

Thinking About the Role of  
Religion in Crime Prevention,  
Prisoner Reentry, and Aftercare

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# **FAITH-BASED PROGRAMMING, REENTRY AND RECIDIVISM**

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KEYNOTE:

**Thinking About the Role of Religion in Crime Prevention,  
Prosocial Behavior, Prisoner Reentry, and Aftercare**

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### Abstract

In this paper I begin by systematically reviewing the religion-crime research literature in order to determine if and how measures of religiosity are associated with measures of crime or delinquency. Consistent with previous reviews and meta analyses on this subject, the results of the current systematic review confirm that increasing levels of religiosity tend to be inversely related to both measures of crime and delinquency. I offer a number of reasons why we should not be surprised to discover that religion might both prevent and protect from crime as well as foster prosocial behavior. Turning to corrections, I briefly discuss the historical role of religion in offender treatment and rehabilitation and examine what we know from recent research about the efficacy of faith based prison programs in reducing recidivism. As an observer of faith based ministries and organizations over the last several decades, I offer insights to the shortcomings and shortsightedness of faith based approaches in corrections as well as the misguided hostility and opposition leveled against faith based organizations and individuals. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the uniquely catalytic role that faith based groups and individuals might yet play in a truly comprehensive, public-private, sacred-secular approach to prisoner reentry as well as aftercare.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	5
CRIME AND RELIGION: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	8
RELIGION AND CORRECTIONS.....	18
Introduction .....	18
Religion and Recidivism.....	18
From Bible Studies to Faith-Based Prisons.....	22
Evaluating a Faith-Based Prison.....	23
Are Faith-Based Prisons Another Correctional Panacea?.....	25
NOT BY FAITH OR GOVERNMENT ALONE: AN ACCELERATED MODEL FOR SUCCESSFUL PRISONER REENTRY.....	28
The National Prisoner Reentry Crisis .....	28
Report of the Reentry Policy Council .....	29
Reflections on the Report of the Reentry Policy Council.....	30
The Texas Prisoner Reentry Situation .....	32
How to Build an Accelerated Statewide Prisoner Reentry Model.....	33
The Typical Prisoner Reentry Misstep.....	34
A Better Reentry First Step: Welcome Back .....	35
Coordination and Collaboration: The Role of AmeriCorps in Reentry...	38
AmeriCorps*Vista Members.....	39
Sponsoring Organization.....	39
REFERENCES .....	45

## TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Religious Affiliation by Demographic Characteristics.....	7
Figure 1: Religious Affiliation in America.....	8
Figure 2: Church Attendance and the Probability of Non-Drug Crime.....	11
Figure 3: Church Attendance and the Probability of Drug Use.....	12
Figure 4: Church Attendance and the Probability of Drug Dealing.....	12
Figure 5: The Effect of Individual Religious Commitment on Marijuana and Hard Drug at Low, Medium, and High Levels of Individual Religious Commitment.....	14
Figure 6: The Effect of Individual Religious Commitment on Marijuana and Hard Drug at Low, Medium, and High Levels of Neighborhood Disorder .....	15
Figure 7: Survival Chart for PF and Non-PF Inmates.....	20
Figure 8: Arrest Survival Chart High and Low Bible Study Participation.....	21
Figure 9: Incarceration Survival Chart High and Low Bible Study Participation...	21
Figure 10: Results of IFI Texas Two-Year Recidivism Analysis 1.....	24
Figure 11: Results of IFI Texas Two-Year Recidivism Analysis 2.....	24

## Introduction

Many scholars have theorized that it is only a matter of time before America's future is one where secularization reigns supreme and over takes what was previously a highly religious society (Berger 1967; Bruce 1992; Wallace 1966; Wilson 1969, 1979, 1982). In other words, as Americans become more secular, they will become less religious and subsequently less likely to participate in religious activities, attend houses of worship, or otherwise become members of various organized religions. However, decades of solid survey research consistently confirm that religion remains important in America and that U.S. citizens consistently report high levels of religious participation, commitments and practices. Indeed, a very high percentage of Americans believe in God, regularly pray, and consider themselves to be religious.<sup>1</sup> In the most comprehensive survey ever conducted on American religion and released in September of 2006, we provided new insights into the complexity of America's religious landscape.<sup>2</sup> Instead of just asking if people believe in God, or if they pray, we asked people how they pray, when they, why they pray, to whom they pray, and what they pray about. We asked a number of questions about their views and perceptions of God. We found that people were quite willing to discuss many aspects and dimensions of their religious beliefs and practices.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gallup Polls as well as other survey researchers have demonstrated these trends for decades. For a review of relevant surveys, see Gallup (1999).

<sup>2</sup> American Piety in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the U.S. (2006). C. Bader, K. Dougherty, P. Froese, B. Johnson, C. Menken, J. Park, and R. Stark. Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

<sup>3</sup> The Baylor Religion Survey is a mail questionnaire collected by the Gallup Organization in 2005 from a nationally representative sample of 1721 non-institutionalized, English-speaking American adults aged 18 and older. The scope and content of the Baylor Religion Survey make it one of the best datasets on American religion ever collected.

This research was featured prominently in a number of print and television outlets, including Time, Newsweek, USA Today, as well as hundreds of newspaper articles across the country. Consistent with previous research, we found that Americans are deeply religious. In fact, because of the methodological advances incorporated in this survey design, we are able to arrive at a much more realistic breakdown of the religious affiliation of Americans.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1 provides an overview of basic demographic characteristics of Americans by religious affiliation. One of the more interesting findings is the percentage of Americans that are affiliated with Evangelical churches. As can be seen in Figure 1, among Americans who attend houses of worship, 33.6 percent attend Evangelical churches, and easily outdistance those attending Mainline or Catholic churches (22.1 and 21.2 percent respectively). We project, therefore, that approximately 100 million Americans attend Evangelical churches. In terms of a religious economy, Evangelical churches tend to attract a more significant share of the market in each age group of Americans. This finding stands in sharp contrast to the much heralded prediction of the demise of American religion. In fact, should future administrations of the Baylor Religion Survey find that these data hold, it will mean that Evangelical adherents will continue to increase their market share while Mainline adherents continue to shrink – a trend that could have profound implications in many areas.

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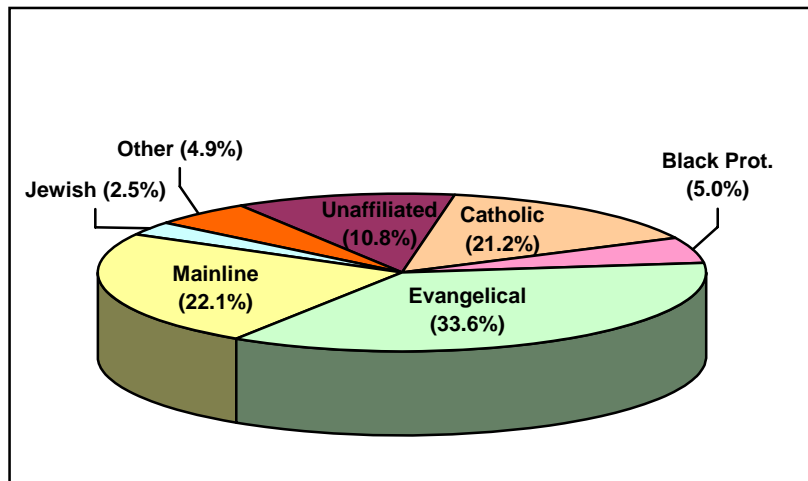
<sup>4</sup> See K. Dougherty, B. Johnson, and E. Polson (in press) “Recovering the Lost: Re-measuring U.S. Religious Affiliation,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, forthcoming June 2007.

**Table 1: Religious Affiliation by Demographic Characteristics**

<i>Religious Affiliation</i>	Black Protestant	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Other	Unaffiliated
<b>Total Sample</b>	5.0%	33.6%	22.1%	21.2%	2.5%	4.9%	10.8%
<b><u>Gender</u></b>							
Male	2.8%	30.0%	22.1%	23.8%	2.5%	6.0%	12.8%
Female	6.9%	36.7%	22.1%	18.9%	2.4%	3.9%	9.0%
<b><u>Race</u></b>							
White	0.0%	35.4%	24.1%	22.8%	2.6%	4.3%	10.8%
African American	62.5%	9.5%	7.7%	5.0%	3.7%	6.0%	5.7%
<b><u>Age</u></b>							
18-30	3.8%	39.0%	20.1%	10.1%	2.7%	5.7%	18.6%
31-44	5.4%	34.9%	17.6%	23.0%	1.9%	5.8%	11.4%
45-64	3.9%	31.3%	22.5%	23.7%	2.7%	4.8%	11.1%
65+	7.3%	33.1%	28.1%	19.9%	2.9%	3.5%	5.4%
<b><u>Education</u></b>							
High School or less	5.0%	45.4%	18.0%	22.0%	2.3%	2.1%	5.2%
College or more	3.0%	23.5%	29.0%	21.4%	3.6%	6.7%	12.8%
<b><u>Household Income</u></b>							
\$35,000 or less	9.9%	39.3%	20.3%	15.2%	2.2%	3.1%	9.9%
More than \$100,000	0.0%	26.9%	22.0%	27.7%	5.1%	7.7%	10.7%
<b><u>Region</u></b>							
East	5.0%	13.1%	26.0%	35.1%	4.7%	4.6%	11.6%
South	7.2%	50.3%	19.3%	11.5%	1.9%	2.7%	7.1%
Midwest	5.6%	33.7%	26.0%	22.1%	1.4%	3.0%	8.3%
West	1.3%	31.7%	17.7%	19.2%	2.2%	10.3%	17.6%

*Note: Differences in percentages across religious groups are significant for all demographic characteristics. Sample interpretation: Five percent of people in the Eastern United States are affiliated with Black Protestantism.*

**Figure 1: Religious Affiliation in America**



This background information on religion in America is important to mention at the outset because it illustrates that America is a country of people who are very religious. Stated differently, religion is important to many Americans and therefore it should not be surprising that religion would also be relevant in discussions of crime, delinquency, and corrections.

