

Reducing Recidivism Among African Americans?

The term recidivism is the term used to describe ex-offenders who return to prison as a result of continued criminal behavior. One of the main concerns in the prison systems is the rate of recidivism among offenders. Recidivism in African American communities is at an all-time high. There are a few inspiring components prompting recidivism inside the African American people group, and they are as per the following: Drug habits, absence of education, lousy environment, poor housing, discrimination, and single-family. Most of the ex-offenders return to the same communities in the same harmful lifestyles.

The recidivism rate here has hovered near 30 percent for much past quarter-century, according to a report earlier June 15, 2018, a study done by the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice reform. Why are this and problems in low-income communities and black neighborhoods versus white neighborhoods and communities? What can be done by the state of Georgia and churches that are located in these communities to help reduce recidivism?

One of the issues is the lack of church driven programs for young mothers with boys and girls. However, if men and women would step up to plate to mentor and single parents and educated members of their congregations, the churches would take own more teaching on the subject of family issues and economic problems in low-income communities, and this will help curve recidivism. The recidivism rate here has hovered near 30 percent for much past quarter-century, according to a report earlier June 15, 2018, a study done by the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice reform. Why are this and problems in low-income communities and black neighborhoods versus white neighborhoods and communities? What can be done by the state of Georgia and churches that are located in these communities to help reduce recidivism?

What is the role of Mega-church, and what they do for the communities located in low-poverty areas? However, these churches and congregation there is poverty rather than the biblical mission of love, service, and justice, better describes the chief aim of many churches. However, black inmates are the majority in state and local jails and prisons. African Americans incarcerated in state prisons across the country at more than five times the rate of whites, and at least ten times the price in five states. This report documents the rates of incarceration for whites, African Americans, and Hispanics in each state, identifies three contributors to racial and ethnic disparities in imprisonment, and provides recommendations for reform¹. Harsh drug laws are an essential factor in the persistent racial and ethnic disparities observed in state prisons. For drug crimes, differences are especially severe, mainly due to blacks are nearly four times as likely as whites to be arrested for drug offenses and 2.5 times as likely to be arrested for drug possession². The Black church may not be dead but on life-support. First, the blacks had to be alive at some point before it can make an impact. The in the black community was functional in schools, politics and the welfare of everyone that made up the community. Several social issues are of great concern to many black people. Many of us see several problems that plague blacks to a more noticeable extent than other minorities and whites. There is substantial poverty among blacks. With the growth of more blacks elevated to the middle class, this has changed the communities, dynamics. Blacks have the opportunities to get better-paying jobs; therefore, they move out of some of the same communities that grew up in and worship in and those churches are still there³.

¹ The Sentence Project By Ashley Nellis

² Ibid 1

³ Prison Ministry By. Dennis Pierce

The Black Church Family Project is a study of family-oriented community outreach programs, provided by black churches. The survey data discussed in this paper reflects programming for youth development as reported in the two northern regions of the project. These particular church is fighting for its life most of the members are old and on fixed income. Still having service the same way they did five years ago. However this type of service doesn't attract young educated blacks to the church and community. These communities' high unemployment rates, drugs, and teen pregnancy. Too many Black churches cherry-pick the sins they discuss. Countless Black churches have an incessant focus on homosexuality, but they refuse to address the unsettling number of aborted Black babies, the alarming divorce rate in the Black community, and many other sins that will upset the greater majority of the members. To avoid infuriating the majority of the church members, many Black preachers pick phenomena that will incense only a minority of their congregants. When teaching about a specific sin, it's vital for churches to link that sin to the sin nature and offer hope, redemption, and salvation to those who have and/or are committing the discussed sin.

However, as Georgia lawmakers desperately search for ways to slash spending, they are not debating an option taken by other states: cutting the prison population. Georgia operates the fifth-largest prison system in the nation, at a cost of \$1 billion a year. The job of overseeing 60,000 inmates and 150,000 felons on probation consumes 1 of every 17 state dollars⁴. Georgia prisoners are serving longer sentences due to tough-on-crime laws adopted in the 1990s. Those laws ban early release through parole for many offenders. A wave of convictions related to illegal methamphetamine also pushed up prison admissions in recent years. However female, population has swelled nationwide dramatically since 2000 when about 70,000 women were

⁴ Article; By Carrie Tee Gordon Atlanta Journal Constitution

incarcerate according to the Bureau of Justice by 2014 that population had grown to nearly 109,000 women locked up in county and prison according to Ga Department of Correction.

