

**Document Title: Development of a Guide to Resources on Faith-Based Organizations in Criminal Justice**

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The preceding review of empirical research suggests that religion can play a significant role in preventing and reducing crime (e.g., Albrecht, et al., 1977; Benda, 1994; Burkett 1977; Evans, et al, 1997; Stack and Kanavy, 1983; Stark et al., 1980, 1982; Stark, 1996). If the contributions of religion to shaping moral behavior and reducing crime are unique to religion, then the implications are many for improving public safety through faith-based organizations participating in criminal justice programming. Indeed, faith-based organizations (FBOs) have been providing criminal justice related services for decades. Within criminal justice, congregations and faith-based organizations serve youth, adults, families, and communities through prevention, intervention, and aftercare initiatives, both as single-agency programs and through partnership and collaborative initiatives. Below, we discuss a number of these programs and examine the extant evaluation literature. As described below, to date, it remains unclear whether religious based interventions are as efficient or more successful than secular interventions.

**Youth Prevention and Intervention**

Faith-based prevention and intervention programs targeting youth have a long history in criminal justice. However, there exists little systematic documentation that reflects the breadth and diversity of existing programming (McGarrell, 1999). Programs include, but are not limited to, mentoring, life skills, and substance abuse programming, as well as basic counseling.

**Adult Prevention**

There are relatively few *adult* prevention oriented faith-based programs aimed at altering behavioral patterns related to crime; instead, most faith-based interventions models target short-term needs of adults (Vidal, 2001). Similarly, research has shown that FBOs do not engage in certain activities or programs if they are deemed lengthy or complex or the organization does not have the requisite skills or experience. Vidal's study of faith-based programming in the field of community development revealed this to be true. Instead, most congregants in the study preferred to donate goods or services for relatively well-defined, short-term projects. Vidal also reported that congregations that are more likely to provide human services related to community development are those located in low-income neighborhoods, have a liberal theology, are African American, and have supportive pastoral leadership.

**Prison Care and Aftercare**

Since the origins of penitentiaries in Europe and America in the 1700s, individuals

affiliated with religious institutions and volunteer community groups have been providing care and support for incarcerated and released prisoners. Today, thousands of FBOs provide a range of services to individuals returning to their communities from prisons and jails. Services include emergency and long-term shelter, job training, mentoring of young adults and children of former prisoners, and treatment for addiction (Wilcox, 1998). These faith-based services provide vital support for returning prisoners and the communities where they live, yet, similar to at-risk prevention programming, there is little systematic knowledge about the extent of these services and the characteristics of the services that embody effective programming.

Religion has been empirically linked to restrain delinquent behavior; thus, it is logical to conclude that religion can assist in prisoner rehabilitation (Workman, no date). Religious teachings focus on promoting pro-social values and morals, imparting accountability and responsibility, and provide social support networks and skills, all of which can affect behavioral and social change (Workman, no date). Theorists suggest that religion can promote the development of a moral community within a penal institution, where inmates can be integrated into a church community and receive mentoring and support following release. Religion can be used to help inmates undergo a spiritual and cultural transformation, using unconditional love, human valorization, evangelism, community restoration, and restoration to create pro-social cultural values and behaviors. In theory, the spiritual transformation acts as a turning point in an individual's life, leading to desistance from crime.

Prisoners and ex-offenders are often the lowest priority when it is time to distribute government-based social service funding. In current times of fiscal restraint, prison pre-release programs and transitional housing continue to have their resources cut. Faith-based institutions bring real strengths and advantages to the task that government agencies, by virtue of their structure and mission, may lack. Often these organizations already are serving the needs of prisoners' family members, or have implemented services (e.g., for high-risk residents who have not engaged in illegal activities) that can be extended to offender populations. For example, Lutheran Family and Children's Services in Saint Louis, Missouri, had been serving children and family of offenders for many years before they were asked to partner with the state parole agency to begin a holistic reentry program for felony ex-offenders (Rossman, Gouvis, Sridharan, Buck, and Morley, 1999). FBOs are well positioned to provide culturally competent services that support values and enhance community cohesion.

