

Prisoners  
for  
Christ



# Worship Renewal in Corrections

## What are the unique issues/challenges and opportunities of leading Christian worship services in a correctional facility?

The responses are from the ten chaplains and ministry leaders and four presenters who participated in the worship renewal roundtable held at the Institute for Prison Ministries, Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College.

### ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

#### 1. Facility

The type of correctional facility (youth, jail, or prison) and security level impacts who is in the congregation, the worship space, and what resources are available and allowed.

#### 2. Legal Issues/Policies

Must follow RLUIPA. Corrections has a fear of being sued. No proselytizing policy. No hugging, no laying on of hands, etc.

#### 3. Staff

Corrections staff present at the worship service. Some staff believe chaplains and volunteers are wasting their time and that inmates can't "change".

#### 4. Chaplain

Most chaplains are overloaded and worship services are on autopilot. It is challenging to provide immediate follow-up with youth or inmates because congregations have to go back to their living unit right after the service. Not all chaplains are Christ followers.

#### 5. Worship Service Space

Worship services may be held in a chapel, worship center or gym (typically in prisons), or classroom or pod (typically jails and youth facilities). This space is also shared with all other religions. The worship space is often visually uninspiring and acoustics very poor.

#### 6. Resources

The technology (microphones, overhead projector, LCI projector, DVD player, CD player, etc.) and material resources (Bibles, music instruments, communion, baptism) varies on what is available as well as what is allowed from facility to facility.

Worship in Renewal Corrections Roundtable/Training at the Institute for Prison Ministries, Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, September 18-20, 2013.

*Worship Renewal in Corrections is made possible through a Worship Renewal Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Grand Rapids, Michigan, with funds provided by Lilly Endowment, Inc.*

## **7. Time and Structure**

Worship services are given limited time with no flexibility. A different denomination each week leading worship. No continuity from week to week.

## **8. Volunteers**

Come from different denominations with varying beliefs. There may be grassroots resistance to programs or change (from volunteers). Most often untrained.

## **9. Congregants**

Must volunteer and sign up to attend. In adult facilities, all the same gender. Congregants attend with sincere (to worship and grow spiritually) and insincere motivations (to see female volunteers or to see friends). A safe place for individuals with a sex offense.

## **10. Bridging the transition between the church on the inside and the church on the outside.**

More is needed to connect juveniles and the incarcerated with the church once they are released. What works in the church on the outside isn't always effective on the inside church.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

1. A space to bring the gospel, disciple others, and worship
2. Many in the congregation are spiritually hungry
3. It is an opportunity to engage the outside church
4. An opportunity for congregants to be transparent and share their testimonies

## **TIPS**

1. Build a worship team (inside and outside teams)
2. Plan for the predictable and be ready for the unexpected
3. Be spiritually healthy

## **Recommended Resources**

*Contact: Calling Offenders to Network Together for Adoration, Confession and Thanksgiving: Reflections and Resources for Reformed Christian Worship in Prisons* by Richard Rienstra, Project Director. Church of the Servant, 2008.

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