There are 31 state prisons, three of which are designated for women. Georgia offenders are assigned to a security level after a review of factors such as offender's sentence, nature of the crime, criminal history, and history of violence. Each prison is rated by a security classification system. The Georgia Department of Corrections has 33 state prisons across the state of Georgia, which house nearly 52,000 felony offenders. State prisons house violent, repeat, or nonviolent offenders who have exhausted all other forms of punishment. Judges may sentence offenders directly to prison or offenders may be sent to prison as a result of revocation proceedings. Offenders have access to classes and other services that allow them to reenter society successfully⁵.

Why Most Pastors Don't Do Prison Ministry

Most have gone to jail (to visit), but few have former inmates in their pews. What can be done to inform the church about the concerns and needs of Ga. inmates? The first thing is to have an interest and love for our brother and sisters in the life of an inmate. Pastor today churches have member with son, daughters, are some they know is in jail or prison. Some leaders believed of site out of mind. Matthew 25: 43 ⁶ I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me sick and in prison and you din not visit Me. Late Jesus says as much as you did not do it to one of the least of theses, you did it on to Me. In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus offers of both gift and challenges disciples will simultaneously minister to and be ministered to and by Jesus in jail and prison⁷. Jesus perplexes his hearers by stating Jesus is found incarnated in the

⁵ www.georgiaopportunity.org/resources

⁶ Bible Life Application

⁷ Who Ministers to Whom By Vargas, Alicia

suffering and in the hope of society's outcast in jail that this ministry done or not done unto "the least of these my brother and sisters has really been done or not done unto Him. Matthew 25:31-46: Missionary or social Justice? The primary concern in Matthew 25:31-46 is not with acts of mercy performed by church members for the needy people of the world but the acts of mercy performed for church members by people among the nations to which they are sent⁸. However, not everybody called to do this work, but on the other hand churches are called to be part of healing community. Churches get real comfortable and don't see that bigger world we live in." He laments an attitude that says "I don't care what happens to them, just keep them away from me," one that only sees the incarcerated as those deserving of punishment.

A Dehumanizing Environment

We can never idealize the jail and prison environment that serves as a warehouse of the failures of both society and the people trapped in and deeply affected by those failures of both society and the people trapped in and deeply affected by those failures. The environment is rough for all inmates and guards. A dehumanized environment results when humans are treated as a herd of animals who are lined up to go to feeding who use toilets in plain view of other, who cannot touch their loved ones through the thick glass in the visiting room of jails. Inmates will be sentenced to jail, or prison for not having the financial means of posting bail or hiring a powerful attorney⁹. But the consequences of being incarcerated do not end there. As dehumanizing as the normal consequence of being incarcerated are, much more dehumanizing are all the consequence of locking up with all kinds of people with all kinds of personal and social and dysfunctions with no outlet for them except on each other inside¹⁰. However the inmate who left a victim on the

⁸ By. Mark Powell God With Us Pg. 136

⁹ Ibid 4

¹⁰ James Samuel Login Good Punishment Christian Moral 2008 pg. 208-216

outside make becomes a victim on the inside. Racism, for example is rampant inside and the social prejudices based on ethnicity and race are mimicked inside the walls of imprisoned environment with cruel virulence and violence. Racism requirement that the powerful control and exploit the weaker itself contextually to each jail and prison according to the power imbalance between racial gangs skinheads, blacks, Latinos, Asians, and their subgroups¹¹. Which some time lead to men raping men¹².

The church can provide drug addiction programs for illegal drug and legal drug in the prison and jails. With commendable exception of successful programs inside that impact only relatively minor numbers of addiction related offenders the addicted prisoner is rarely cured of addiction inside. Addiction triggers are augmented not decreased in prison and drugs are easily available in jails and prisons, brought in not only by visitors, but also by some guards who supplement their income by the trade. Addiction triggers are exacerbated upon release when the released inmate contemplates the obstacles to restoring his or her life with a criminal recorded. Mental Health suffers outside is exhibited more tragically even inside when the individual suffering mentally is further punished for his or her symptoms.

Many pastors have little contact with those who have been incarcerated. Half of pastors say no one from their congregation has been jailed in the past three years. A third has seen one or two people from their church go to jail¹³. Incarceration rates in the United States remain at record levels. More than 2.2 million Americans are held in state and federal prisons or local jails, according to the Institute for Criminal Policy Research. That's more than any other nation in the world. Though about 13 percent of Americans are black, more than a third (36%) of

¹¹ The Sentence Project: [www. Sentencing Project](http://www.SentencingProject.org)

¹² Understand Jail and Prison Culture By Gregory E. Von

¹³ Bob Smie, Tana article, May 24 2016

inmates in state and federal prisons are African American, according to the Department of Justice. Those statistics have led to concerns about the high number of black inmates and charges of racial disparity. African-American pastors (88%) are also most likely to see racial disparities among inmates as unjust. Most Methodist (73%) and Presbyterian/Reformed (75%) pastors agree. Fewer Baptist (34%), Pentecostal (43%), Church of Christ/Christian (40%) and Lutheran (56%) pastors agree¹⁴.

