

MINISTRY WITH OFFENDERS' FAMILIES

CRIMINAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

Written by

Charles Jones

Assisted by

Neron Smith

Men's Ministry Department

Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

INTRODUCTION TO MINISTRY WITH OFFENDERS' FAMILIES

The success of a person's not returning to prison after release is greatly affected by what has happened in the family during the incarceration experience. Even though a person may have experienced a changed life while in prison, coming back into a family environment where there is a different perspective about life will make it difficult to maintain the new lifestyle. The local church has the greatest opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the family members.

The church's ministry should begin as soon as possible after the arrest. During this time the family is experiencing a crisis situation. The unexpected has happened; questions need to be answered. The shock the family experiences is much like that experienced when a serious accident occurs. A knowledgeable person has stated, "the local jail is to the criminal justice system what the emergency room is to the hospital." The family members need someone to help them deal with the crisis. A caring church through its Criminal Justice Ministry can meet this need.

As the incarceration experience continues and changes, the family will need detailed criminal justice information, support through caring relationships and assistance through available community resources. Trained, compassionate church members who make themselves available, can help provide for these day to day needs. God's love can be demonstrated through word and deed at this crucial time in the life of family members.

- In order to minister effectively the church must find the answers to these important questions:
- Who are the family members?
- What are they experiencing because of incarceration?
- Based on the needs of the family, what are some ministries the church should consider?
- Who in the church can do this ministry?
- What training will these people need?

WHO . . .

ARE THE FAMILY MEMBERS?

Most families will consist of some combination of spouse, children, parents, grandparents, siblings, and significant others. Each of these will have special needs because of the varied experiences in the criminal justice process. Most churches will have people who are gifted and called to minister to one or more of these family members.

WHAT . . .

DO THE FAMILIES EXPERIENCE?

Family members will experience different needs as they go through the criminal justice process. Ministry to the family should begin at the time of arrest, and continue through the trial, sentencing, incarceration, and pre-release. The following chart will help in understanding some of what the family experiences during the criminal justice process.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS	ARREST	TRIAL	INCARCERATION	PRE-RELEASE
FAMILY EXPERIENCES	Shock	Bewilderment	Guilt	Fear
	Denial	Frustration	Anxiety	Anxiety
	Shame	Anxiety	Shame	Hope
	Anger	Fear	Lostness	Guilt
	Fear	Hope	Failure	Frustration
	Sadness	Shame	Relief	Anger
	Anxiety	Loneliness	Isolation	Blame

WHAT...

ARE SOME MINISTRIES NEEDED BY THE FAMILY?

The church can provide spiritual guidance and emotional support to assist the family members cope with the needs brought about by the incarceration. The church can help meet other needs of the family by providing transportation assistance, information about the criminal justice process, and referrals to other agencies or ministries. The family's greatest need can be met best by the church through its caring and gifted members whose presence provide a non-judgmental listening ear.

WHO...

MIGHT BE INVOLVED IN THIS MINISTRY?

To be effective in this ministry a person should be:

- A committed Christian, willing to follow the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- One who believes the Lord loves everybody and will forgive any sin.
- One who believes that the Lord can change lives.
- One who is able to empathize with love and concern for other people.
- One who is non-judgmental and open to accepting people where they are.
- One who is willing to be trained to do effective ministry.

WHAT...

TRAINING IS NEEDED?

Training is available in a 14-16 hour workshop which will provide training in understanding the criminal justice process and how to identify and meet offender families' needs. The workshop will also provide skill development in understanding self, establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, listening and communicating, avoiding dependency, detecting distress signals, identifying resources, and making referrals.

To schedule a workshop or to receive additional information on

Criminal Justice Ministry contact:

Neron Smith, Consultant

Men's Ministry Department

Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, P. O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205

Telephone:

1-800-748-1651 or in Jackson metro area: 292-3278