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According to the *Corrections Compendium* (2003), faith-based worship services and programs are being offered by all of U.S. prisons, 93 percent of which offer prayer groups. Personal development and parenting classes sponsored by faith-based programming are being offered in more than 70 percent of prison systems reporting to the Compendium, while 68 percent are offering meditation groups and marriage classes. Only 39 percent of U.S. state systems reporting have peer mentors to assist with religious studies. U.S. and Canadian systems also include revivals, life skills, bible study, family religious festivals, anger management, musical choirs and bands, prerelease mentoring, and multiple religion specific programs. Of those state prison systems reporting, seven have established separate housing units for certain faiths. Prison chapels are used for faith-based services, but other facilities are used such as classrooms, visiting rooms, and compound meeting rooms; special meditation areas are used for Buddhists, Muslims, and Native Americans. Only 24 states systems provided budget figures covering the costs of faith-based programming, which varied widely. The overwhelming majority receives funding from general funds, while 23 percent receive funds from private sources. Some states, such as Maryland, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Virginia use inmate welfare

trust funds to pay for related costs, while volunteers provide program funds in 34 percent of those systems. Ordained and professionally trained chaplains or correctional staff and inmate mentors guide faith-based programs and provide such services as worship services, counseling, staff support, wedding and funeral ceremonies, and crisis intervention.

Faith-based pre-release residential programming is offered in at least sixteen states and six reporting systems in Canada. The state of Texas has more than 100 volunteer religious programs, partnering with criminal justice networks, for returning prisoners. Inmate participation averages around 50 percent, although some states, such as Pennsylvania report participation rates over 75 percent (Corrections Compendium, 1998).

### **Program Evaluations**

The literature on religious programming has produced few studies reviewing the effectiveness of religious programming in criminal justice practice. Our search of the extant literature revealed a few studies examining the impact of faith-based *correctional* programming. However, the few empirical evaluations that exist of faith based programming in corrections provide mixed support for the role that religion plays on prison inmates. A study conducted by Johnson (1984) found that religious inmates were no more likely to receive disciplinary confinement than non-religious inmates. In contrast, Clear (1992) found that an inmate's religious participation had a significant and positive impact with respect to prison adjustment (Sumter and Clear, 2002).

Johnson, Larson, and Pitts (1997) examined inmates participating in the Prison Fellowship programs in four prisons in New York State. Using a matched comparison group, they found that inmates involved in the program had similar rates of recidivism as inmates who did not participate in the program. After controlling for level of involvement, researchers did find that inmates who were more active in the program had lower rates of rearrest in the year following release.

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religious orientation with respect to values at their time of release were less likely to recidivate. Sumter also found that inmates who increase participation on religious programs after release had lower re-arrest rates (Sumter and Clear, 2002). These studies, like many others, support the notion that religious participation (ritual) and

personal religiosity (belief in God) are linked with reductions in deviant behavior. Although many programs are not rigorously evaluated, program proponents often can provide some type of outcome data. However, programs define success in many different ways. For instance, Damascus Way in Minnesota reports that 85 percent of their participants in a prison program have not recidivated and have stayed substance abuse free. Similarly, Christian Prison Ministries contend that only 20 percent of “Bridge” program participants have recidivated, as compared to a 74 percent national average. While these statistics seem promising, the constructs (staying out of trouble, not recidivating) are not clearly defined; therefore, it is difficult to determine how effective these programs really are.

The Transition of Prisoners (TOP) program in Detroit seeks to help African-American men successfully transition from prison to the community by: developing their relationship with God and the church; increasing their attachment to work, family, education, politics, and religion; reducing attachment to substance use and criminal friends and ways of thinking; and reducing recidivism (O’Connor, Ryan & Parikh, 1998). Further, TOP works to increase the focus of African-American churches and communities on criminal justice issues. TOP services include case management to meet the participants’ needs connecting them to employment, substance abuse treatment, housing, and weekly “moral reconnection therapy” (MRT; MRT is a behavioral and cognitive group therapy promoting moral reasoning, decision making skills, relationship skills and pro-social attitudes in the context of Bible study and spiritual development). Two other service areas focus on the church and family. Services include community member mentors and family training to support the ongoing transition of the former prisoner.

Within the TOP program, the case manager develops a one-year formal transition plan based on key risk and need areas identified through the Level of Services Inventory-Revised. The participant is matched to a mentor who can help meet the person’s goals and increase involvement with the church and its pastor. The case manager reviews the participant’s progress every six months and re-administers the LSI-R to adjust service plans. A sample of 45 male participants, consisting of six graduates, 20 men still in the program, and 19 discharged from TOP before they completed it (average length of time in the program before discharge was nine months) were tracked to determine the success of the program. Results were measured through a “level of services” needs assessment.

