youth and adults—our “Community Sons and Daughters” (CS/CD)—and their families throughout confinement and re-entry. We sought to identify all of the “fronts” within one family where the adverse effects of incarceration are felt, and then design an approach to impact needs in each of these areas.

Rather than a facility partnership, which only serves a specific facility, *Project 25:36* is community-based. This is because, first, the incarcerated come from and return to specific communities. Serving Sons and Daughters and their families who are from or connected to a specific community increases the potential impact of the ministry within that community. Second, *Project 25:36* volunteers come from a church within the community. They have a vested interest because they are from or connected to the same community to which the Sons and Daughters and their families belong. These families are our families; these Sons and Daughters are our sons and daughters. Many of them are not only



These families are our families;
these Sons and Daughters are
our sons and daughters.

from the communities in which our churches reside, but also members of our congregations.

A Community Son or Daughter can be in re-entry, currently confined, or preparing for sentencing when support from *Project 25:36* begins. Requests for support come from church members, members of other community churches, or non-church members in the community. When a request for support is received, a ministry representative meets with the CS/CD's immediate family of support to present the program. If they agree to participate, a Family Commitment Agreement is signed. A mentor is then assigned to support the Son or Daughter and a Family Support Facilitator is assigned to their family.

During confinement, the mentor visits the CS/CD at least once per month and writes them at least twice per month. These contacts put a face on the case number and demonstrate outside support. The facility chaplain and/or social worker is informed of our support and contacted prior to each visit. Regular visitation can be challenging, given facility requirements for approval. Participation by the CS/CD in all applicable facility programs is encouraged and, whenever possible, a volunteer attends court hearings. The Family Facilitator contacts the family of support twice each month, and a

mentor is provided for the children or siblings of the CS/CD for twice-monthly visits when requested. Support group sessions are conducted for family members once each month. The Facilitator also assists with resolving issues impacting the family, such as housing, employment, financial emergencies, etc., by providing resource contacts within the church and the community. The church's existing outreach ministries play a key role in assisting families supported by *Project 25:36*.

During re-entry, the assigned mentor contacts the CS/CD by phone once each week, and they meet face-to-face once per month and as needed. Individual and family support groups meet once each month to assist with the transition of the CS/CD and his or her family. Education, employment, and housing assistance are also available. If on parole, the CS/CD's parole officer is informed of our support and periodically contacted. Family Facilitator support and youth mentoring also continue during re-entry.

Post-confinement support continues as necessary for at least 18 months. Successful completion of the program is determined by progress in the support groups, as well as by stable housing and employment. The goal of *Project 25:36* is to achieve a 70 percent non-recidivism rate within the first year after release and a 55 percent non-recidivism rate within two to three years after release. When creating the ministry, we set those goals in response to statistics from Wikipedia (citing James Henslin's *Social Problems: A Down-to-Earth Approach*), which report recidivism rates of 44.1 within one year of release, and 67.5 percent within three years of release.

The greatest obstacle to successful re-entry is discouragement, which makes a ministry like *Project 25:36* so vital. This program remains one of the most meaningful ministry efforts that I was involved in while at First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens. Pastor DeForest B. Soaries Jr. called our volunteers before the church for prayer when the ministry began its work. After the benediction, I could not get out of the sanctuary, as members came to me one after another, some wanting to volunteer, more seeking support for a friend or loved one. One young man waited anxiously to speak to me. When he finally had the chance, he told me he was a member of a church in Philadelphia, but he was unable to attend there because he could not go out of the state of New Jersey—he was on house arrest and wearing an ankle bracelet. He was so glad to be at Lincoln Gardens that day. We prayed together. As stated in Matthew 25:40, “[J]ust as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me.”

Rev. Dr. Byron P. Wess is the pastor of Second Baptist Church of Asbury Park, N.J., and an adjunct instructor at Somers Christian College in Zarephath, N.J.

Proyecto 25:36:

Brindando cuidado Cristo-céntrico en el camino a la restauración

El encarcelamiento es un problema familiar que afecta a padres, madres, hijos, cónyuges y hermanos. Así sea sólo un miembro de la familia el que esté preso, de alguna manera toda la familia también lo está. La formación del *Proyecto 25:36*, el ministerio de la prisión/reingreso que creé como pastor asociado en la Primera Iglesia Bautista de Lincoln Gardens en Somerset, New Jersey, fue influenciada por esta realidad. Mateo 25:36: “Estuve en la cárcel, y vinisteis a mí” (RVA) es la base bíblica de este ministerio y los conceptos en los cuales se basa son similares a los incluidos en el material *Equilibrando justicia con misericordia: Herramientas para crear comunidades restauradoras**, de Linda Mills. El estímulo lo brindó un número cada vez mayor de miembros interesados en el “ministerio de la prisión”, y el diseño provino de un deseo de ser atípicos en nuestro enfoque y planteamiento.

Las iglesias que tienen ministerios en las prisiones suelen optar por alguna de las posibles formas de operar. Una de estas formas es tener miembros voluntarios que lleven servicios de adoración dentro de

la prisión. Otra forma es que miembros sirvan de mentores y mentoras a hijos e hijas de adultos encarcelados. Una tercera y común manera de enfocarse es proporcionando ayuda a personas encarceladas para su reingreso. El *Proyecto 25:36* está diseñado para apoyar a jóvenes y adultos encarcelados, nuestros “Hijos/Hijas de la Comunidad” (HC) y a sus familias mientras dure su confinamiento y a través de su reingreso a la sociedad. Intentamos identificar todos los “frentes” en los cuales se sienten los golpes adversos del encarcelamiento en la familia para luego diseñar un cercamiento de impacto para tratar las necesidades de cada una de estas áreas.

Más que un servicio a una prisión en particular, el *Proyecto 25:36* tiene como base la comunidad. Esto es porque, en primer lugar, las personas confinadas vienen de comunidades específicas y retornan a ellas. Servirles a ellos y ellas y sus familias, que son de una comunidad específica o están conectados a ésta, aumenta el potencial de impacto ministerial dentro de esa comunidad. En segundo lugar, los voluntarios y voluntarias del *Proyecto 25:36* provienen de una iglesia dentro de la comunidad, es decir, tienen un interés personal porque pertenecen o están conectados con la misma comunidad a la que estas familias pertenecen. Estas familias son nuestras familias; estos Hijos/Hijas son nuestros hijos e hijas. Muchos de ellos y ellas no sólo pertenecen a la comunidad en la cual se ubica nuestra iglesia, sino que también son miembros de nuestra congregación.

Un Hijo/Hija de la Comunidad puede estar en proceso de reintegración, confinado o preparándose para la condena cuando *Proyecto 25:36* inicia su tarea de ayuda. Los pedidos vienen de miembros de la iglesia, o de otras iglesias de la comunidad, así como de personas de la comunidad que no son miembros de la iglesia. Cuando se recibe un pedido de ayuda, un representante del ministerio se reúne con la familia inmediata del Hijo/Hija para presentar el programa de ayuda. Si están de acuerdo en participar, se firma un *Acuerdo de compromiso de la familia*. Luego se asigna



Estas familias son nuestras familias; estos Hijos/Hijas son nuestros hijos e hijas.