### Crime and Religion: A Review of the Literature

In this section I review the research literature in order to understand the nature of the relationship, if any, between religion and crime. Unfortunately, researchers have dedicated minimal attention to the relationship between religiosity and delinquency among youth, and even less to studies of religion crime with adult samples. Therefore, this relationship has been an area lacking explanatory consensus (Evans et al., 1995; Johnson, 1987; Tittle and Welch, 1983).



Dating back to Hirschi and Starks's (1969) "Hellfire" article, there has been an interest in knowing if religion has beneficial, harmful, or no association with delinquency. Hirschi and Stark (1969) discovered essentially no significant relationship between levels of religious commitment among youth and measures of delinquency. Subsequent replications both supported (Burkett and White, 1974) and refuted Hirschi and Stark's original finding (Higgins and Albrecht, 1977; Albrecht et al., 1977; Jensen and Erikson, 1979). Therefore, there has been a lack of consensus about the nature of the relationship between religion and delinquency and thus a need for an objective assessment of the state of the literature.

Another issue that is equally important but often overlooked in the research on religion and delinquency is the appropriate measurement of religion, spirituality, or religious commitment. To provide an accurate and unbiased summary of the research on religion and delinquency, we need a review method that is systematic yet flexible enough to encompass a wide range of studies based on diverse methodologies and using different measures of religion. Another important consideration is to find out how researchers treat measures of religiosity in published studies of delinquency and whether the research methodology employed has an effect on the research findings.

I will briefly summarize here three previous published studies where the research literature has already been reviewed in a systematic way. The first study is a "systematic review" or SR, and has become popular in recent years and is widely used in many different fields and is touted by the Campbell Collaboration as an objective to review and assess bodies of literature (Johnson, Li, Larson, and McCullough 2000). In this SR, Johnson and colleagues uncovered 362 delinquency articles published in refereed

journals between 1985 and 1997. Forty of these 362 studies specifically examined the role of religion within the context of studying delinquency. The SR concluded: (1) the literature is not disparate or contradictory as previous studies have suggested; and (2) religious measures are generally inversely related to deviance, and this is especially true among the studies using more rigorous research designs.

In a meta analysis of religion and crime research, Baier and Wright (2001) review a total of 60 published studies and found that: (1) religious beliefs and behaviors exert a moderate deterrent effect on individuals' criminal behavior; and (2) conceptual and methodological approaches account for some of the inconsistencies in the research literature.

In a third review of the literature, Johnson (2002) reviewed 151 studies that examined the relationship between religiosity and drug use ( $n=54$ ) or alcohol use ( $n=97$ ) and abuse. The vast majority of these studies demonstrate that participation in religious activities is associated with less of a tendency to use or abuse drugs (87%) or alcohol (94%). These findings hold regardless of the population under study (i.e., children, adolescents, and adult populations), or whether the research was conducted prospectively or retrospectively. Only four of the studies reviewed reported a positive correlation between religious involvement and increased alcohol or drug use. Interestingly, these four tend to be some of the weaker with regard to methodological design and statistical analyses.<sup>5</sup> In this same study Johnson reviewed 46 published studies which examined the religiosity-delinquency relationship. Seventy-eight percent of these studies report

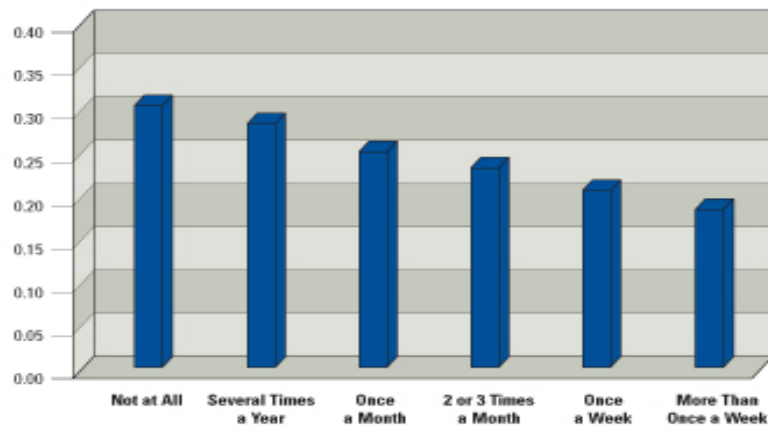
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<sup>5</sup> One of the four studies does not have any statistical analysis, and none of the four have multiple of even some controls.

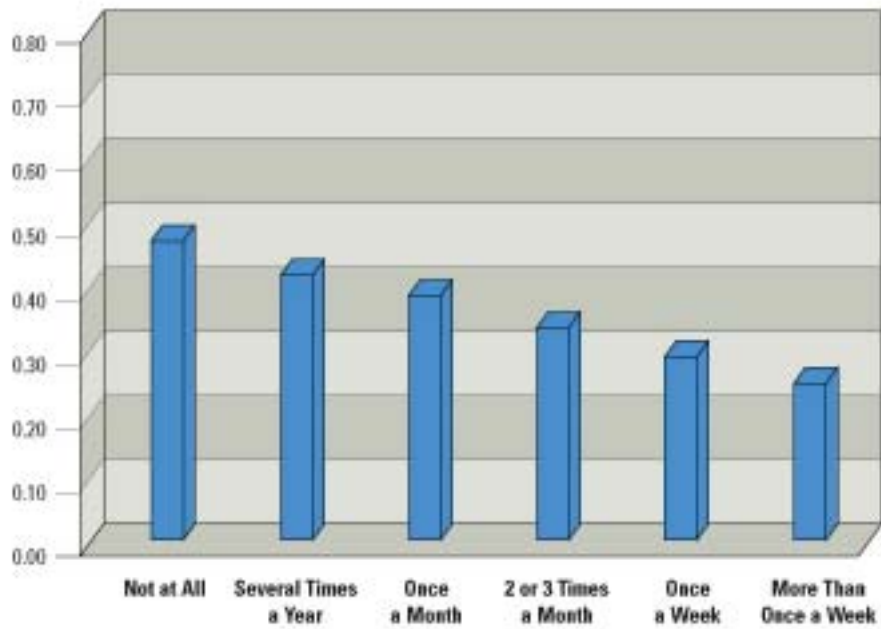
reductions in delinquency and criminal acts to be associated with higher levels of religious activity and involvements.

In sum, these reviews provide growing evidence that religious commitment and involvement helps protect youth from delinquent behavior and deviant activities. Recent evidence suggests that such effects persist even if there is not a strong prevailing social control against delinquent behavior in the surrounding community. For example, replicating an important study by Richard Freeman (1986), a Harvard University economist, Johnson, Larson, Li, and Jang (2000) found that young, Black males, from poverty tracts in Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia were much less likely to be involved in crime and delinquent behavior if they regularly attended church. Stated differently, at-risk youth from poverty tracts were less likely to be involved in criminal activity as well as drug related crime if they attended church regularly.