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The study found that scores were reduced during the first six months during the project. This reduction indicated a lower level need and lower risk for recidivism.<sup>3</sup>

The InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) is a faith-based, pre-release program operated by Prison Fellowship Ministries in Richmond, Texas. The goal of the program is to "facilitate the life transformation of the member eliminating the thinking process which resulted in his incarceration and to rebuild the member's value system, establishing a solid foundation for productive growth" (Trusty and Eisenberg, 2003). The program was unique in that it is expressly Christian in orientation, although the program is not restricted to Christian inmates. Only inmates who were planning to live in the immediate Houston area were permitted to participate because program volunteers, mentors and aftercare services were based there (Johnson and Larson, 2003). There are three phases to the program consisting of 16-24 months of in-prison biblical programming as well as 6-12 months of aftercare while on parole. The program utilizes biblical education, life skills, community service, leadership, GED tutoring, drug abuse prevention, support groups for improving relations with family members as well as crime victims, and personal growth.

A principle goal of the program is to utilize a biblically based program with an emphasis on spiritual growth and moral development. The program runs 24 hours a day, including weekends. Christian men from the community are recruited by IFI to volunteer to work with and assist IFI participants. Program volunteers work with inmates as mentors and role models, Bible instructors, and assisting inmates during the aftercare process; the program also offers post-release employment and housing assistance. A key aspect of the program is the relationship that mentors build with participants and maintaining that relationship upon inmate release or parole.

Candidates for the program must volunteer to participate and recognize that the program is pervasively Christian. Sex offenders and inmates with medical problems are excluded from the program. The program tracked the two-year post-release recidivism rates for program participants. The first evaluation group is based on 177 IFI participants. Comparison groups were selected from the records of inmates released during the evaluation period that met program criteria but did not enter the program. The comparison groups were matched based on race, age, offense type, and salient factor risk score. IFI graduates are those participants who complete the in-prison phases (biblical

3 This study is only reporting TOP's early implementation and only 19 people at that point had completed 18 months or more in the program. It is important not to assume change does not occur after six months because the finding is based on a small sample size.

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...education, work, and community service—usually lasting 16 months) as well as the six months aftercare (participant must hold a job and have been an active church member for three consecutive months following release from prison).

Results of the program found that 17.3 percent of IFI graduates were arrested during the two-year post release compared to 35 percent of the matched group; 8 percent of IFI graduates were incarcerated during the two-year post release compared to 20.3 percent of the comparison group. When considering all program participants (those who graduated as well as those who did not complete all phases of the program), 36.2 percent of IFI participants were arrested during the two-year tracking period as compared to 35

percent of the matched group; 24.3 percent of IFI participants were incarcerated during the two-year post release compared to 20.3 percent of the comparison group. Based on IFI member narratives, five spiritual transformation themes among IFI participants are consistent with offender rehabilitation: (1) I am not who I used to be; (2) spiritual growth; (3) God versus the prison code; (4) positive outlook on life; and (5) the need to give back to society. Mentor contact was associated with lower rates of recidivism.

An evaluation of the Transcendental Meditation Program (TM) in Walpole prison (Massachusetts) shows positive results with regard to reduced psychopathology (Binghamton, 2003). In a sample of 286 prisoners released from Walpole, inmates who had participated in the program were less likely to return to prison for a stay of 30 days or more than a comparison group. In a separate comparison, the TM group had a lower reincarceration rate when compared to participants of four other programs (counseling, drug rehabilitation, Christian, and Muslim), with a proportionate reduction in recidivism of 29 percent to 42 percent. The TM group also had a 47 percent lower reincarceration rate due to new convictions, and had a 27 percent lower reincarceration/warrant for arrest rate. These findings remained significant after controlling for background and release variables.