El mayor obstáculo para la reintegración exitosa es el desánimo...

un mentor o mentora para apoyar al Hijo/Hija de la Comunidad, así como un facilitador o facilitadora de apoyo a la familia.

Durante el confinamiento, el mentor visita al Hijo/Hija de la Comunidad por lo menos una vez al mes y le escribe por lo menos dos veces al mes. Estos contactos le dan un rostro al número del caso y demuestran el apoyo exterior. El capellán o capellana y/o el trabajador social es informado de nuestra ayuda y es contactado antes de cada visita. Las visitas regulares pueden ser un desafío, dados los requisitos de algunas cárceles. Animamos a que el Hijo/Hija de la Comunidad participe en todos los programas aplicables de la prisión, y siempre que sea posible, un voluntario asista a las audiencias judiciales. El facilitador se contacta con la familia por lo menos dos veces por mes y se proporciona un mentor o mentora para los niños o hermanos del HC para visitas dos veces por mes cuando sean requeridas. Se conducen sesiones de apoyo para los miembros de la familia una vez al mes. El facilitador también ayuda resolviendo problemas que afecten a la familia, tales como vivienda, empleo, emergencias financieras, etc., proporcionando contactos para recursos dentro de la iglesia y de la comunidad. Los ministerios de apoyo existentes de la iglesia desempeñan un papel clave en la ayuda a las familias que son parte del *Proyecto 25:36*.

Durante la reintegración, el mentor o mentora asignado se contacta con el Hijo/Hija de la Comunidad

por teléfono una vez por semana y se reúnen personalmente una vez por mes o según sea necesario. Los grupos de apoyo individual y familiar se reúnen una vez al mes para ayudar con la transición para el HC y su familia. Hay apoyo disponible para educación, empleo y vivienda. Si se encuentran en libertad condicional, el oficial a cargo del HC es informado de nuestra ayuda y es contactado periódicamente. La ayuda del facilitador para la familia y la mentoría a los jóvenes también continúa durante la reintegración.

La ayuda post-confinamiento continúa mientras sea necesaria por lo menos 18 meses más. El cumplimiento exitoso del programa se determina por el progreso de los grupos de ayuda, así como por una vivienda estable y empleo. La meta del *Proyecto 25:36* es alcanzar una tasa de no-reincidencia del 70 por ciento dentro del primer año posterior a la puesta en libertad y una tasa de no-reincidencia del 55 por ciento dos a tres años después de la misma. Al crear el ministerio, fijamos esas metas en respuesta a estadísticas en Wikipedia (que cita un trabajo de James Henslin titulado: *Social Problems: A Down-to-Earth Approach*), que divulga índices de reincidencia de 44.1 en el primer año de libertad 67.5 por ciento en los siguientes tres años.

El mayor obstáculo para la reintegración exitosa es el desánimo, lo que hace tan vital un ministerio como el del *Proyecto 25:36*. Este programa sigue siendo uno de los esfuerzos ministeriales más significativos en los que he estado involucrado en la Primera Iglesia Bautista de Lincoln Gardens. Cuando el ministerio comenzó su trabajo, el pastor DeForest B. Soaries Jr. llamó a nuestros voluntarios y voluntarias ante la iglesia para orar. Después de la bendición, yo no podía salir del santuario, pues venían a mí miembros uno tras otro; algunas personas querían ofrecerse como voluntarias, otras buscaban ayuda para un amigo o persona amada. Un joven esperó ansiosamente para hablarme. Cuando finalmente tuvo la oportunidad, me dijo que era miembro de una iglesia en Filadelfia, pero que no podía asistir porque no podía salir del estado de New Jersey; tenía arresto domiciliario y llevaba un brazalete electrónico en el tobillo. Estaba tan contento de estar en Lincoln Gardens ese día. Oramos juntos. Según lo indicado en Mateo 25:40: "Todo lo que hicieron por uno de mis hermanos, aun por el más pequeño, lo hicieron por mí". (NVI)

El Rev. Dr. Byron P. Wess es pastor de la Segunda Iglesia Bautista de Asbury Park, New Jersey y profesor adjunto en la Universidad Cristiana de Somerset en Zarephath, New Jersey.

* *Balancing Justice with Mercy: A Toolkit for Creating Healing Communities*, material disponible sólo en inglés por ahora.

One Pennsylvania Woman Crusades to Reduce Recidivism



This transformational story is just one of many wrought by *In His Eyes*, which seeks to rebuild lives and help women overcome cycles of drugs, poverty, and violence.

When Carla Clanagan first met Dionne Johnson, the 40-something crack addict had been on drugs for three decades and in and out of jail every year since high school.

Johnson was the first woman Clanagan worked with in the ministry to ex-offenders—*In His Eyes*—that she founded in Montgomery County, Pa., in 2006. With God’s help, Clanagan says, she was able to minister to Johnson simply by loving her, because Johnson had been unable to receive love before, even the love of her own family.

Like so many of the women Clanagan works with today, Johnson never had anyone to say, “I love you for who you are, and I don’t want anything in return,” says Clanagan. But God’s unconditional, life-affirming love, shared through Clanagan, changed that. Johnson has been out of jail for 2 1/2 years now. A faithful member of Narcotics Anonymous (NA), she chairs her NA group, and she’s holding down a full-time job—she’s even gotten a promotion—and she’s enrolled in cooking school, having discovered a love for cooking as she’s healed and bloomed into herself.

This transformational story is just one of many wrought by *In His Eyes*, which seeks to rebuild lives and help women overcome cycles of drugs, poverty, and violence. Ultimately, the organization works to reduce recidivism, strengthen families and build better communities.

Johnson, however, was not the first woman to teach Clanagan about the difference God’s love can make in turning a life around. *In His Eyes* began as a vision of offering hope to women—a vision that grew out of Clanagan’s own former sense of hopelessness.

To look at her, with her calm demeanor and gentle manner, her broad smile and the gleam in her eye, you would never guess she knows what it’s like to feel hopeless. But this suburban mom, who admits to living what looks like a Kodak-moment life, complete with picket fence, says, “Because I suffer from depression, I made a lot of bad choices, and I ended up in the system. I was very unhappy and I didn’t know it. ... It looked like I had everything ... but I had no idea of who I was.”

At a conference in Florida in 2003, Clanagan experienced an “awakening” that started her “really seeking God” with the help of her pastor. “It was a painful process to discover who I am in Christ,” she says. But finally she understood she was living for everyone else rather than herself, and she learned she had to take care of herself first.

Prayer helped her overcome depression: “I’m a prime example of what God can do. ... Now I want to minister to women so they see themselves as God sees them ... as God intended them to be.” As someone who has walked in shoes similar to those of the women she ministers to, Clanagan tells them, “You are not the crime you committed. Let go of that. That is not who you were created to be. ... You made a mistake. Let’s start over.”

Clanagan began her ministry four years ago by offering one-on-one support and guidance, as well as unconditional love, to female ex-offenders struggling to start over. She helped them face the inevitable challenges that follow release from prison: finding affordable housing without references, finding employment with an inconsistent work history and criminal record, finding treatment for addiction, and the list goes on.

In 2009, she collaborated with Montgomery County’s Parole and Probation Department, as well as the county correctional facility, to add a formal mentorship program to *In His Eyes* that serves both men and women. In its first year, the mentoring program served 15 inmates—10 women and five men.

