

Questions - Prison Ministry

I. Inmates:

- What would you discuss with someone who is about to be released?
- What would you say to someone who will never be released?
- What are some of the issues that the ministry volunteer must be prepared to deal with when visiting offenders of the opposite gender?
- What factors should the ministry volunteer keep in mind when visiting with sex offenders?
- Are there certain factors that might make young offenders difficult to work with?
- What does the ministry volunteer have to be aware of when visiting offenders addicted to alcohol and/or drugs?
- What should be kept in mind when visiting inmates who are emotionally or mentally ill?
- What limits should be set while visiting inmates?
- When is it advisable to challenge or confront an inmate regarding a belief, conviction or opinion?
- Can a ministry volunteer become too assertive when dealing with an inmate?
- How can a ministry volunteer develop or engender trust when visiting an inmate?
- Can offenders become responsible decision-makers if ministry volunteers tell them what to do?
- How can a ministry volunteer keep from becoming too emotionally involved with inmates and their loved ones?
- Is it every advisable for a ministry volunteer to develop a close relationship with an inmate?
- How much should a ministry volunteer commiserate with an inmate in crisis to show understanding?
- When entering a correctional facility what are your expectations of the inmates you will visit?
- Do you anticipate or believe they are capable of positive changes in their lives?
- What do you think the inmates expectations are of you?
- What should you do if you suspect an inmate is trying to use or manipulate you?
- What constitutes good listening?
- What are some problems or issues that could emerge during the first encounter with an inmate?

- Is it important for an inmate to tell his or her story to you?
- What should you do when you feel an inmate is sexually attracted to you?
- How can you tell if an inmate responds to you just to "butter you up"?
- How do you handle an inmate who seems to argue for the sake of arguing?
- How do you know which inmates are dangerous and which are not?
- Should you allow an inmate to speak privately with you around a corner or behind a pillar?
- When should you refer an inmate to a more experienced volunteer or professional?
- Should you give money, food or postage stamps to an inmate who asks for them?
- Should you make a phone call or contact someone on the outside for an inmate?
- When should you ever intervene in a physical confrontation between inmates?
- Respond: Most inmates do not feel guilty about what they have done.
- React: "The majority of inmates are religiously insincere."

II. Ministry:

- What is correctional ministry burnout? How does it manifest itself?
- What can be done to prevent burnout?
- What ethical questions are most troublesome for a ministry volunteer?
- What personal skills are essential for a ministry volunteer to cultivate?
- How does correctional ministry differ from other types of ministry?
- How should a ministry volunteer deal with an inmate who talks about committing suicide?
- What is your reaction: "We do more harm than good when we force our beliefs on those who are not predisposed to them."
- What are the indicators that your encounter with an inmate has been effective or ineffective? Is this difficult to measure?
- Have you ever been used or manipulated so that you must maintain a defensive attitude against being conned?
- How should a ministry volunteer dress when entering a correctional facility?
- What should be your response when an inmate knows the Bible better than you do? How can a ministry volunteer "minister" to correctional staff?
- How should the ministry volunteer speak about a sense of sin or guilt while dealing with inmates?
- Is it ever appropriate to evangelize or seek to convert inmates within the

facility you are visiting?

- What influence does the parole board wield on inmate response to your outreach?
- React to the statement: I am willing to help those being released with re-entering society, but I am not comfortable with them in my own church or neighborhood.

III. Prison System:

- Is a system based on reward or punishment more effective in changing the behavior of offenders?
- How verbal should a ministry volunteer be with an inmate when a regulation seems unjust or excessively harsh?
- How verbal should a ministry volunteer be with the correctional staff when a regulation seems unjust or excessively harsh?
- Are we all trapped by the criminal justice system, including prisoners, officials and ourselves?
- Do the prison officials and staff respect you or do you feel that they resent your presence as a "do-gooder" or as a meddler in the order of the prison?

What is your reaction to the following:

"A chaplain with proper perspective realizes that custodial officers view a side of inmate life he never sees. He knows that guards may see the insincere inmate after he has been to church or Bible class...in which he gave his best song and dance to the chaplain. He realizes that guards may see the way the inmate acts, the way he talks, observe the means he uses in getting out of work or acquiring something he is not supposed to have. In other words, officers are apt to see incarcerated men at their worst, whereas chaplains are apt to see them at their best. Unless chaplains keep reminding themselves of things as they actually are, they are liable to grow starry eyed and too idealistic to be of any practical help to those who really mean business about becoming rehabilitated."

- Do inmates identify you with the prison staff?
- From the perspective of "a culture of life"* what are some possibilities for finding better alternatives to respond to crime as a society?

Note: *The phrase "culture of life" is a term used in the moral theology of the Catholic Church.. It describes it as a way of life based on the theological truth that human life at all stages from conception through natural death is sacred. As such, a "culture of life" opposes practices destructive of human life including abortion,

euthanasia, destruction of human embryonic stem cells, contraception, capital punishment, unjust war, sadistic humiliation, narcissism, and excessive selfishness. For more information on Pope John Paul II's "culture of life" cf. his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*: "In our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the culture of life and the culture of death, there is need to develop a deep critical sense capable of discerning true values..." Also read: *The Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death: A statement of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops calling for an End to the Use of the Death Penalty* (2005).

IV. Restorative Justice and Catholic Social Teaching:

- What is restorative justice and how does it relate to the criminal justice system?
- Should victims and their families occupy a central place in the criminal justice process? Should their participation be mandatory?
- How should we - or is it even possible - to apply the principles of Catholic social teaching to the criminal justice system?
- How has the fact that Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced and executed as a criminal altered your understanding of the Christian religion?
- How does the God of second chances relate to "three strikes" and rigid, mandatory sentencing?
- What are some of the social, economic or psychological factors that may contribute to criminal behavior?
- How important is it to understand the causes of crime in an individual's case history? Does this take away the blame or guilt of the criminal behavior?