In 1992, Clear, et al., examined the impact of religion as it related to prison adjustment. The sample data consisted of 20 prisons from all regions of the country. Approximately 800 inmates participated in the study. The methods included a two-year ethnographic study, survey questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews with prison chaplains, administrators, correctional officers, and other correctional staff. The *Prisoner Values Survey*, a multidimensional assessment of prisoner's beliefs and behavior, was used to measure religion. Results showed that religiousness was directly related to reducing infractions, but found that it was less important and adjustment is reduced when levels of inmate depression are accounted for. Religious participation assisted inmates in overcoming depression, guilt, and self-contempt, especially for younger inmates who possess fewer coping skills. Inmates utilized religious teachings as a mechanism to restore self-control in the dehumanizing prison environment. These inmates were typically less depressed, less threatened, and more comfortable than their peers because they had used faith as a means to overcome the emotional strains of prison. Other inmates, particularly older inmates, relied on religion as a tool to avoid threats faced in prison; involvement in religion allows these inmates the opportunity to reinforce behaviors and attitudes that undermine the traditional hustles of prison life. These inmates spent time in the chapel and associated themselves with like-minded religious inmates. Essentially, inmates sought prison in an effort to make life more livable; this may be through improved emotional supports or by creating an environmental support structure. Ultimately, religion provided inmates with the ability to adjust to prison society.

In a subsequent study, Clear, et al., (2000) conducted a series of interviews and ethnographies to study the meaning of religion within prison. The study focused on inmates located in prisons in Delaware, Texas, Indiana, Missouri, and Mississippi. Clear and colleagues contend that religion is experienced in both an individual and personal way, and has a group context. The authors maintain that prison is a network of social groups, and religious groups comprise a portion of those groups. Clear points out that imprisonment can cause some individuals to feel that their life is of little value; forcing inmates to confront the choices they have made in life that resulted in their incarceration. Religion provides an explanation for the causes of failure and also proscribes a solution. Clear found that the most powerful message in prison is guilt. Clear found that religion, particularly evangelical faiths, can help an inmate overcome guilt in two ways. This first is exculpatory acceptance, in which evil is used to explain how an individual ended up in

prison. This could be as simple as understanding that the individual's previous rejection of religion put him in circumstances that made him more susceptible to criminal involvement. Religion can help the inmate combat the evil influences present in his life. The second is atonement and forgiveness; religion provides a way for the inmate to atone for what he has done and receive forgiveness, which is needed for the individual to reestablish personal self-worth. Adopting a religious identity allows an inmate to adopt a frame of mind that allows for the passage of guilt. Essentially, religion is important in helping inmates find a new way of life. Religious inmates in the study were deeply committed to living the religious doctrine they have adopted. The investigation found that the ways of the past are replaced by a new way of living. Faith helped inmates feel that they had greater personal power and it enabled them to cope with the pressures associated with prison life. Inmates who felt that they had changed allowed religion and their belief in God to influence their daily decisions.

### **Understanding What Works in Faith-Based Programming**

As shown in the sections above, rigorous evaluations of faith-based programming in criminal justice are few and far between (Canada, 2003). A report regarding religiously affiliated nonprofit programs concluded that no credible studies existed evaluating the effectiveness of social service programs sponsored by religious organizations (McCarthy and Castelli, no date). There are a number of reasons for the dearth of research. Faith-based programming in criminal justice is diverse and complex, and does not often lend itself to categorization as a "faith-based criminal justice program." Related to complexity and diversity is that rigorous evaluation is difficult to do with small, not well defined, and varied programming. In addition, as we have documented in Section I, the relationship between religion and crime is complex, and it is not easy to measure all necessary variables. Furthermore, the measurement of the construct of religion, itself, is limited. These issues are discussed in more detail below.

#### **Complexity of Categorization of Faith-based Programming**

First, there are few faith-based programs that provide long-term or sustained services and could be easily be defined as a "program." According to Chaves (1999), the majority of faith based interventions focus on short-term, immediate needs. As a result, no attention is placed on behavioral or other patterns that lead to criminal involvement; this focus prohibits program evaluation, not only because individual behavior change can not usually not occur through short-term programming, but because there are no program participants to monitor for a sustained time. In addition, faith-based organizations frequently collaborate with other organizations (Chaves 2001), making it difficult to parse out what is faith-based programming or if it even exists within the collaborative. Similarly, it is not always apparent which organizations are actually engaging in religious work or programming that has a religious or spiritual message. While some faith-based initiatives utilize religious teachings to instill a new set of beliefs and morals in individuals to prevent criminal activity or to change the behavior of those who have already been involved with the justice system, other faith-based organizations mobilize their members to participate in social services, similar to those services provided by secular organizations, without an element of religion in direct programming. In evaluating religious programs, Vidal (2001) questioned how researchers should distinguish organizations that assert religious teachings into the program structure from interventions that do have a religious component. This is an issue that has not been resolved, and continues to plague evaluation.