Clanagan manages and administers the volunteer-based program, interviewing volunteers, completing background checks, and leading their 10 hours of training. Ninety days before release, mentors begin visiting inmates once or twice a week. Mentors must commit to continuing the relationship for a year following the inmate’s release; Clanagan requires signed contracts to reinforce the importance of the commitment.

Inmates are also interviewed to assess their suitability for the mentor program. “We are looking for someone who is really interested in changing,” she says. The desire to change is key to an ex-offender’s transformation. “In jail, life stops. You have no reason not to read, meditate, and journal. ... The idea is to exhale, release, submit to God, and then allow God to do what God wants to do in your life.”

Along with a strong desire to change, inmates and ex-offenders in the mentor program have to have goals. “A goal is a dream with time attached to it,” says Clanagan. “Without a goal, without a dream, you are not going anywhere.”

Carla Clanagan—LPN by training, wife, mother, full-time employee of the Montgomery County Behavioral Health Department, and member of Zion Baptist Church in Ambler, Pa., in addition to the direc-

tor of *In His Eyes*—still has lots of dreams for this ministry that she has found to be a “gift from God.”

This year *In His Eyes* is launching DAKMAK (Dads and Kids, Moms and Kids Re-Unification), a program that reaches out to children with incarcerated parents,



Carla Clanagan (center), founder of In His Eyes, meets with ex-offender Dionne Johnson (left), and In His Eyes volunteer Maryann Forcinio.

offered in cooperation with a local community center. Clanagan is also consulting with a local college considering a prison ministry club, she wants to begin parent education classes in the county correctional facility, and she’s planning to set up a family visitation room in the prison.

As though these goals are not enough to keep her multitasking, she has yet another—to speak in churches about prison ministry programs. Churches have an important role to play in successful community re-entry of ex-offenders, she says, and they need to be more understanding and supportive of former inmates’ challenges and needs.

More than anything, though, Clanagan wants to share the lesson she learned the hard way—the lesson that changed her own life, and the one she uses to end every Bible study, every workshop, every interaction with offenders and ex-offenders: “You don’t know that God is all you need until God is all you got.”

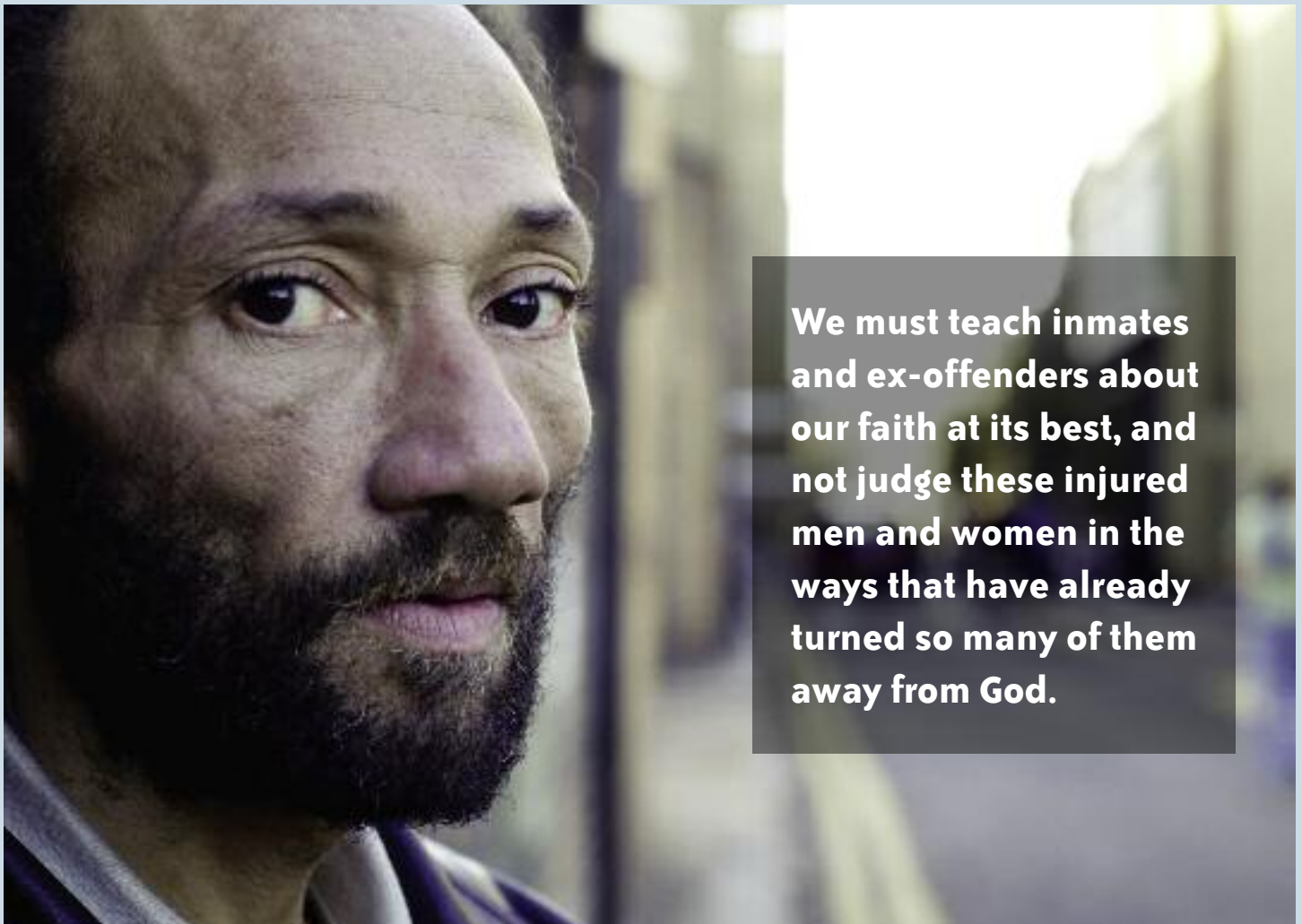
Susan Gottshall, associate executive director for Communications at American Baptist Home Mission Societies, has volunteered as a mentor to a female ex-offender through THE PROGRAM for Women and Families in Allentown, Pa., where she found she received much more than she gave.

Faith Communities and Addicted Ex-offenders

Who cares about the inmates in U.S. prisons? Sometimes we hear people speak about them as if they are subhuman and do not deserve anything except punishment. Rhetoric like that hurts me, because my son was once an inmate, and I was arrested several times in my youth. Drug abuse once ruled my life, and as someone who now works as a Connecticut Department of Correction (DOC) prison chaplain, pastors an American Baptist church in Hartford, Conn., and has earned a doctorate, I know

and model the power of faith to change lives.

While the small percentage of inmates who perpetrate truly vile crimes receives headline-grabbing attention, the vast majority are less violent offenders, some of whom are struggling with mental illness or substance abuse. The question for each of us is whether we care enough about the degrees of difference between truly violent offenders and the less violent majority to find ways to help the majority stay out of prison, or—if they are re-entering ex-offenders—transition successfully. If



We must teach inmates and ex-offenders about our faith at its best, and not judge these injured men and women in the ways that have already turned so many of them away from God.

we do care, we have great power to facilitate change. If not, we will continue to see more prisons built and scarce resources sacrificed for housing and supervising the largest per capita prison population of any country in the world.