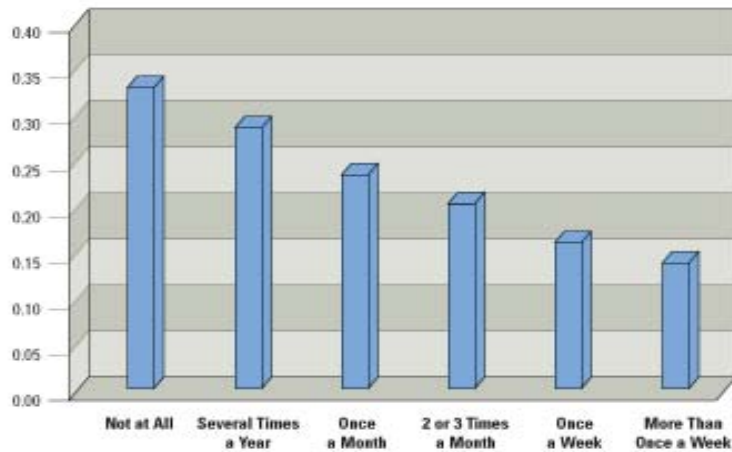
**Figure 2 – Church Attendance and the Probability of Non-Drug Crime**



**Figure 3 – Church Attendance and the Probability of Drug Use**



**Figure 4 – Church Attendance and the Probability of Drug Dealing**



Similarly, Johnson (2002) found that highly religious low-income youth from disadvantaged communities or “bad places,” are less likely to use drugs than less religious youth in these same disadvantaged communities. Further, these highly religious

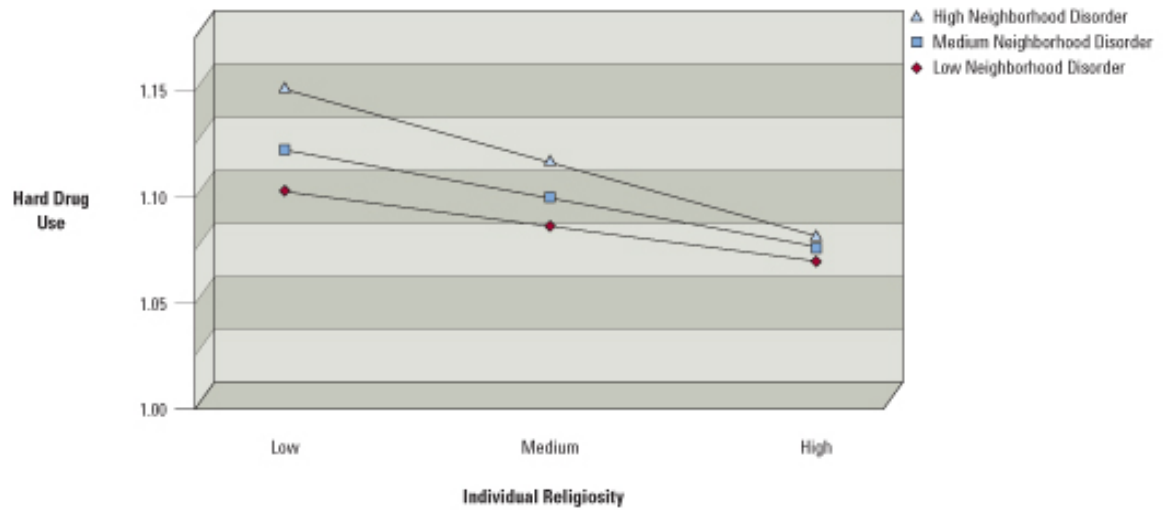
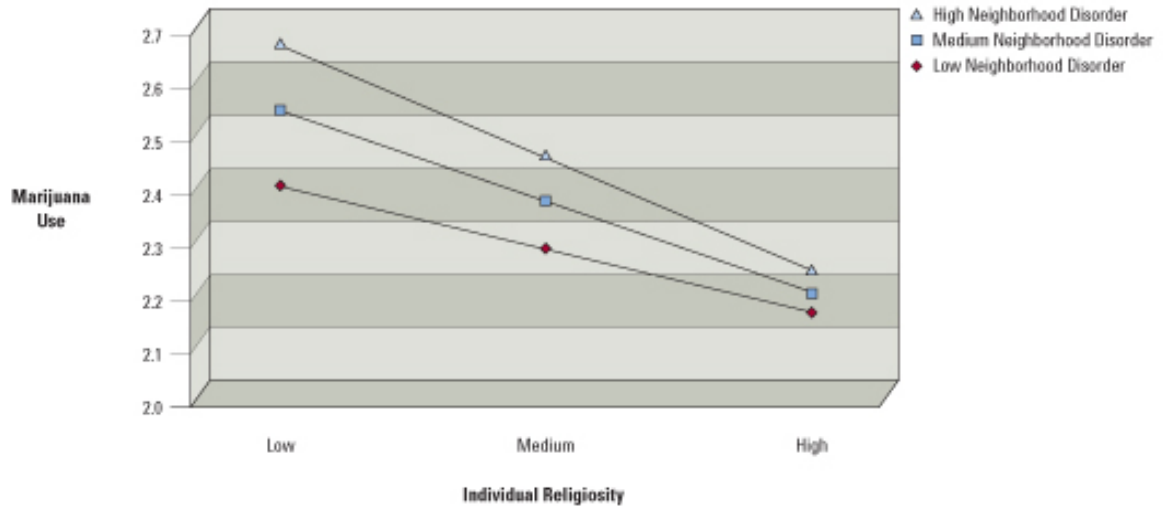
teens from bad places were also less likely to use drugs than less religious teens from middle class suburban communities or “good places.”

There is evidence that religious involvement may lower the risks of a broad range of delinquent behaviors, including both minor and serious forms of criminal behavior (Evans, Cullen, Burton, Dunaway, Payne, and Kethineni, 1996). There is also evidence that religious involvement may have a cumulative effect throughout adolescence and thus may significantly lessen the risk of later adult criminality (Jang and Johnson 2000). Additionally, there is growing evidence that religion can be used as a tool to help prevent high-risk urban youths from engaging in delinquent behavior.<sup>6</sup> For example, Johnson (2002) finds that the African American church may play a key role in reducing crime and delinquency among Black youth from urban communities.

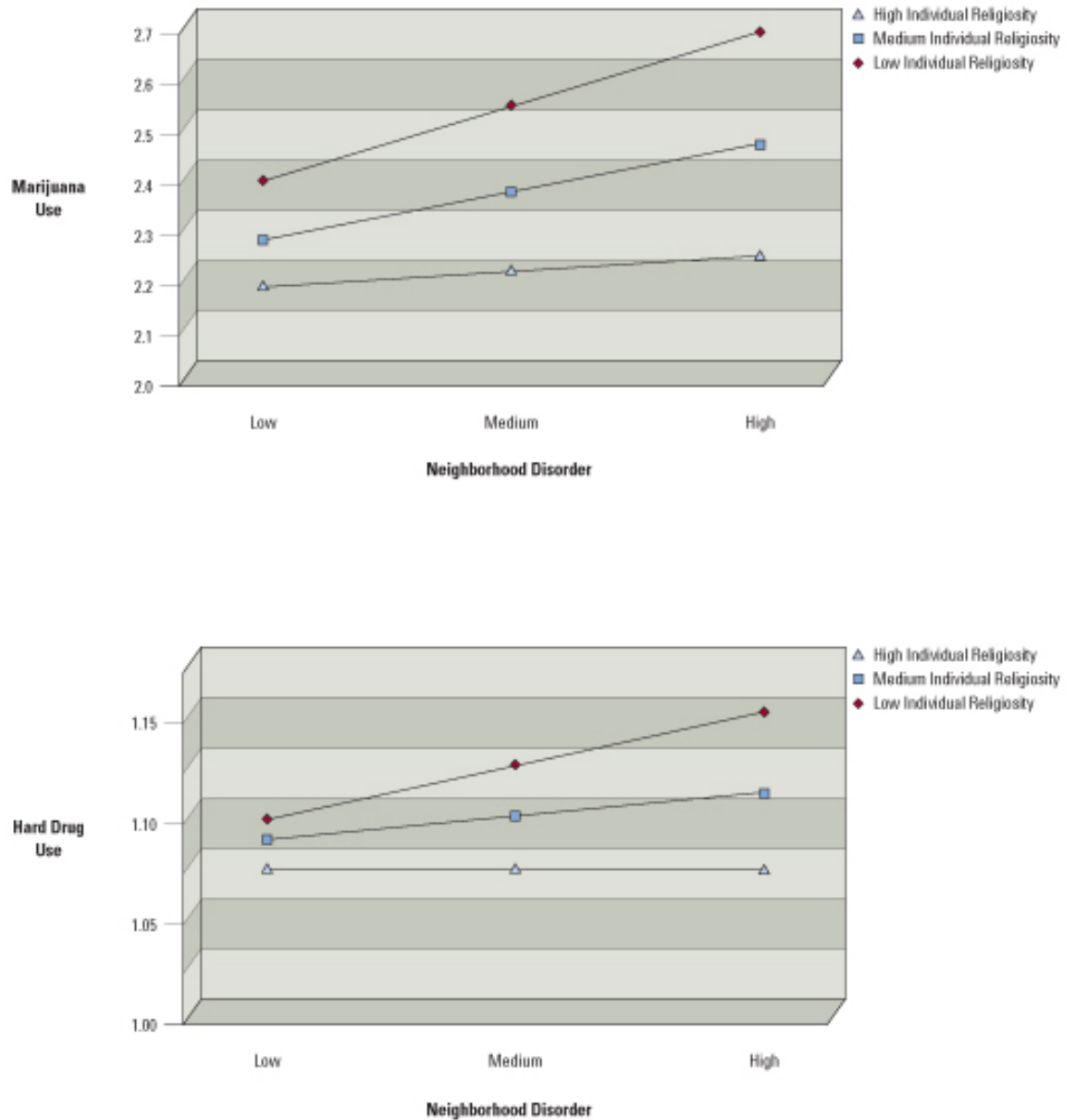
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<sup>6</sup> See B. R. Johnson, D. B. Larson, S. J. Jang, and S. D. Li. “The ‘invisible institution’ and black youth crime: The church as an agency of local social control,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 29 (2000): 479-498; see also B. R. Johnson, S. J. Jang, D. B. Larson, and S. D. Li. “Does adolescent religious commitment matter?: A reexamination of the effects of religiosity on delinquency,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 38 (2001): 22-44.

