

Pastor Views on Prison Ministry

SUMMARY REPORT

Methodology

The Pastor Views on Prison Ministry Study was conducted by LifeWay Research. Its objectives were to quantitatively measure current church involvement in correctional ministry and to measure Protestant pastors' experience and attitude toward engaging in ministry among those affected by incarceration.

Project sponsors were:

- Institute for Prison Ministries, Billy Graham Center for Evangelism, Wheaton College
- Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association
- Assemblies of God
- Crossroad Bible Institute

The quantitative questionnaire was designed by LifeWay Research in consultation with a cross-denominational working team of correctional ministry experts. The cross-denominational working team was essential in survey development and review. Many thanks go to:

- Karen Swanson, Director, Institute for Prison Ministries, , Billy Graham Center for Evangelism, Wheaton College
- Rev. Dr. Harold Dean Trulear, National Director of the Healing Communities Prison Ministry and Prisoner Reentry Project of the Philadelphia Leadership Foundation and Associate Professor of Applied Theology, Howard University
- R. Steve Lowe, President, Pacific Youth Correctional Ministries
- Dr. Manuel Cordero, Senior Director of AG Chaplaincy Ministries
- Lisa Blystra, Executive Director, Crossroad Bible Institute

The phone survey of Protestant pastors was conducted March 9 - 24, 2016. LifeWay Research obtained a random sample of Protestant churches with a telephone. The sample was stratified and quotas were used for church size and Black Protestant denominations. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called. Responses were weighted by region to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed $\pm 3.2\%$. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

Research Summary

This brief summary contains key findings from a study of 1,000 Protestant pastors. The study was conducted by LifeWay Research in March 2016.

EXPERIENCE WITH THE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM

While more than 8 in 10 pastors have had some exposure to correctional facilities, only half of pastors have recently had one of their own church attendees sent to a correctional facility. Less than a quarter of pastors say they are very prepared to minister to church attendees if they are sent to a correctional facility.

- 83% of pastors say they have personally visited a correctional facility.
- Half of pastors say 1 or more attendees of their church have been sent to a correctional facility in the past 3 years.
 - 50% have not had an attendee sent to a correctional facility in the last 3 years
 - 33% have had 1-2 attendees sent
 - 8% have had 3-4 attendees sent
 - 5% have had 5-9 attendees sent
 - 4% have had 10 or more sent
- Almost 6 in 10 pastors estimate they have at least some church attendees who have a family member currently incarcerated.
 - 41% estimate 0% of their church attendees have a family member currently incarcerated
 - 33% of pastors estimate 1-2%
 - 5% of pastors estimate 3-4%
 - 12% of pastors estimate 5-9%
 - 10% of pastors estimate 10% or more
- 7 out of 10 pastors say that at least one person that attends their church has been previously incarcerated.
 - 31% indicate none of their attendees were previously incarcerated
 - 36% have 1-2 attendees who were previously incarcerated
 - 13% have 3-4
 - 12% have 5-9
 - 8% have 10 or more
- 92% of pastors say they are at least somewhat prepared to minister to church attendees if they are sent to a correctional facility, but only 22% say they are very prepared and 8% are not prepared at all.

ATTITUDES OF PASTORS TOWARD THE INCARCERATED

Almost all pastors agree that local churches have a responsibility to care for families of the incarcerated and for those leaving correctional facilities.

- 97% of pastors agree (60% strongly) that local churches have a responsibility in their local communities to care for families of the incarcerated.
- 95% of pastors agree (43% strongly) that local churches have a responsibility to provide resources and support for youth and adults leaving correctional facilities.

PERCEPTIONS OF PASTORS ABOUT WHETHER THERE IS INJUSTICE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

About 4 in 10 pastors have not addressed the growth in the correctional facility population in a sermon, and a similar number don't see any injustice in this trend nor the racial disparity of that population. About one-fourth of pastors have addressed the topic recently in a sermon and a similar number feel strongly that this growth and racial disparity are unjust.