The 2007 *State of Connecticut Prison Population Projections Annual Report* reveals that the state's prison population rose from 5,422 in 1985 to 18,902 in 2007. And, at their Web site, the DOC's Health and Addiction Services agency states that 88 percent of inmates in the state's prison system "have a substance abuse history that suggests a significant need for some level of substance abuse treatment." For re-entry to be effective for these and other such inmates across the United States, we have to address the problem of addiction. Housing, supervision, a job, and food are simply not enough when substance abuse has ravaged one's soul and destroyed one's family.

Addiction, whether to drugs or alcohol, is a disease of both body and soul, and it is one reason for crimes that lead to incarceration. Putting ill people in jail and treating them like criminals compounds their problems in recovery. They feel powerless over their illness, their incarceration, and the criminal record and subsequent stigma attached to it. Instead of acknowledging the link between addiction and crime by seeing to it that the addicts—many of them nonviolent—get needed treatment, we incarcerate them with tough and sometimes violent criminals, and expect them to somehow be cured upon release.

Comprehensive re-entry strategies are important for successful reintegration into the community. Ex-offenders need more than the support that is typically offered. This is where some experimental programs that work with individual inmates, and then help them adjust during their re-entry, are useful. As part of my work with the DOC, I teach a 15-week study in prison about spirituality and recovery, which many inmates have told me is simply not available out in the community. This program looks at the incredible bigness of God, and seeks to tap that awesome healing power to apply the balm of Gilead to the raw places in the inmates' souls. We look at all the Abrahamic faiths, as well as Buddhism and Native American spirituality, and we spend time learning the biology and physiology of addiction.

Faith communities should consider developing similar programs to help ex-offenders successfully reintegrate into the community. We must teach inmates and ex-offenders about our faith at its best, and not judge these injured men and women in the ways that have already turned so many of them away from God. We all know that Jesus took great delight in touching the hearts and souls of lost and lonely Samaritans, adulterers, tax collectors, lepers, and all manner of broken-hearted. My inmate participants know all too well what those people

felt. Their eyes light up as they begin to understand that Jesus wants to touch their hearts as well, and things begin to change for them in ways that matter.

Alongside programs like these, ex-offenders need communities of support so they can begin to feel they are valued, contributing to their families, and finding useful treatment for addiction. Re-entry is the time when ex-offenders are most in need of places where they can be their authentic selves, as well as where they can talk about their struggles with addiction, life, family, and fitting in. Who better than faith communities to provide these healing places?

Despite their bravado, former inmates are vulnerable. In an Associated Press article, "Risk of Death High for New Ex-Cons," writer Linda Johnson cites a four-year study conducted by the University of Washington that uncovered a death rate for new ex-offenders 13 times higher than that of the general public and also identified drug overdose as the leading killer. A drug-addicted former convict, the study concludes, is "129 times more likely to die that way within two weeks of release than a drug-addicted member of the general population."

My son Jesse became one of those statistics. On April 3, 2007, at the age of 21, he died of a drug overdose while on probation. Imagine the grief we experienced after months in and out of court, paying thousands of dollars in legal fees and bail bonds, and seeing our loved one in prison surrounded by inmates who act tough despite the terror in their hearts. Then, in spite of all our love and support, his young life was wasted by a drug overdose. A family can never again have a "normal" life after that kind of devastation. Unless we treat the whole person and recognize the ravages of addiction on the hearts of addicted ex-offenders and their families, more people will experience that kind of grief.

It is rare in our culture to find substantial re-entry work being done in communities of faith. Too many of us believe the "get tough on crime" rhetoric without asking critical questions. Yes, those violent inmates who are dangerous to our streets need to be incarcerated and remain so. However, that leaves many thousands of non-violent offenders to whom communities of faith can offer open and authentic support. If you are one of the few who truly cares, perhaps a life will be changed by the work you and your faith community can do. My son died from the ravages of addiction, but you might just save someone else's son or daughter from that same lonely fate. I do believe that is what Jesus would want us to do.

The Rev. Dr. Charles Williams has been an American Baptist pastor since 1991 and a prison chaplain with the Connecticut Department of Correction since 2001. This article represents the author's beliefs, and not the positions or views of the DOC.

Redemption Church— A Model for Re-entry Prison Ministry

Churches need to bridge the chasm separating the prison gate and the church door. The sad and perplexing reality that those who possess a genuine prison-formed faith are seldom assimilated into church after release was the catalyst for Redemption Church.

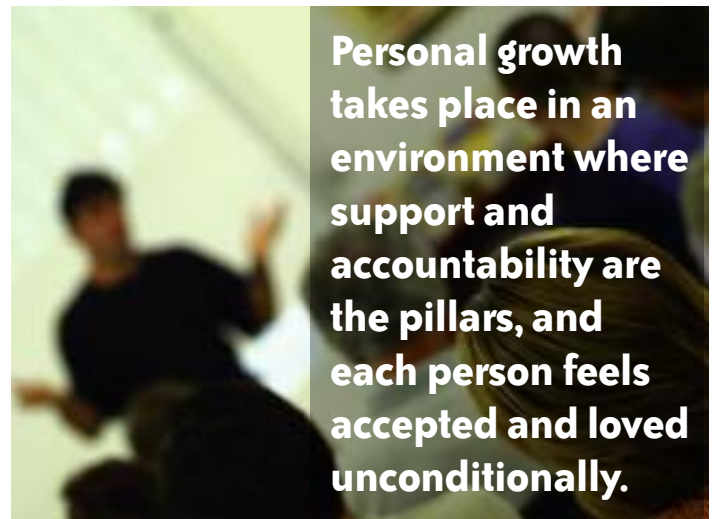
While developing a model for the Redemption Church ministry, I considered several sources. During my experiences as an attorney and as a minister, I have observed a strong sense of community amongst persons who have encountered the criminal justice system and, perhaps, struggled with addiction. They are more comfortable associating with each other in and out of prison, and their shared values tend to be oppositional to those of individuals who have never been incarcerated. Liberation Theology teaches that oppressed persons can develop relevant theologies within their own culture and experiences, and the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous teach that people who share struggles can successfully support one another and hold each other accountable within a community dedicated to transcending bondage.

In *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys*, Kennon Callahan articulates another model that was followed during the development of Redemption Church, the Mission Outpost. Callahan exhorts staid and dying churches to invest time and resources creatively and unreservedly in mission. The host church for Redemption was dying and, instead of closing, looking for new ways to do ministry. The Redemption concept of opening the church building, and the congregation's hearts, to convicted felons was the host's expression of the "Mission Outpost" as articulated by Callahan.

Religious volunteers from the host church and elsewhere became the stable fabric upon which the mission would be sewn. The church targets prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, and it seeks to transform a slice of the community it represents. Those who embraced spiritual, cognitive, and behavioral change in prison can continue after their release to associate with

people they are most comfortable with and those who also embrace change. The message is always that this is "their church." All are included, supported, and held accountable by those in the congregation who have never been in prison.