**Figure 5 – The Effect of Individual Religious Commitment on Marijuana and Hard Drug at Low, Medium, and High Levels of Individual Religious Commitment**



**Figure 6 – The Effect of Individual Religious Commitment on Marijuana and Hard Drug at Low, Medium, and High Levels of Neighborhood Disorder**



Religious involvement may help adolescents learn “prosocial behavior” that emphasizes concern for others’ welfare. Such prosocial skills may give adolescents a greater sense of empathy toward others, which makes them less likely to commit acts that harm others. Similarly, once individuals become involved in deviant behavior, it is

possible that participation in specific kinds of religious activity can help steer them back to a course of less deviant behavior and, more important, away from potential career criminal paths.

Research on adult samples is less common, but tends to represent the same general pattern, that religion reduces criminal activity by adults. An important study by T. David Evans and colleagues (1995) found that religion, indicated by religious activities, reduced the likelihood of adult criminality as measured by a broad range of criminal acts. The relationship persisted even after secular controls were added to the model. Further, the finding did not depend on social or religious contexts.<sup>7</sup>

In a series of studies on African American adults, Jang and Johnson find that higher levels of religiosity tend to: (1) buffer the effects of negative emotions (e.g., anger) on deviance and crime (Jang and Johnson, 2003); (2) be associated with lower levels of distress and higher levels sense of control and social support (Jang and Johnson, 2004); and (3) better protect African American women than African American men (Jang and Johnson, 2005).

A small but growing literature focuses on the links between religion and family violence. Several recent studies find that regular religious attendance is inversely related to abuse among both men and women (Ellison and Anderson 2000; Ellison, Bartkowski, and Anderson 1999; Ellison, Trinitapoli, Anderson, and Johnson 2007).

Research and practical experience demonstrates faith and spirituality are important to battered women, affecting many aspects of the way women negotiate violence, seek support, share

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<sup>7</sup> See T. D. Evans, F. T. Cullen, R. G. Dunaway, and V. S. Burton, Jr. "Religion and crime reexamined: The impact of religion, secular controls, and social ecology on adult criminality," *Criminology* 33 (1995): 195-224; see also B. R. Johnson, D. B. Larson, and T. G. Pitts. "Religious programming, institutional adjustment and recidivism among former inmates in Prison Fellowship programs," *Justice Quarterly*, 14 (1997): 145-166.



information, and plan for their own and their children's safety (Nason-Clark, 2000). Gillum, Sullivan, and Bybee (2005) interviewed a community sample of 151 battered women and found that 97 percent of their sample of battered women reported, "spirituality or God was a source of strength or comfort for them" (2005: 245). As Gillum, Sullivan, and Bybee (2005) remind us, "Currently many domestic violence shelter staff distance themselves from discussions of spirituality with shelter residents...The end result is that the shelter provides a haven for physical safety but fails to provide an environment for spiritual healing" (2005: 248). Using in-depth interviews, Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000) note the way conservative or evangelical Christian women use their spiritual and religious beliefs to negotiate recovery and healing. In particular the authors report the manner in which the women's faith operates to either "engender shame or guilt or inspire hope and empower transformative change" (2000: 229).

Thus, aided by appropriate documentation, religiosity is now beginning to be acknowledged as a key protective factor, reducing the deleterious effects of a number of harmful outcomes. Theoretical perspectives such as social control, social disorganization, strain, moral communities, social networks, coping, resilience, and even life course are finally beginning to look at religion and that it can be a robust and meaningful variable.

## Religion and Corrections

### Introduction

The evolution of the American correctional system is one that has been accompanied by the constant influence of religion and religious workers. Terms like corrections, penitentiary, reformation, restoration, and solitary confinement can be traced to religious origins. Even contemporary topics like restorative justice have their roots in religiously oriented points of view (Umbreit, 1985). The influence of religion, however, is by no means uniform or predictable, as very different perspectives on issues like punishment or treatment have been both supported and opposed on the basis of religious convictions.

One thing that is not disputable is the pervasiveness of religious programming within prisons. Male or female, minimum or maximum security, prisons of all shapes and sizes are visited by many thousands of volunteers each year. Indeed, beyond work, education, or vocational training, religious activities attract more participants than any other type of personal enhancement program offered inside a prison.<sup>8</sup> As pervasive as religious programming in American prisons may be, published research in refereed journals on the relationship between religious interventions and recidivism is anything but common.

### Religion and Recidivism

There are many ways that religion might be consequential for prisoners, and I would argue that the vast majority are positive, though I certainly do not rule the possibility that religion or religious programs might also be linked to harmful outcomes

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<sup>8</sup> Data based on face-to-face interviews with 13,986 inmates in 1991, and published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Similar surveys were conducted in 1974, 1979, and 1986.

for some. However, where correctional decision makers and policy stakeholders are concerned, the one overriding outcome that trumps all others is this “does it reduce recidivism?”

In the mid-1990s, Prison Fellowship, a nonprofit religious ministry to prisoners, commissioned a study to determine the relationship, if any, between religious programming and recidivism. I subsequently conducted a study that examined the impact of religious programs on institutional adjustment recidivism rates in two matched groups of inmates from four adult prisons in New York State (Johnson, Larson, and Pitts, 1997). One group had participated in programs sponsored by Prison Fellowship (PF); the other had no involvement with PF. We found that PF and non-PF inmates were similar on measures of institutional adjustment, as measured by both general and serious prison infractions, and recidivism, as measured by arrests during a one-year follow-up period. However, after controlling for level of involvement in PF sponsored programs, inmates who were most active in Bible studies were significantly less likely to be arrested during the follow-up period.

One of the limitations of this study was that former prisoners were only tracked for one year following release from prison. A more appropriate test would be to conduct a recidivism study that would have a three-year recidivism window. Therefore, I extended the original study of former New York prisoners by an additional seven years and the follow-up study was published almost three years ago (Johnson, 2004). The second study extends and improves on the previous research by: (1) increasing the recidivism window from one to eight years; (2) incorporating new approaches to operationalizing program participation; (3) including two measures of recidivism --

rearrest and reincarceration; and (4) using survival analysis and proportional hazards modeling to present and analyze the data. Like the first study, the subsequent research found no difference between PF and non-PF inmates on measures of recidivism. Results from survival analyses indicate: (1) no difference in median time to rearrest or re-incarceration between PF and non-PF groups throughout the eight-year study period; (2) after dividing the sample into groups of high and low levels of participation in Bible studies, high participants were less likely to be rearrested at 2 and 3 years post-release, though the effect diminishes over time; (3) though there is a similar survival effect of high levels of Bible study participation on re-incarceration, the statistical differences across groups only border significance at two and three years; and (4) the results of the proportional hazards modeling show that high participation in Bible studies significantly reduces the hazard of rearrest at years 2 and 3.