- Almost 4 in 10 pastors (38%) say they have never addressed the growing correctional facility population in a sermon.
 - 26% addressed it in a sermon in the last 6 months
 - 11% addressed it in a sermon 7-12 months ago
 - 23% addressed it in a sermon more than a year ago
- Pastors are almost evenly divided in their response to whether the rapid growth in recent decades of the inmate population in America is unjust.
 - 46% agree (22% strongly)
 - 44% disagree
 - 10% are not sure
- Pastors are a little more likely to agree than disagree that the racial disparity within the inmate population in America is unjust.
 - 50% agree (28% strongly)
 - 39% disagree
 - 11% are not sure

CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN CORRECTIONAL MINISTRY

The most prevalent ongoing church activity related to correctional ministry is not something that the local church coordinates at all. Individuals personally getting involved are the most common ongoing activities of churches related to correctional ministry. The most common current activity is talking about imprisonment openly. Leaders, training, and finances are

the greatest challenges pastors see to their church helping the incarcerated and their families more.

- The largest participation of churches in an organized, ongoing way is 18% who have a team from their church that ministers in correctional facilities.
- The only ongoing activities that a majority of churches have are individual members ministering to families of the incarcerated (61%) and individual members ministering to people leaving correctional facilities (58%)
- 23% of churches do not have any of the six ongoing activities tested related to correctional ministry.
- The only current activity (other than ongoing activities) that a majority of pastors say their church is involved in is talking about imprisonment openly (57%).
- 47% say their church financially supports a ministry outside the church serving the incarcerated or their families.
- More than 4 in 10 pastors say their church provides counseling for individuals (43%) returning from correctional facilities or their families (45%).
- The most common barriers to churches helping the incarcerated and their families more are lack of volunteers to lead it (65%), lack of training for this type of ministry (62%), lack of finances (48%), and not knowing where to start (40%).

ADVOCACY

One in 5 pastors indicate that their congregation is currently involved in advocacy efforts on issues related to the criminal justice system including increasing public awareness, influencing policies, or actively addressing underlying causes of the issues.

- 23% of congregations are not involved in advocacy efforts but are interested.
- More than half of congregations (56%) are not involved at this time in advocacy efforts.

HIGHLIGHTS AMONG SUB-GROUPS

- Churches with attendance of at least 250 are more likely to encounter attendees sent to a correctional facility or have attendees with family members currently in a correctional facility.
- Presbyterian/Reformed pastors are less likely to have had an attendee sent to a correctional facility in the last 3 years (63% said 0) or have attendees with a family member incarcerated (51% said 0%).
- African-American pastors are the least likely to estimate 0% of their attendees have a family member incarcerated (18%) and most likely to answer 10% or more of their attendees do (29%).

- Groups that are more likely to be “Very prepared” to minister to a church attendee if they are sent to a correctional facility:
 - African-American pastors (43%)
 - Pastors with a Doctoral degree (32%)
 - Pentecostals (29%)
 - Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (28%)
- Groups that are more likely to have “Never” addressed in a sermon the rapid growth in recent decades of America’s correctional facility population:
 - Lutherans (52%)
 - Pastors age 18-44 (47%)
 - Christian/Church of Christ (45%)
 - White pastors (41%)
- Groups most likely to Agree the rapid growth in recent decades of the inmate population in America is unjust:
 - African-American pastors (78%)
 - Presbyterian/Reformed (72%)
 - Methodists (67%)
 - Mainline pastors (61%)
 - Pastors with a Master’s (51%) or Doctoral degree (50%)
- Groups most likely to Agree the racial disparity within the inmate population in America is unjust:
 - African-American pastors (88%)
 - Presbyterian/Reformed (75%)
 - Methodists (73%)
 - Mainline pastors (66%)
 - Pastors with a Master’s (57%) or Doctoral degree (54%)
- Churches 250+ are most likely to have a team from their church that ministers in correctional facilities as an ongoing activity (53%).
- Not knowing where to start is a barrier for Presbyterian/Reformed (56%), pastors age 18-44 (47%), and pastors in the South (45%).
- Lack of training for this type of ministry is a barrier for African-American pastors (73%), pastors in the South (68%), pastors with a Bachelor’s degree (66%) or a Master’s degree (63%), and pastors age 65+ (52%).