The biblical image for Redemption Church is 1 Corinthians 12:27—"the body of Christ." Indeed, when one hurts, we all hurt. Every person has gifts and functions. No one is unimportant. As Paul suggests, sometimes the one who is regarded as "less honorable" (1 Corinthians 12:23) has the most important ministry



role—the reformed sinner, the recovering addict. We constantly offer meaning and purpose to individuals who have been scorned. At the same time, we teach the importance of individuals coming together to form a community, and that no one disciple is an island unto him or herself.

Redemption Church is a fellowship of currently, formerly, and never incarcerated individuals and their families. For those who are or have been in prison, a hierarchical church structure can be unsatisfying. They, perhaps more than other people, tend to dislike authority, and often have short attention spans. They also tend to be concrete thinkers for whom metaphors and stories may not have the intended meanings. For all of these

reasons, sermons tend to be short, dialogical, and practical. There is frequently a feeling of alienation, being judged, and sometimes shame amongst those who have served time. Therefore, joys and sorrows are shared liberally in church, and occasionally someone will offer a public confession. We proclaim the desire to pray for each other. The Lord's Supper is celebrated at every service, because for those who are living under legal judgment, hearing the story of Christ's body broken and his blood shed for our forgiveness cannot occur too often.

Disciplines of faith provide a foundation upon which to build other life disciplines, so there are frequent services and group meetings, with the expectation that attendance will be more than once a week. Ex-offenders volunteer and hold church offices. Some work with the children and youth. Their faithfulness and witness set examples for other disciples through what I like to call "behold moments"—the moments when they do or say things in the church which reveal the presence of God.

One night in worship, for example, when many in attendance were sharing their "joys and sorrows," two of our former prisoners expressed concern for another former prisoner who had relapsed after release. The two, who were unmarried when they began attending Redemption while still prisoners, had already become an example of the possibilities of happiness and stability after prison by joining together in marriage. They set yet another example that evening by expressing concern for another disciple and taking the first steps toward leading her back to the fold. After her release, she had returned to the church and had been, in their words, "doing good." But she was back in jail for unpaid fines on an old charge. We felt God's presence when they asked the people of the church to join them in raising the money to secure her release and then made the first donation in the amount of \$200, which was for them a sacrificial sum.

The mission of Redemption Church is to bring re-entering prisoners into the church community. As that happens, one by one, through their transformation from spiritual isolation to congregational fellowship, they each become credible prophetic witnesses to others who are currently or formerly incarcerated, as well as to those who have never been in prison.

There are Redemption Church congregations at United Methodist churches in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Lawton, and Ardmore in Oklahoma. One is targeted for Muskogee, and one is being considered for the Arlington, Texas, area. The Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church is planning a Redemption Church as part of its overall plan to birth new congregations, and they are looking conference-wide for the best location. Many of the disciples in existing congregations are former prisoners.



The Redemption Church idea was inspired by the observation that there is often a chasm between the prison gate and the church door. I believe that building a bridge over that chasm is the church's responsibility. Personal growth takes place in an environment where support and accountability are the pillars, and each person feels accepted and loved unconditionally. My hope is that other congregations will look for ways to embrace offenders and their families and include them in the life of the church.

The Rev. Dr. Stan Basler serves as director of Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries, Oklahoma Conference, of the United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City. He is also a member of the adjunct faculty at Saint Paul School of Theology in Oklahoma City.

MEETING IN THE MIDDLE: People of Faith Reforming the Criminal Justice System

The political entrenchment of right versus left in Washington, D.C., has been widely noted recently. However, in the midst of seemingly endless partisan attacks by one side against the other, some organizations have chosen to work together to solve some of the serious issues the United States faces.

One of those issues is the broken criminal justice system. Faith groups from across the political and theological spectrums have come together to bring about necessary reforms. The Faith in Action Criminal Justice Reform Working Group includes organizations such as American Baptist Home Mission Societies, Mennonite Central Committee, National Association of Evangelicals, World Vision, American Humanist Association, Prison Fellowship, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Sojourners, among others.

Why has such an array of groups come together? Among many reasons is that the criminal justice system has adversely affected so many lives that these organizations, regardless of their political or religious leanings, see this system as in deep need of change. Some of the areas where change is so desperately needed are identified below, and these are issues that the Faith in Action working group is addressing in Washington, D.C.

Human Rights of the Incarcerated

The Prison Rape Elimination Act, passed in 2003, requires the development of national standards for detection and prevention of prison rape, and also punishment for those who commit it. At the Just Detention International Web site, the organization shares the results of a 2006 U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics survey of prisoners across the country, which found that more than 60,500 inmates had been victims of sexual assault in federal or state prisons. What is troubling is that these are only the reported assaults; many more are believed to have occurred. Unfortunately, the standards for prison rape detection and prevention have yet to be implemented by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Re-entry

The Second Chance Act of 2007 represents another major piece of legislative reform to the criminal justice system. It provides for housing, employment, substance abuse, and mental health treatment programs for ex-offenders. In a document titled “Addressing the Prisoner Re-entry Crisis—America’s Promise: A Second Chance,” advocates of the act reveal that, on average, 67 percent of those released from prison will commit



felonies or misdemeanors again within three years. This is largely due to a lack of resources for those re-entering society. Providing grants to faith and community organizations to support their efforts to better serve former inmates can help reduce the recidivism rate. This translates into safer communities, as well as the reunion and strengthening of ex-offenders' families.

Justice for Youth

In addition to issues of re-entry, faith organizations have also worked together on issues facing youth. The 1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), due for reauthorization, would continue to provide necessary federal funding for the prevention of delinquency in state and local juvenile justice systems. For more than 30 years, JJDP has been repeatedly reauthorized, with bipartisan support, for the federal care and custody of children, youth, and families involved with the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and it has also upheld the interests of public safety and crime prevention.

The most recently reauthorized, extended version of the act will essentially require the protection of incarcerated juveniles from the adult criminal justice system, alternatives to detention for juveniles who are status or first-time minor offenders, community-based services to address the needs of at-risk youth, and the identification of racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system. Faith-based organizations are among those supporting the act and implementing its programs.

Racial Bias

One of the unfortunate realities of the current criminal justice system is its inherent bias against minorities and, in particular, against the African-American community. There is perhaps no better illustration of this than the legal disparity created by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which instituted much tougher punishment for crack cocaine offenses than for those involving powder cocaine. *Cracks in the System*, an excellent report by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), explains that the lower cost of crack cocaine makes it easier for poor U.S. Americans—many of them African-American—to obtain, while the pricier powder cocaine tends to be the drug of choice for more affluent white Americans. The report includes statistics gathered by the U.S. Sentencing Commission indicating that white Americans are more likely to be incarcerated for powder cocaine offenses, while African-Americans are more likely to be incarcerated for the more severely punished crack cocaine offenses. Other statistics show that white Americans are less likely to be prosecuted and more likely to be acquitted for drug offenses, while they are much less likely to be sent to prison even if they are convicted.

At their Web site, the Sentencing Project describes this racial disparity:

“Over 60% of the people in prison are now racial and ethnic minorities. ... These trends have been intensified by the disproportionate impact of the ‘war on drugs,’ in which three-fourths of all persons in prison for drug offenses are people of color.”