Figure 7

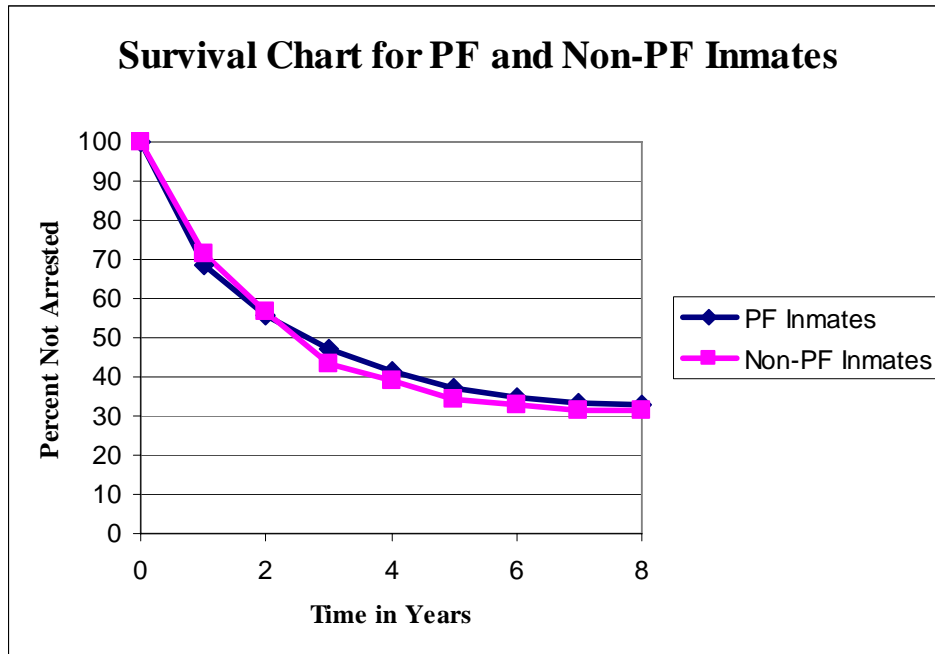


Figure 8

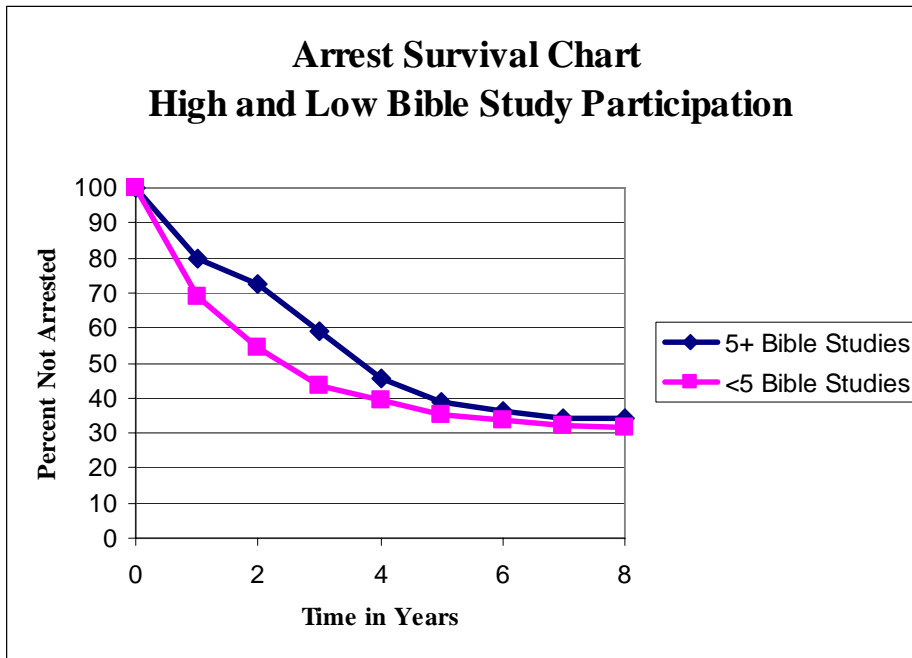
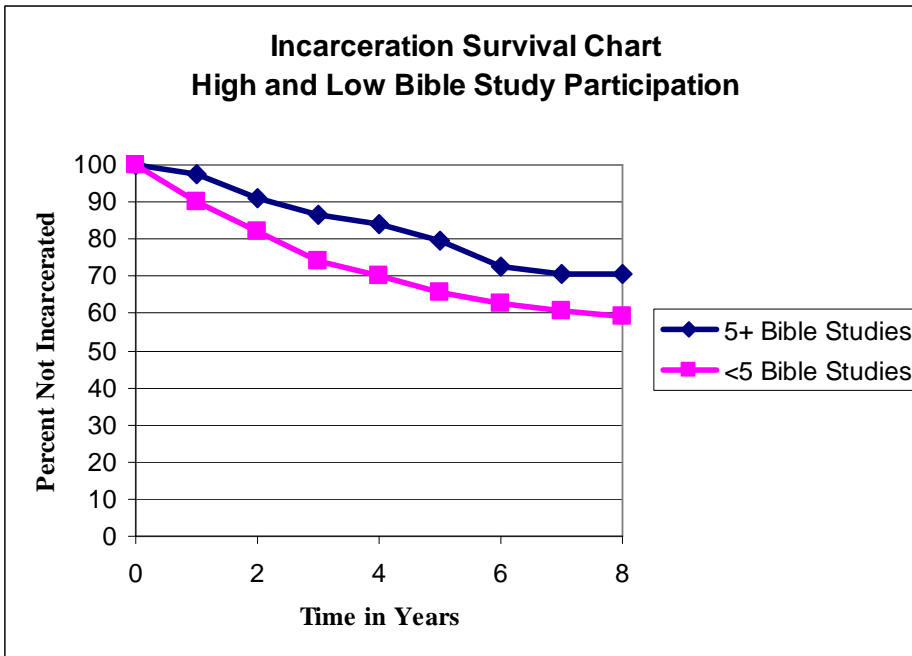


Figure 9



## From Bible Studies to Faith-Based Prisons

Long before either of these two studies were published by *Justice Quarterly*, PF was convinced these programs worked because they believed that rehabilitation could only take place as part of a larger spiritual transformation – something PF promoted as foundational. For PF, like many prison ministries, crime is the result of a moral problem that requires a spiritual solution. PF was led by Chuck Colson, former Nixon aide and Watergate figure, who eventually went to prison where he became a “born again” Christian. Following his release from prison, Colson founded PF in 1976, and began a process he continues to this day of reaching out to prisoners. As he traveled around the world visiting and speaking in prisons, Colson was profoundly influenced by a faith-based prison in Brazil, called Humaita, where the prisoners literally controlled the keys to the prison and volunteers essentially ran the prison. Colson was convinced the prison dramatically lowered recidivism in Brazil.

Indeed, thought Colson and others at PF, if an intervention like Bible studies could be shown to reduce recidivism, all that what was really needed was the opportunity to reach out to prisoners more intentionally, every day. During the early to mid 1990s, PF essentially sought permission to start – at their expense – a faith based prison in the U.S. that would be built largely on the Brazil prison model. A faith based prison would allow PF to control the whole prison environment – achieving, if you will, a saturation effect with orthodox or Evangelical Christianity. However, no doubt due to fears over church-state separation, a number of governors approached by Colson turned down the opportunity. That is, of course, until he met with Governor George W. Bush in 1996.

Governor Bush would embrace Colson's idea as he was already actively defending and promoting faith-based initiatives in Texas.<sup>9</sup>

### Evaluating a Faith-Based Prison

In April of 1997, with the support of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), Prison Fellowship Ministries (PF) launched an unusual correctional experiment - The InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI). This unique public-private partnership between TDCJ and PF represented a first for Texas, if not for the country, as perhaps the first full-scale attempt to offer comprehensive programming emphasizing education, work, life skills, value restructuring, and one-on-one mentoring in an environment where religious instruction permeates all aspects of the prison environment. I agreed to lead a study that would track the two-year post-release recidivism rates for those prisoners that entered the IFI program from April of 1997 through January of 1999, and were released from prison prior to September 1, 2000. In addition, the research was an intensive on-site, multi-year field study of IFI, including in-depth interviews with IFI staff and participants. The study was released at a White House briefing in 2003.<sup>10</sup> Among the study's key findings are the following:

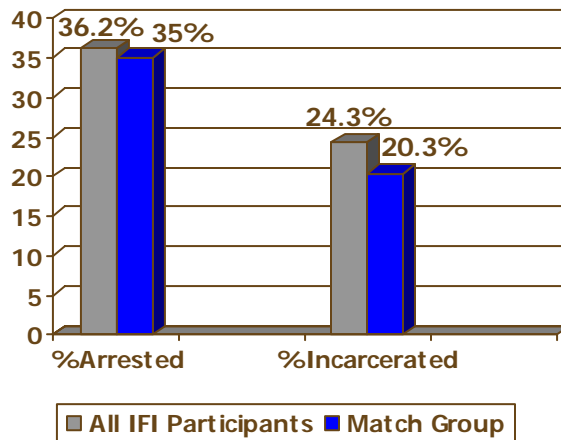
1. There is no statistical difference between the total sample of IFI prisoners and the matched comparison group on either measure of recidivism during the two-year tracking period.

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<sup>9</sup> See Faith in Action: A New Vision for Church-State Cooperation in Texas (1996), Governor's Advisory Task Force on Faith-Based Community Service Groups, Austin, Texas.

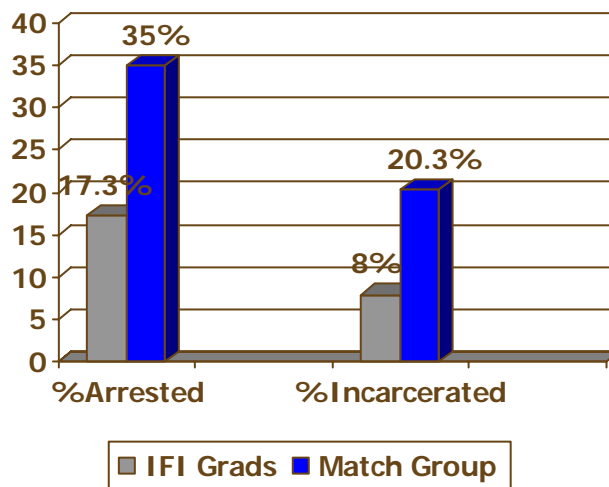
<sup>10</sup> Byron Johnson, 2003. "The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program," Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, CRRUCS Report, University of Pennsylvania. Re-released by the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR Research Report), Baylor University (2006).

Figure 10



2. A high percentage of IFI participants (58%) were not able to complete the program (half were paroled early and another 25% voluntarily withdrew), and these “non-completers” were much more likely than the comparison group to be arrested or incarcerated.
3. IFI program graduates were significantly less likely than the matched comparison group to be arrested (17.3% vs. 35%), during the two-year post-release period.
4. IFI program graduates were significantly less likely than the matched comparison group to be incarcerated (8% vs. 20.3%) during the two-year follow-up period.

