

Alpha Prison Ministries Newsletter

October 2023 Edition

"I was in prison and you came to visit me." Matthew 25:36

Prison Ministry Impact

As we get ready to celebrate Alpha's Impact Night on Nov. 13, Leon shared with me an excellent article entitled *Unlocking the Chains: How Prison Ministries Set People Free* published by National Christian Foundation back in June of this year. It's fairly long and covers several aspects of the prison system, inmates, how and why the system doesn't work and why prison ministries make such a difference.

This newsletter format only allows a brief summary so I'll do my best to choose wisely in selecting key points. Even though I've been with APM for 19 years and have shared many insights I've gained, I found those insights have just been expanded.

This part I already knew but it is an important one to start with as I summarize. The US makes up only 4% of the world's population yet we have 20% of the world's prison population (2 million people in prison). We have the highest number of prisoners per capita in the world!

And the justice system that creates this imbalance is broken to say the least. It gets worse because a former inmate's chances of success upon release are dismal and a large contributing factor is finding employment. About 60% of former inmates struggle with unemployment compared to about 3.7% of the general population.

Finding employment reduces the chance of ending up back in prison from 52% down to just 16% (most stats I see have that 52% at around 66% or higher). According to one expert quoted in the article:

If incarceration worked, we'd be the safest country in the world.

We in prison ministry are well aware of Jesus' specific mention of visiting those in prison and how woefully lacking that priority is in the church. The purpose here is

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- ◆ Please continue to pray about our annual Impact Night for November 13. Pray that it will be a success in every way: more awareness gained, everyone encouraged, new partners gained, ministry needs met and exceeded (more growth), etc. It's our 40th Anniversary and we have a great night planned.
- ◆ Please pray for our outgoing Executive Director Leon and his wife Pamela as Leon was admitted to the hospital in September with a heart condition. The latest before going to print with this newsletter is that he is doing better but more work to be done.
- ◆ Getting Alpha volunteers back into prisons is still pending for most of the facilities we serve but getting more promising. Please pray for that to happen as the men we serve continue to have to deal with being unable to be "visited in prison" which means a lot to them.

Prayer Requests

SEPTEMBER 2023

Please cut around these prayer requests and use this as a bookmark in your Bible.

Alpha
Prison Ministries

Prison Ministry Impact (continued)

not to reiterate a point our supporters already know but to demonstrate why what we do makes such a difference.

Let's start with the fact that "innocent until proven guilty" set up by our Founding Fathers has become a foul joke rather than an actual reality, an assault that's growing increasingly worse in multiple ways. Our brothers in prison will be well acquainted with how these points made in the article have contributed greatly to our mass incarceration and flat out warehousing of bodies.

The fact that 71% of people being held in jail have not been convicted of a crime (that is, proven guilty) demonstrates a gaping hole that the most vulnerable people in society are prone to fall into. Being able to post bail significantly determines the outcome of a case, which can take months or years to complete.

If bail cannot be posted, the options are bleak: stay in jail for those months to years or accept a plea deal for a guilty plea.

Just being in jail presents a reality most of us know little to nothing about, nor how the system operates and be able to identify with what a person unable to post bail faces, and the rapid unraveling of their life before even being convicted. Child custody can be lost within 24 hours and job losses typically occur after three days in jail. And even if bail money can somehow be scraped together, the downward spiral only deepens.

The person already quoted, Robin Steinberg, founded a ministry called *The Bail Project* in 2018 which has helped nearly 30,000 people post bail, which is returned to the ministry at the end of each case to go into a revolving bail fund in addition to ongoing donations. She points out that anywhere from 20 to 70 percent of cases get dismissed, which tells us a lot about how many people are being dragged into the system who should not be there.

Interestingly, 92% of the clients getting bail money show up for court dates even though they have no financial investment in charity funded bail. These clients were able to hold their lives together and escape the profoundly demoralizing, often violent and terrifying, incarceration experience while fighting their cases, which makes a huge impact on the outcome.

Steinberg also states:

At some point, we have to all take a breath and really ask ourselves: 'Is this system working?' We've tried the experiment of mass incarceration for generations, and it doesn't work. It harms communities that are most vulnerable.

There's no doubt that some people in prison deserve to be there and remain there but the over the top mass incarceration, caused largely by the fact that an inability to post bail takes fighting the charge off the table, lands too many people in prison who shouldn't be there or remain there. Once brought into this broken system, human dignity is stripped away, self worth is lost, hope is hard to find, and rehabilitation has proven to be woefully low.

Prison ministries are addressing these problems. Inmates in general are not unlike people on the outside, they are ordinary people who made a bad mistake and/or couldn't afford to fight the case and have to face the consequences. In either case, if ministry services are not provided in prison, then the prison culture is very depressing and the inmate is left wondering if anyone actually cares.

In-prison ministry should definitely include Bible study and APM is committed to a unique approach to doing that—one-to-one discipleship training. But supplemental programs, such as educational, personal growth, and job training, have been shown to improve inmate conduct/morale. The chances of returning to prison drop from as high as 70+ percent to as low as four percent, and post-release employment rates rise. As stated in the article, by the time a person is released from prison, the greatest opportunity for rehabilitation has passed.

After prison care greatly influences the difference between a successful transition back into society or ending up back in prison like 60% or so (studies vary but the number is always high). For APM, we provide transitional housing with strict requirements each resident must agree to before being accepted. This creates a safe environment and each resident is teamed with a mentor, sometimes a former inmate. They are required to find work but have a place to live while they seek a job.

I've been very brief in this summary and recommend the full article on ncfgiving.com. Jesus has a special compassion for prisoners because they matter to him and his love is their only hope and sense of value in a place where they otherwise find little to none.

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Newsletter written/edited by APM Board member Steve Chittenden

APM is an **undenominational Christ-centered ministry** to prisoners and ex-offenders

APM Financial Summary January-August 2023

Total Income: **\$60,428.06**

Total Expense: **\$88,076.98**

Net Income: **\$-27,648.92**



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