This imbalance is also addressed by Laura Magnani and Harmon Wray in their book, *Beyond Prisons*, where they reveal that “an African-American male has a 28% chance of going to state or federal prison in the course of his lifetime, compared to ... 4.4% of white males.”

Looking at the Criminal Justice System as a Whole

The issues identified here represent some of the challenges before us, and they are immense indeed. The Faith in Action working group is advocating for fair and compassionate reform of the criminal justice system. We are also seeing people of faith throughout the country serve those directly affected by this broken system and push for necessary reforms. From call-in days for specific pieces of legislation, to prayer vigils between faith communities lifting up the need for reform, people of faith have served those in need and have begun to make their voices heard on Capitol Hill. Although the brokenness of the criminal justice system is daunting, we know that God's intentions are for a justice system that is far more just and humane than the one we have now. And we believe that God has called us as God's people to come together and make those hopes a reality.

Bill Mefford serves on the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church as director of civil and human rights. He works primarily on issues of immigration and criminal justice reform.

From call-in days for specific pieces of legislation, to prayer vigils between faith communities lifting up the need for reform, people of faith have served those in need and have begun to make their voices heard on Capitol Hill.

Dismantling the CRADLE to PRISON Pipeline

So many poor babies in the rich United States enter the world with multiple strikes against them: born at low birth weight without prenatal care to a teenaged, poor, and poorly educated single mother and absent father. At crucial points in their development from birth to adulthood, more risks pile on, making a successful transition to productive adulthood significantly less likely and involvement in the criminal justice system significantly more likely. Poverty, exacerbated by race, drives the cradle to prison pipeline as poverty frays the bonds of family and community. A child in a low-income family is more than 10 times as likely to be neglected or abused as a child in a higher income family. Children in the child welfare system are less likely to do well in school and more likely to enter the juvenile justice system.

At younger and younger ages, poor minority children become sucked into the pipeline to prison, which funnels them down life paths marked by illness, truancy, school failure and dropout, arrest, conviction, and incarceration. Income and race-based disparities in children's general health and cognitive development are apparent as early as nine months of age, and the gaps widen considerably by 24 months. By the beginning of kindergarten, poor Hispanic and African-American children are way behind their white counterparts, falling further behind with each subsequent school year.

School practices such as tracking, social promotion, and one-size-fits-all zero tolerance policies fuel the prison pipeline. Under "zero tolerance," a student who commits a minor offense—such as pushing or swearing—is arrested by a police officer, handcuffed, taken to a police station, and booked. Even when not convicted and locked up, arrested students are suspended from school for weeks or even months; sometimes they are expelled. Out of school and on the streets, children become disengaged from school and involved in delinquency and criminal activity.

The past continues to strangle the present and the future. Children with an incarcerated parent, especially



those living in poverty, are more likely to become incarcerated themselves. African-American children are seven times as likely, and Hispanic children twice as likely as white children to have an incarcerated parent. We must break this cycle. It is time for adults of every race and income group to end our silence about the pervasive breakdown of moral, family, community, and national values, to place our children first in our lives, and to model the behavior we want our children to learn. We do not have a "child and youth problem"; we have a profound adult problem.

The United States spends almost three times as much per prisoner as per public school student. We have let our children down. If called to account today, our nation would not pass the test of the prophets, the gospels, and all great faiths. Christians who profess to believe that God entered human history as a poor vulnerable baby, and that each man, woman, and child is created in God's own image, need to act on that faith. The prison pipeline is not an act of God. It has been created by our human political choices. Now we must rouse the nation to act with urgency and demand new choices for all our children so they can survive, thrive, learn, and reach their God-given potential. For our children's sake, the sake of our communities, and the sake of our nation, we must act now to dismantle the cradle to prison pipeline.

Marian Wright Edelman, "Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline," © 2010. Children's Defense Fund.

Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), has been an advocate for disadvantaged Americans for her entire professional life. Under her leadership, CDF has become the nation's strongest voice for children and families.

Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Crusade—Key Immediate Action Steps

Tens of thousands of youth are being funneled down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction, incarceration, and even death. The urgent challenge for each of us and for our nation is to prevent this waste of our children's lives and our nation's capabilities.

Individuals

- Mentor a child.
- Volunteer at an after-school program for youth.
- Vote in every election and advocate for children.
- Educate elected officials about the Pipeline.
- Host a house party to educate others about the Pipeline and what they can do to dismantle it.
- Volunteer with children who are homeless or in foster care.
- Organize a forum on incarcerated youth and the funding disparities between prisons and education in our nation.
- Volunteer your talents or professional services to help a single-parent, kinship care, or foster care family by babysitting, inviting them to events with their children, or providing transportation.

Families

- Show affection, love, and respect to your child every day.
- Spend quality time with your family (i.e., family game night, eating meals together).
- Consistently praise your child's achievements in school and extracurricular activities.
- Establish and maintain a supportive home learning environment.
- Create daily homework routines and limit television viewing.
- Talk and actively listen to children within your extended family.
- Adopt a foster child or become a foster parent.

Communities

- Institute a "Cradle Roll" within your faith-based institution or community, linking every child to a permanent, caring family member or adult mentor who can keep them on track and get them back on track if and when they stray.
- Promote learning by starting an after-school program for children.
- Ensure that at least one caring community member attends every public school student suspension meeting or court hearing.
- Encourage families to spend quality time together by hosting a movie or game night at your church.

- Start a support group for single-parent or kinship care families.
- Provide job opportunities and guidance for families and youth in need.
- Work with school officials to develop and adopt more child-appropriate discipline policies and procedures.
- Reach out to youth who are homeless or in foster care.
- Prepare care packages of new clothes, personal toiletries, and/or a welcome gift for children placed into foster care homes.
- Hold events to celebrate the strengths of our children and provide college scholarships and leadership opportunities to youth.
- Create a summer job opportunity for a youth.

Organizations

- Invest in prevention and early intervention.
- Host a health fair to ensure all children who are eligible for Medicaid or your state children's health insurance program are enrolled.
- Provide free tax filing assistance to low-income working families.
- Educate families about how they can apply for food stamps, Head Start, federal nutrition programs, and other similar benefits.
- Create and distribute a calendar of free family-friendly community events.
- Start a parent education program to familiarize parents about conflict resolution in the home and how to advocate for their children.
- Encourage alternatives to incarceration such as restitution, community service, electronic monitoring, drug rehabilitation treatment, or placement in a "staff secure" (but not locked) community corrections facility.
- Work to ensure that counseling, social services, education, and health and mental health services are provided to at-risk youth.
- Host a *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* Summit to connect and educate others about the Pipeline and ways to dismantle it.





Standing in the Gap

Imagine growing up in a community where your cousins, your uncle, your father, everybody has gone to jail. ... Now, you're nine years old, and you're trying to figure out what it means to be a nine-year-old [in your community]. Well, pretty quickly you're going to come to believe that going to jail is no big deal. ... If that third grader grows up and things stays the same—meaning that every other man they run into has gone to jail—we're going to lose a huge number of those kids. They're going to look up to these guys and they're going to end up being sucked into that same kind of environment very easily. ... On the other hand, if you've got ... hundreds of kids [in that community] who've gone to college, then at least you have a competing vision of what it means to grow up poor. If you get enough of the adolescents to do well, they'll prepare your community for those third-graders.