Figure 11





5. Mentor contact is associated with lower rates of recidivism.
6. Initial TDCJ skepticism of the IFI program diminished over time.
7. Narratives of IFI members revealed five spiritual transformation themes that are consistent with characteristics long associated with offender rehabilitation.
8. Spiritual transformation can best be understood as a developmental process marked by key turning points or events.
9. Completing the IFI program and continued pre- and post-release mentoring are central to both the offender's spiritual transformation and rehabilitation.

### Are Faith-Based Prisons Another Correctional Panacea?

As an observer of faith based ministries and organizations for twenty years, I offer a few insights to both the strengths and shortcomings of faith based approaches in corrections. I also discuss the often misguided opposition leveled against faith based approaches to corrections as well as valid concerns about faith based approaches.

#### *Strengths*

Based not on anecdotal accounts, but on preliminary empirical research, it is fair to conclude that what little we know about the efficacy of faith based prison programs as well as faith based prisons is thin, but positive. Perhaps the biggest advantage of faith based prisons is that they hold the potential of changing the prison culture in fairly dramatic and positive ways. IFI Texas, as well as other IFIs I have visited, promulgate an environment that is largely in stark contrast to the prevailing "prison code" found in most correctional institutions. For example, accountability and responsibility are guiding principles in a faith based prison. Forgiveness and spiritual transformation are critical aspects that can change the environment in a way that is obvious to other staff and inmates. Indeed, the process of rehabilitation runs hand-in-hand with the goals of a faith

based program, but often run counter to the prison environment. Faith based programs provide a safer and more amiable environment for rehabilitation to be fostered.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Weaknesses of Faith Based Approaches*

To follow are problems that continue to haunt faith based approaches:

1. Prisoners need more than religion.
2. Faith based workers/volunteers tend to lack correctional expertise.
3. FBOs need ongoing training and technical assistance.
4. FBOs need governmental oversight, accountability and evaluation.

If we could demonstrate that all faith-based prisons significantly reduced recidivism, should we convert all or even a majority of prisons to faith based units?

There are a number of reasons why the obvious answer to this question is “no.” I will return to this discussion in the last section on prisoner reentry and aftercare.

#### *Weaknesses of Those Opposing Faith Based Approaches*

Opponents of FBOs are guilty of stereotyping religious workers and volunteers. It is not a stretch to suggest that one of the last acceptable forms of prejudice in America is to discriminate against people of faith and this is particularly the case when it comes to Evangelical Christianity. Perhaps the best example of a misconception that has helped in maligning the faith based movement is this widely held, but completely unsupported notion: Faith-based programs are first and foremost about evangelism. Short of a rare example, what in statistics we call a random outlier, critics have successfully linked the entire faith based movement to proselytizing. Yet, we have no empirical to support these

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<sup>11</sup> For similar research findings from an evaluation of a faith-based prison program at the Tomoka Correctional Institution in Daytona Beach, Florida, see J.M. Hercik, 2005. *Rediscovering Compassion: An Evaluation of Kairos Horizon Communities in Prison*. Caliber Associates; see also T. Clear,

claims. We do, however, have preliminary empirical evidence that social services are not provided or withheld regardless of a person's belief, or lack thereof.

Of course, faith based ministries have done little, if anything, to help dispel these notions. For example, FBO websites commonly refer to the necessity of Christian belief or spiritual transformation in order for one's life to move forward. PF has described their own InnerChange Freedom Initiative on their website as a 24 hour-a-day Christian program where offenders are essentially immersed in non-stop Christian program that is quite rigid. The reality, of course, is quite different. IFI is the most comprehensive treatment program I have observed in over twenty years of doing prison research. It is about education, vocational programming, family values, accountability, counseling, and last but not least, faith.

Criticism of the Bush's faith based initiative – from left to right – has been based on misinformation, partisan politics, and even outright misrepresentation of data regarding the federal response. Opposition of faith based approaches do not tend to come from prisoners, or their families. The same could be said for Amachi, a program of Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America that provides mentors from churches and houses of worship to children of prisoners. Critics of Amachi do not care that these programs can help children of prisoners – one of the most neglected populations in America. It reminds me of the experience in Texas in the 1990s when people within the substance abuse treatment field tried to close down a faith-based drug treatment program run by Freddie Garcia in San Antonio. The problem was that people who worked in the program were not certified by the State of Texas, and therefore were not legitimate “counselors.” As

one of the critics was quoted as saying, “we don’t care that the program effective, these people are not state certified.”

### Not by Faith or Government Alone: An Accelerated Model for Successful Prisoner Reentry

I will conclude with a discussion of the uniquely catalytic role that faith based groups and individuals might yet play in a truly comprehensive and multifaceted approach to prisoner reentry as well as aftercare.

#### The National Prisoner Reentry Crisis

Approximately 650,000 prisoners will be released from American prisons this year. What has often been referred to as an unprecedented and disturbing development is now beginning to be recognized for what it is not – a temporary trend. The dramatic increase in the number of prisoners returning to communities across the country has created a national debate about how best to handle what has become known as the prisoner reentry crisis and perhaps one of the most significant dilemmas in correctional history.<sup>12</sup>

A number of well known correctional programs have been implemented over the years to facilitate the transition of prisoners to society. For example, parole, halfway houses, community corrections, and community reintegration represent a few of the various post-release efforts designed to address the critical time period when prisoners return to society.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See J. Travis (2005). But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry, Urban Institute Press; J. Travis and C. Visher (Eds) (2005). Prisoner Reentry and Crime in America, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, J. Petersilia, When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry, Oxford University Press (New York, 2003).

But despite corrections expenditures now in excess of \$60 billion annually, the likelihood of a former prisoner succeeding in the community has not improved.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, about two-thirds of all offenders released from prison are re-arrested within three years of their release.<sup>15</sup> The problems associated with prisoners returning to society are not new, of course. What is relatively new, however, is the both the magnitude and long-term nature of the prisoner reentry problem.

#### Report of the Reentry Policy Council

Anticipating this crisis, the Council of State Governments (CSG) launched the Re-Entry Policy Council in 2001, an unprecedented initiative to bring together diverse groups in an effort to produce a non-partisan document that would provide policy-makers with ultimate guide, if you will, of how best to meet the reentry crisis. With support from the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council* was released in the fall of 2004. The *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council* (hereafter *Report*) draws heavily from many meetings among workforce, health, housing, public safety, family, community, and victim experts. In collaboration with ten project partners,<sup>16</sup> the *Report* benefited from surveys administered to state and local government officials in

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<sup>14</sup> Lynn Bauer, *Justice Expenditure and Employment in the United States*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Patrick A. Langan and David J. Levin, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2002), NCJ 193427.

<sup>16</sup> American Probation and Parole Association, Association of State Correctional Administrators, Corporation for Supportive Housing, National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, National Association of State Alcohol/Drug Abuse Directors, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, National Association of Workforce Boards, National Center for State Courts, Police Executive Research Forum, and the Urban Institute.

communities in all 50 states; interviews with administrators of innovative programs; and reviews of relevant research, promising programs, policies, and legislation.

The *Report* is a 648 page document that outlines many important recommendations designed to help equip governmental leaders and communities prepare for the successful transition to society of those being released from correctional institutions. The *Report* is divided into three major sections: (1) planning a reentry initiative; (2) the reentry process – from admission to release from prison; and (3) elements of effective health and social service systems. Scattered throughout the *Report* are 35 policy statements as well as necessary steps to take in implementing recommendations stemming from these policy statements.

The *Report* is an important tool in that it systematically reviews and describes in great detail the many complex problems confronting prisons, offenders, social service agencies, and local communities. This comprehensive approach allows concerned practitioners, governmental leaders, policy-makers, community leaders, and grass roots organizations to see more clearly the breadth as well as the many layers of the prisoner reentry problem. The *Report* is absolutely right on target for calling attention to the necessity of (1) collaboration and coordination; (2) the importance data, monitoring, and evaluation in prisoner reentry; (3) housing; (4) employment; and (5) ongoing aftercare for ex-offenders. These are elements that are vital to any plan seeking to achieve a successful reentry outcome.

#### Reflections on the Report of the Reentry Policy Council

First and foremost, the *Report* is correct to argue that collaboration among stakeholders is essential to any plan confronting the reentry crisis. The *Report* also

rightly argues for the significant expansion of vocational and educational opportunities within prisons. This is a monumental goal to be sure, but one that is not only essential, but realistically achievable. And the Federal Bureau of Prisons has long provided a vocational model that correctional institutions within states should seek to replicate.<sup>17</sup>

Even though many of the recommendations in the *Report* are right on target, it is hard to imagine how implementing many of them would be possible without incurring substantial financial costs. For instance, a vast expansion of offender treatment programs in prisons as well as in communities following release, as called for in many of the *Report's* policy statements and recommendations would place an additional and significant financial burden on correctional budgets that are widely regarded as too high. Such an economic reality means a number of the *Report's* policy statements and recommendations, unfortunately, are simply too costly to be implemented, sustained, or replicated.