This is Geoffrey Canada's description, in Paul Tough's *Whatever It Takes*, of the lives of too many children growing up in Harlem, and in the United States. Canada, founder and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone, describes a culture in which going to jail is a rite of passage. This culture is prevalent in communities with pervasive poverty. The "Children of Incarcerated Parents Fact Sheet," at the *Family and Corrections Network* Web site, cited Christopher Mumola's *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children* for the information that, in the year 2000, more than 1.5 million U.S. children had a parent in a state or federal prison; the average age of these children was eight, and 22 percent of them were younger than five. These children need an alternative vision of adulthood that does not include incarceration.

First Baptist Church of Oakland (OFBC), Calif., has been providing youth in its community with an alternative vision since 1982. The city of Oakland and OFBC changed dramatically during the turbulent 1960s. The church was losing members as people moved out of downtown Oakland and into the suburbs. The neighborhoods around OFBC became poorer, with a majority of

the population in poverty. These neighborhoods deteriorated, and gang-related crime and violence rose every year. Today, Oakland continues to have a reputation as a violent city.

When the Rev. Steven Reimer arrived in 1982 as a seminary intern, he saw an opportunity for the church to stand in the gap between the youths' challenging environment and the fulfillment of their God-given potential. In a recent e-mail, he explained that:

All of the parks in the neighborhoods were infested with drugs, prostitution and criminal acts. The [Samaritan Neighborhood Center] of OFBC became a [safe] place where a "kid could be a kid." Through the recreational activities with these children and youth ... [we] established mentoring relationships that led to really getting to know each child and their family/home situations. Through God's leading we developed programs beyond the recreation to help these poverty-stricken children to better themselves educationally, emotionally and spiritually.

The OFBC Samaritan Neighborhood Center received a Children in Poverty Grant in 2009 from National Ministries (now American Baptist Home Mission Societies) because of its interventions with at-risk children. This is an example of the effective initiatives that American Baptist churches are offering to school-aged children. Most youth development programs do not describe themselves as practicing crime prevention. However, when congregations provide nurturing, caring adults and a safe place for spiritual, educational, or recreational fellowship, they can make a positive difference.

Lisa R. Harris is national coordinator of the Children in Poverty Initiative and Christian Center Relations at American Baptist Home Mission Societies.

A House of Healing for All People

The church universal was established by Christ as an instrument of spiritual healing. Spiritual disease, which we might call dis-ease, is manifested in a variety of ways, individually and globally. At root is our human inability to enter a right relationship with God; all the rest—illness or violence, depression or decay, worry or war—are physical symptoms of the spiritual dis-ease. We see vivid evidence of spiritual disease in ministries of prison re-entry and aftercare. There wounds of victims, victimizers, and the families of both must be tended. Dis-ease is found on all sides, rooted in anger and alienation, guilt and grief, shame and shock, distrust and dysfunction. James 5:14-16 speaks of a ritual by which the church ministers to those who are sick. This ritual involves three primary components: the prayer of faith, the anointing with oil, and the confession and forgiveness of sins.

Prayer of Faith

The knowledge that others are praying for us can be healing, but the prayer itself often brings special graces as well. Peace, empowerment, patience, and perhaps most significant of all, compassion. When we pray for others, we also benefit because we allow God to transform us by the power of the Holy Spirit. We begin to see others through God's eyes. Through the example of others, we are inspired and educated; through giving to others, we as well are strengthened in the Lord.

Anointing with Oil

In biblical cultures, oil had many uses, from cosmetic to hygienic to cultic. In every use, however, it involved physical presence. One had to be present to administer or receive the benefits of the oil. Traditional prison ministries bring the gift of presence into jails and prisons; the healing ministries of prison re-entry and aftercare commit to a ministry of presence that walks alongside the restored member and his or her family. Perhaps the most significant use of oil in Scripture was for consecration. What would it mean to newly released prison-

ers, their families, and congregations if they were consecrated anew for participation in Christ's body?

Confession and Forgiveness of Sins

It may seem obvious that the person needing this healing ministry is the offender. Indeed, returning prisoners may be transformed by repenting anew for the wounds inflicted by their choices—whether on the victims who prosecuted or on those who suffered collateral damage (spouses, children, parents, and friends). These individuals and their “victims” also may experience liberation through forgiveness granted and received. As communities of faith, we must explore questions of guilt and forgiveness more deeply:

- What issues of forgiveness might be present for the person falsely accused and wrongly incarcerated?
- What guilt does the community bear for its tolerance of poverty, racism, homelessness, and other evils?
- What guilt does the church bear for our personal prejudices and self-righteousness, and for our complicity in an unjust system?
- What guilt do we bear for past failures to share the *whole* gospel with the poor, visit those in prison, and care for those left behind?
- How do we help the guilty, whoever they may be, to accept God's forgiveness and forgive themselves?

If spiritual healing is found in drawing ever deeper into the life of God, then the church offers such an opportunity for all of us. We recognize that if God has had such mercy on us, then others are even more deserving of God's mercy.

Adapted from Making Your Church a House of Healing by Michael Gemignani, an ordained Episcopal priest, longtime spiritual director, and author of several Judson Press books, available at judsonpress.com or 1-800-4-JUDSON.

Mental Health Treatment for Former Prisoners— Advocating Ministry for Community Re-entry

Recent studies conclude that significant numbers of incarcerated persons are suffering from mental illness. In the article, “Persons With Severe Mental Illness in Jails and Prisons: A Review,” Drs. H. Richard Lamb and Linda Weinberger, for instance, state, “Clinical studies suggest that 6 to 15 percent of persons in city and county jails and 10 to 15 percent of persons in state prisons have severe mental illness.” These researchers further conclude that “a greater proportion of mentally ill persons are arrested compared with the general population.” Among the reasons, they identify release from institutional care, lack of sufficient community support after release, difficult access to treatment, and societal attitudes.

To begin to address this issue in our prisons and communities, a greater awareness of its seriousness, more adequate support of the mentally ill, and higher availability of treatment for mental illness are needed. Individually and collectively, these can contribute significantly to the successful reintegration of mentally ill former inmates into the community after their release. Services provided by agencies and organizations that focus on the specific needs of this re-entering population are particularly crucial. In that regard, Dr. Stephanie Hartwell cites her own previous studies and those of other researchers in her article, “The Organizational Response to the Community Re-entry of Ex-inmates with Psychiatric Disabilities,” to support her observation that “current thinking suggests that specialized services are needed for the successful community reintegration of ex-inmates with psychiatric disabilities.”

Unfortunately, however, lack of access to basic medical care and cuts in state budgets for mental health services have thrown specialized services and former inmates who need them into crisis. In the October 2009 press release, “Survey Finds Mental Health Services Hit Hard by State Budget Cuts,” the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare reports survey findings pointing to \$670 million in state budget cuts to mental health services nationwide in 2009. These cuts

“are forcing community mental health centers ... to eliminate programs, ration care, and treat some patients only when their conditions reach the crisis-intervention stage.”