The *Report* is also correct in its assessment of the obvious need to strengthen the aftercare process for ex-offenders. Strengthening aftercare is by far the most important component in achieving the successful return of prisoners to the community, and yet, unfortunately, it remains the most neglected. It is true that aftercare efforts should start at the beginning of a prison sentence, but it is also important to emphasize that it is in the community, not the prison, where aftercare efforts must be concentrated and waged. Thus, coordination and communication in communities between various public and

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<sup>17</sup> Federal Prison Industries (commonly referred to as FPI or by its trade name UNICOR) is a wholly-owned, Government corporation established by Congress on June 23, 1934. Its mission is to employ and provide job skills training to the greatest practicable number of inmates confined within the Federal Bureau of Prisons; contribute to the safety and security of our Nation's Federal correctional facilities by keeping inmates constructively occupied; produce market-priced quality goods and services for sale to the Federal Government; operate in a self-sustaining manner; and minimize FPI's impact on private business and labor.

private sector social service providers and criminal justice agencies is absolutely foundational to the success of any proposed aftercare strategy.

### The Texas Prisoner Reentry Situation

In 1980, there were approximately 300,000 inmates incarcerated in the United States. Since the year 2000, the Texas prison population has reached record levels and has consistently hovered around 150,000 inmates.<sup>18</sup> California is the only other state in the U.S. that reports a prison population of comparable size.<sup>19</sup> Florida ranks a distant third in number of persons incarcerated, with roughly half the number of prisoners as Texas. While many have argued that the country as a whole is in the midst of a national prisoner reentry crisis, there can be no denying that the extent of the prisoner reentry crisis is most profound in Texas.

For about a decade now, Texas has also led the nation in the number of offenders exiting prison. Over the last ten years the Texas Department of Criminal Justice has released on average about 78,000 prisoners each year to Texas communities.<sup>20</sup> To put the Texas situation in perspective, consider that at yearend 2004, the total number of parolees leaving all prisons across the entire country was 765,355.<sup>21</sup> The stark reentry reality -- fully one-tenth of the nation's parolees are released to Texas communities each year.

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<sup>18</sup> *FY 2005-2009 Agency Strategic Plan*, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Austin, Texas, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Paige M. Harrison and Allen J. Beck, *Prisoners in 2004*, U. S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2005), NCJ 210677.

<sup>20</sup> *FY 2005-2009 Agency Strategic Plan*, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Austin, Texas, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Lauren E. Glaze and Seri Palla, *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2004*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2005).



Texas is not presently equipped to handle the volume of offenders returning to local communities across the state. Factors like the geographic size of the state, the diversity of the offender population, the concentration of poverty in specific communities known to be home for many ex-offenders, and the sheer size of the number of ex-prisoners returning to society make the Texas situation unique. It is not hard, therefore, to argue that the prisoner reentry crisis is as pronounced in Texas as any another state in the country.

#### How to Build an Accelerated Statewide Prisoner Reentry Model

Since prisoner reentry is a problem facing communities all across the United States, the ultimate goal of any plan should be to establish a model that is not only effective in a particular area, but one that can be effective in multiple communities or jurisdictions and thus take reentry to scale statewide. Stated differently, what is needed is a prisoner reentry plan that is not only efficacious at the local level, but one that intentionally connects local communities with other local communities. Such a process would make possible the building and systematic expansion of a prisoner reentry network; establishing a regional and then a state level prisoner reentry model. It is one thing to have isolated success, it is quite another to have success at a statewide level.

What does not exist today is a prisoner reentry model or template that links all of the *Report's* non-negotiable elements of reentry together in a way that can be replicated and sustained in cost-effective ways at local communities, in regions, or statewide. We are in need of a plan where coordination and collaboration are central, where the goals of the reentry model are realistically achievable, where the specific elements of the plan are

replicable in any community, and finally, where the plan is affordable and does not add new costs to already overburdened correctional budgets.

Finally, the use of the word crisis implies the obvious -- the need for a reentry plan that will not take decades to realize. Communities and states across the nation are in need of an accelerated approach to the reentry crisis. In sum, in order to effectively face the prisoner reentry crisis, we are in need of an approach that can achieve scale as well as be built and operational with all haste.

As a guiding principle, it may be helpful to state that any attempt to build an accelerated and successful prisoner reentry plan at scale has to be Collaborative, Achievable, Replicable, and Economical. CARE is an appropriate acronym for the daunting task now facing correctional leaders and policy-makers. Successful prisoner reentry at scale and on a fast-track is not possible without a plan that includes each of these four elements.

#### The Typical Prisoner Reentry Misstep

As stated earlier, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice releases approximately 78,000 prisoners each year to Texas communities. What does this process actually look like on the ground? Within several days of a prisoner's release, they are transported from one of the 150 correctional facilities across the state to the Walls Unit in Huntsville, Texas. With rare exceptions, all prisoners are released centrally from this one prison.<sup>22</sup> If family members or friends are not there to pick-up the former prisoner following release they take a TDCJ voucher to the Trailways Bus Station to get a ticket to either Dallas or Houston, in route to their final destination. In addition to the bus

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<sup>22</sup> Prisoners are paroled directly from the Carol Vance Unit in Richmond, Texas, where the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) is based. IFI is a faith-based pre-release program. In addition, all female prisoners are released from prison in Gatesville, Texas.

voucher, ex-prisoners are provided with \$50. On average, 150 prisoners are released from the Walls Unit each day with the clothes on the back, \$50, and a bus ticket.

What additional mechanisms are currently in place to assist Texas prisoners being released to society? Like other states, parole authorities in Texas investigate the proposed home placement to insure that the soon-to-be-released prisoner has an approved living arrangement. Since the vast majority of these ex-prisoners will be on parole, they will be told to get in touch with their parole officer within 24 hours of their release. This is the initial reentry step in Texas, and aside from the central release of prisoners from the Walls Unit, it is a process not unlike other states.

Perhaps no other single picture more accurately reflects the gravity of the reentry crisis than the realization that most leaving prison will not even have a family member or friend waiting for them outside those prison gates. The majority will walk out of the prison and head to the bus station and return to communities without a positive or supportive social network. Not a good start or omen for successful prisoner reentry.

#### A Better Reentry First Step: Welcome Back

Established in 1844, the First Baptist Church in Huntsville, Texas, is recognized as one of the oldest Baptist churches in the state of Texas. Unlike most churches in Texas or the entire country for that matter, First Baptist Huntsville is located right next door to a prison. And not just any prison, but the legendary Walls Unit, the oldest and most well known prison in Texas. Since First Baptist and the Walls Unit literally share the same property line, for many years congregants of the church have been able to view first-hand the daily exodus of prisoners. As might be expected, the constant view of

prisoners has been disturbing to many church members and more than a few discussions have taken place regarding the possible relocation of the church.

But First Baptist has not moved, and in 2002, a small group from the church launched an outreach ministry to the large number of prisoners exiting the Walls Unit. Called Welcome Back, the ministry was designed to facilitate a more successful reentry transition to society. Gaining the confidence of the Walls Unit warden, Welcome Back volunteers are given the opportunity to go in to the prison each night and address inmates the night before their release. Welcome Back volunteers are provided with a daily list of all prisoners that will be released from the Walls Unit.

During this voluntary session, Welcome Back participants introduce themselves as volunteers from First Baptist Church in Huntsville and that they are here to help in their transition home. They next tell the inmates what the schedule will look like for the following day. For example, they tell inmates what time they will eat breakfast, how long it will typically take to be processed out, and the approximate time range for their physical departure. For the majority of prisoners who will not have someone to transport them, Welcome Back volunteers tell them where the bus station is located, and how to redeem the vouchers that will be provided for their bus fare. They also provide suggestions about how to spend and more importantly, how not to spend, their fifty dollars TDCJ will provide. They will ask the inmates if someone will be greeting them and transporting them home following their release. For the minority of prisoners who do have family or friends that will be meeting them, they are informed that additional Welcome Back volunteers will also be in the parking lot adjacent to the prison and will be there to assist their families in anyway possible.

Welcome Back volunteers tell prisoners that there are people in the free world who care about them and want to assist them in their home communities. Prisoners are asked if they are affiliated with any religious denomination or organization. Having already identified supportive congregations in many of the cities and communities across the state of Texas, Welcome Back participants ask inmates for permission and the opportunity to connect them with these participating congregations in their home town. A list of supportive congregations broken down by geographic areas is provided to each prisoner requesting the listing. On a strictly voluntary basis, prisoners are asked to provide their contact information in the communities to which they are returning. With permission of the prisoners, Welcome Back staff then offer to notify these congregations in order to make the connection between the ex-prisoner and the congregation. As might be expected, virtually all of the inmates are delighted to provide the necessary information. Indeed, many of them are shocked that anyone would greet them as they are about to exit. For those prisoners who have been in prison before, the experience is particularly surprising.

Drawing upon some 15 volunteers, the Welcome Back outreach ministry made connections with approximately 55,000 prisoners each of the last two years. This small volunteer ministry is reaching roughly 70 percent of all inmates leaving TDCJ correctional facilities each year. The Welcome Back program not only tells prisoners that there are people who care about and want to help them, but also collects important data regarding the ex-prisoner's new home address, TDCJ #, local phone number, email, date of birth, and religious affiliation or preference. Prisoners are also asked if they participated in any treatment as well as religious programs during their incarceration.

With the permission of the prisoner, this voluntarily provided information is then forwarded to the church, synagogue, or mosque in the community to which the ex-offender is returning.

Though the Welcome Back outreach effort is truly remarkable, it is but the initial step in what could be, I believe, an accelerated and scalable prisoner reentry initiative. Presently, a Welcome Back volunteer attempts to follow-up with congregations across the state of Texas, in an effort to determine if the ex-prisoner either contacts or is contacted by the local congregation. The sheer volume of offenders leaving TDCJ everyday is obviously overwhelming and the effort to follow-up or track ex-prisoners is not being coordinated effectively.

### Coordination and Collaboration: The Role of AmeriCorps in Reentry

#### Background

AmeriCorps\*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) provides full-time members to nonprofit, faith-based and other community organizations, and public agencies to create and expand programs that seek to lift disadvantaged individuals and communities out of poverty.”<sup>23</sup> AmeriCorps\*VISTA members invest human and social capital to increase the capacity of low-income communities across the country to solve their own problems. Today, close to 6,000 AmeriCorps\*VISTA workers help combat various social problems, create businesses and housing opportunities, and strengthen the capacity of community organizations in some of the country’s most economically distressed communities.

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<sup>23</sup> *AmeriCorps Vista Member Handbook*, May 2002, 9.

AmeriCorps operates under the following three assumptions: (1) Private citizens can help solve problems confronting low-income communities; (2) Vista members' skills "are used most effectively when they live and work in the low-income communities they are serving;" and (3) "the full-time personal involvement" of vista members brings added value to organizations.<sup>24</sup>

### AmeriCorps\*Vista Members

AmeriCorps Vista members serve as community and organizational catalysts, assist in creating or expanding programs, and mobilize community resources to sustain these programs. Members must adhere to certain rules designed to ensure that they maintain fidelity to this stated purpose.

AmeriCorps Vista members serve for at least 1 year, but no more than three years. Their term of service is renewable at the discretion of the organization, AmeriCorps and the member. Frequently, members are encouraged to pursue a second year. In order to ensure that AmeriCorps Vista members are working towards the purpose of community self-sufficiency, "AmeriCorps Vista members may not assume, or retain positions of leadership, or become identified with a particular faction or group or with a partisan or nonpartisan political group in the communities in which they serve."<sup>25</sup>

### Sponsoring Organization

AmeriCorps requires sponsoring organizations to fulfill certain duties. Sponsoring organizations must (1) manage AmeriCorps Vista resources;<sup>26</sup> (2) provide

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> *AmeriCorps Vista Member Handbook*, May 2002, 11.

<sup>26</sup> A sponsoring organization must manage all funds and projects that AmeriCorps entrusts to it.

“support necessary to achieve project goals;”<sup>27</sup> (3) ensure that the project achieves certain objectives prescribed by AmeriCorps.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the project ought to expand community and organizational capacity to sustain the project once the Americorps\*Vista member(s) finishes his/her term.

In an effort designed to curb the prisoner reentry crisis, we should propose a partnership between AmeriCorps\*Vista, State Criminal Justice Authorities, and the State Office of Faith Based Initiatives. Relying on a cost-sharing format, the Faith-Based Office should partner with AmeriCorps for the purpose of developing a local infrastructure that would help to reintegrate prisoners into society.

I am proposing placing an AmeriCorps\*Vista member in each of the Council of Governments in a state. In Texas, for example, there are 24 local Councils of Government COGs.<sup>29</sup> Vista members would be tasked with multiple responsibilities including prisoner reentry. Because of the number of ex-prisoners returning to Houston and Dallas, a statewide plan would call for additional assistance for the Harris and Dallas County COGs.

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<sup>27</sup> A sponsoring organization must do three things to provide “support necessary to achieve project goals.” First, it must provide “dedicated supervision of the AmeriCorps Vista member.” Second, it must also provide a clear work plan. Third, it must provide the mentoring needed to promote the professional growth of the AmeriCorps.

<sup>28</sup> A sponsoring organization must ensure that the project achieves three things. First, it must engage “residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, and implementing the project to ensure that it is responsive and relevant to the low-income residents served. Second, the organization must ensure that the project “leverages community resources (including part-time community volunteers) from the public and private sectors.”

<sup>29</sup> The Texas Association of Regional Councils was organized in 1973 by interlocal agreement among Texas’ 24 regional councils of governments. The statewide association assists the regional councils in strengthening their capabilities to serve their local government members; provides a forum for the regular exchange of information and ideas; educates other governmental entities, public and private organizations, and the general public about the services and functions of regional councils; and represents the councils before both state and federal agencies and legislative bodies.



Vista members would be in constant communication with faith based groups like the Welcome Back program in Huntsville, Texas. The Welcome Back program would make it possible for Vista members to know in advance how many ex-prisoners are returning to communities within their COG. Vista members would select key volunteer coordinators in each of the congregations that are presently participating in the Welcome Back network of supportive congregations. Importantly, Vista members would insure that the initial connection between ex-prisoners and congregations not only takes place, but that the relationship is nurtured and tracked. Additionally, Vista members would work to establish solid working relationships with the local parole authorities in an effort to provide additional supervision that is so necessary in the initial reentry period following release from prison.

Vista members would be tasked with identifying and coordinating local volunteers interested in the issue of prisoner reentry. The Vista member would target organizations and groups that provide resources that are most needed for ex-prisoners to return to society and be productive citizens. In particular, the Vista member would work to establish ties with community leaders and organizations that could assist with housing, employment, and transportation.

Intentionally working with local church congregations widely recognized to be “volunteer rich” organizations, the Vista member would seek to provide leadership in building an alliance between local houses of worship that together would strive to assist in the provision of the multifaceted needs facing ex-prisoners and their families. In addition to identifying jobs, housing, and transportation, Vista members would seek to connect and train mentors that would be matched with each ex-prisoner returning to the

Texas COG within which the Vista member serves. The congregation, again, would be a natural home for identifying mentors committed to assisting ex-prisoners in the community. Since we know from research that mentors matter in the lives of at-risk youth<sup>30</sup> as well as former prisoners,<sup>31</sup> it is essential to the success of any proposed reentry plan that mentors be central to aftercare.

Vista members would utilize new state-of-the-art software that would not only allow them to track and monitor ex-prisoners, but would also make it possible to identify and to provide necessary social services through this online capability. The software would connect each of the Texas COGs and would provide a tool for creating a real-time network that effectively coordinates the initial as well as ongoing follow-up of ex-prisoners.

Working with local COGs, AmeriCorps\*Vista members would be the key element to coordinating the collaboration between community and faith based organizations, volunteers, social services, needed reentry resources, mentors, parole, and the Welcome Back program in Huntsville. The Governor's Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives, would provide the necessary support, oversight, and assistance necessary to take the reentry plan to scale throughout the state.

Finally, the software discussed earlier would make it possible to collect ongoing data on the aftercare process and would allow researchers to not only evaluate the

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph P. Tierney and Jean Baldwin Grossman (1995), "Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters," Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>31</sup> Byron R. Johnson (2003), "The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program," Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Re-released by the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR Research Report), Baylor University (2006).

initiative, but to conduct empirical studies of the efficacy of the state reentry plan. In sum, the plan outlined above takes some of the best ideas offered from the *Reentry Report* coupled with a number of additional but necessary components to take the current plan to scale. Utilizing public-private partnerships, fostering collaboration between secular and sacred organizations, the plan put forward here is quite achievable and replicable in any state. Additionally, the plan can be brought online in an accelerated fashion and with minimal cost.

We know that religious beliefs and commitments tend to be positively associated with other public goods like volunteerism and civic engagement. Robert Putnam has acknowledged that a substantial percent of social capital is a result of America's vast spiritual capital (Putnam 2000; Putnam and Feldstein 2003). Others have drawn the connection even more clearly between religion and social capital (Greeley 1997; Smidt 2003; Wuthnow 2002). As economists begin to examine religion more intentionally, it will no doubt confirm that the human and financial contributions of religion in America are enormous (Brooks 2006).

Prisoner reentry is a problem that can only be adequately confronted by a partnership between private and public entities. If sacred and secular groups can come together it is possible to literally create a paradigm shift within community corrections, though it will require dramatic concessions on both sides. Government will have to realize that it needs assistance and intentionally work to welcome and accommodate (and not just tolerate) religious volunteers. Faith based organizations will need to mobilize volunteers to work in the community instead of the prison. These volunteers will need to bring much needed expertise in the areas of employment, housing, education, and

counseling. This does not mean that faith based volunteers have to leave their faith behind. It simply means that need to minister to all the needs of former prisoners transitioning back to society.

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