For former inmates who are mentally ill, recidivism is often a consequence. In Ohio, for instance—as Tracey Read reveals in his March 2010 *News-Herald* article, “What Happens to Ex-Inmates with Mental Illness?”—a



large proportion of former state prisoners who are mentally ill are likely to re-enter the prison system. He further reveals that, according to the Ohio Association of Behavioral Health Authorities, it costs \$7,400 per year to treat

former inmates who are mentally ill, and \$25,000 per year to incarcerate them again. In light of this example, it seems to make good economic sense to provide treatment for former inmates in need.

It also seems clear that, as these persons return to their home communities, their families need services and support to help them cope. Churches can provide these services, if they are willing to add mental health treatment and family support to their ministries. Sadly, indications are that many states and local jurisdictions are not following recent federal mandates—including substance abuse and mental health screening—designed to help prisoners readjust to society. Therefore, the church needs to become an advocate, on the federal, state, and local levels, against budget cuts and for additional resources, so that state and local governments can fulfill these mandates and better serve the needs of mentally ill ex-offenders and their families.

The Rev. Dr. Clinton D. McNair is a diplomate of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, an ABCUSA clergy member, and director and associate professor of Pastoral Counseling in the Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry.

A Place to Start Over with God

Our story began back in the summer of 1993 with a knock on the door at midnight. I was the pastor of a local church when the police came to arrest me in response to a complaint made by a woman in our congregation. The bottom line is that I spent four and a half years in prison for a crime I did not commit. During those years we learned much about the world of prison, and we prayed for a way to make a difference for those whom Christ numbered among the “least of these.”

We, husband and wife, always speak about this as “our” experience because going to prison involves the whole family. Upon our release in 1999, the Lord blessed us with a call to a small American Baptist church in New Hampshire. The church knew our story, prayed for us, and “sent us out” to our ministry five and a half years later. Amazing Grace Farm came into existence in 2006 when we sold our home and purchased an old barn in Troy, N.H. With the help of friends and volunteers, it has been adapted for use as an aftercare prison ministry for men.

We invited Bill, a former prisoner, to come and stay at the farm while we completed our ministry at the church. During that time, he was able to save enough money to purchase a duplex down the street. He evicted the drug dealer who had been living there and fixed the place up. Just recently, he was called to become a deacon in his church—evidence of the amazing transforming power of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Our next resident, Keith, was incarcerated for 18 years and needed a place to stay because he wasn’t welcomed back home after his release. Adjusting to society is difficult. Old patterns die hard, attitudes change slowly, and even though there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus, people need to understand that consequences will follow them for the rest of their lives. We helped Keith find a church home and put structure in his life. He has learned some hard lessons, and he has been challenged by our insistence on holding him accountable for his actions. Keith is seeking full-time employment and is due to leave us this summer.

We were recently asked to accept Luke, who was homeless for five months following his release from jail. He has adjusted well, although he too is in need of full-time employment—something that is difficult to find after a felony conviction.

Each man who comes to the farm must sign our covenant, which includes certain requirements such as finding a church home, attending Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous, and seeking counseling or group therapy. Each day begins with Bible study, chores, and then off to work. On Friday evenings local residents join us for Bible study and fellowship.

We receive limited financial support for our ministry and pay most of the bills ourselves. We do not accept government funds, and the men who come to us



do not pay. But though we are sometimes challenged financially, we are richly blessed by helping former prisoners get back on their feet. We correspond with a number of incarcerated men, and we know many of them will have nowhere to go when they are released. That’s when a place like Amazing Grace Farm can help. We serve as a sort of biblical “city of refuge”—a place where former prisoners can come and live in safety as they begin their new life with God.

The Rev. Dr. Robert Robertson and Catherine Robertson are co-directors of Amazing Grace Farm in Troy, N.H.

Prison Aftercare Ministries Toolkit



Prison re-entry and aftercare are such painful, delicate subjects that sometimes we as a church family choose not to touch them. The shame and stigma often attached to the people helped by those ministries cause us to hide them in silence, in favor of discussing and practicing much less controversial ministries. In American Baptist Home Mission Societies' Office of Prison Aftercare Ministries, we are dedicated to providing our churches with awareness about these ministries and also with resources to help them embrace those persons affected by the criminal justice system. From those persons we hear voices crying out in testimonials that break the silence in our church pews:

My son is incarcerated. Very few people know about it. I'd rather suffer alone than be criticized and looked down on. It's painful enough to carry this burden

Every week I go to church and worship, I pray and fellowship, I contribute, I'm part of the congregation But nobody knows my shame. Nobody knows what I went through when I was handcuffed, fingerprinted, sentenced I'm out of prison, but hurting inside. How can they understand?

I just got out of prison. I've paid my debt to society. Because of my past, I carry the "ex-offender" label. That label has closed many doors for me, including doors with a cross and a loving, Christian sign.

It is in response to these "silent voices" that we, as part of the American Baptist family, are preparing the *Prison Aftercare Ministries Toolkit*, which equips church leaders with the resources and tools they will need as they take their own steps toward responding to these voices.

Our organization recommends the holistic model defined in *What Shall We Then Do?: A Family Freedom Kit for Creating Healing Communities*, published through the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The publication covers study areas designed to help

create healing communities for those affected by incarceration. Following this model, the Office of Prison Aftercare Ministries designed the *Toolkit* to introduce the concepts of re-entry, aftercare, and healing communities to our American Baptist churches, giving pastors and other church leaders the tools to begin conversations about these issues with their congregations. Along with the *Toolkit*, we offer orientation sessions and opportunities for churches within the same region to join together to create customized materials for their own use.

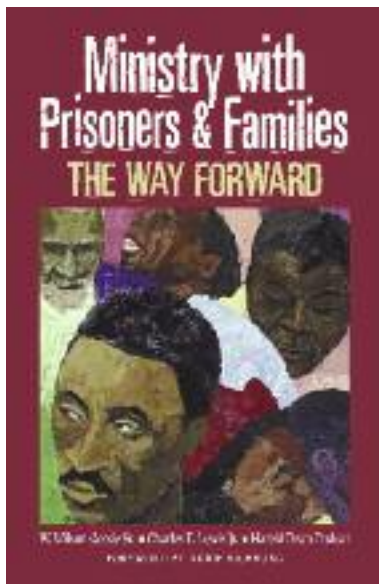
The *Toolkit* includes:

- **Assessment Tool for Congregations.** Not every church is prepared for a prison aftercare ministry, and it does more harm than good if a church is not well-equipped and trained. This soul-searching section helps churches begin determining their readiness for this ministry.
- **Tools for Churches.** These include a prayer, a litany, some tips about working with crime victims and returning citizens, and a list of some of the realities returning citizens face that may be unknown to church congregations and leaders.
- **Tools for Families.** A few tips for those who have loved ones in prison, including some designed specifically for children.
- **Tools for Returning Citizens.** Basic tips for former prisoners who are returning home and preparing to start over. Also, a listing of helpful resources, including organizations that offer job training.
- **Frequently Asked Questions.** And answers, including information about how to contact our offices.

For more information about the *Prison Aftercare Ministries Toolkit* and *The Family Freedom Kit*, visit www.abhms.org > Justice Ministries > Prisoner Re-entry and Aftercare.

Fela Barrueto is national coordinator of Prisoner Re-entry and Aftercare Ministries for American Baptist Home Mission Societies. She welcomes comments and suggestions by e-mail, at Fela.Barrueto@abhms.org.

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