Pastors often don't know how to start ministering to inmates. Other ministries, like distributing school supplies to kids or volunteering at a food pantry, are relatively easy to start, she said. But ministering to inmates and their families is more difficult, requiring special training and often a long-term commitment from volunteer. Most people have never been in trouble with the law, and many people have never known someone who has been to prison. In fact, most people in the United States go about their daily lives rarely thinking about prisons. A crime related news story may catch our attention, or a corrections facility sign might catch our eye. But for the most part, prisons and prison issues are not even a blip on our radar screens. So you might think prisons have nothing to do with your life. Ignoring prisons as a relevant part of all of our lives, however, overlooks a basic fact. The incarceration system is an integral part of how American society runs, and everyone has a stake in that system functioning effectively. Imprisonment is also a general theme of the Bible, for prisons and prisoners are mentioned in both Testaments 130 times. The evangelical church must again take a look at the total community, for ignorance of those locked up in prisons and jails within reach of the church cannot be offered as an excuse for apathy¹⁵.

¹⁴ Ibid 4

¹⁵ [www.missionsnorthamerica.com/ chapter 10](http://www.missionsnorthamerica.com/chapter10)

Why Do We Need Alternatives to Prison

Why are there so many alternatives to prison? One reason is simple practicality. The United States, for example, has more than three times as many prisoners as it did just 25 years ago. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, about four million Americans were under correctional supervision in 1990, which includes those in prison, on probation, or on parole. By 2013 that number had risen to almost seven million, and there just isn't enough prison space to have them all incarcerated¹⁶. Everyone has a stake in the functioning and effectiveness of the prison system even if you've never committed a crime or been the victim of one. The prison system is an integral part of how society functions—punishing criminals, rehabilitating inmates, and protecting the public. The United States leads the world in incarceration with the largest number of its citizens behind bars. The hugeness of the U.S. prison system raises important issues we all need to consider. The True Costs of Prison teaches readers not only about the prisoners but also the families and communities they leave behind and to which most will return after serving their sentences¹⁷. Keeping the public safe from criminals is more complicated than simply locking them up¹⁸.

The Role of Prisons in Society

Incarceration clearly has an important role to play in society it is the method by which perpetrators of crime are punished. But punishment is not the only purpose of the incarceration system. The incarceration system is also meant to serve a protective purpose—it is meant to protect law-abiding citizens by separating dangerous criminals from the rest of the population

¹⁶ The Prison System By Russell Craig 2018

¹⁷ American Prison By Shane Bauer

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and confining them where they cannot harm others. Deterrence is another important function incarceration is intended to serve; the existence of the system the mere threat of losing one's freedom is supposed to deter people from committing crimes in the first place. Ideally, incarceration is also meant to serve an additional purpose, this one rehabilitative. Most prisoners will serve out their term, be released from prison, and reenter the rest of the population. In an ideal system, prisoners would receive the necessary care, training, and resources to reform their behavior, ensuring that once released from prison they will not continue a life of crime. This is where the church comes in to provide care, training, and resources for returning citizens.

Ministry to Families

Some of the needs of inmates' families are obvious. Loss of income means that obtaining food, clothing and shelter have now become critical in what was probably a difficult situation to begin with. One huge problem for families is transportation for visitation. Generally, prisons are located in rural areas, far off the beaten path, for obvious reasons. Many times, families do not have the financial resources to fund these trips to visit inmates, and sometimes they travel long hours by bus, only to be turned away, if the inmate has been transferred or is not allowed to receive visitors. The families suffer in many other, less obvious ways. Often the families report that they feel as if they are imprisoned along with their loved one, even though they, themselves, committed no crime¹⁹.

They report being ostracized by friends, family, neighbors, and even their church. Almost half of all inmates come from a family where a member of their immediate family was in prison while they were growing up. There are many opportunities for ministry with families of inmates, but you will probably have to seek them out. Shame and fear of rejection will keep inmate's

¹⁹ Ministry with Prisoners Families By Wilson Goode

families from contacting you. One of the best ways is to simply be a caring and compassionate friend, a brother or sister in Christ. Therefore the church could provide resources to help families travel too prison and jails. As important and even as essential as advocacy is to help effect systemic change in the justice system, advocacy efforts propelled from safe environment of out houses of worship, or the steps of the capi8tal building, are more comfortable forms of action than getting physically into the jails and prisons, even to see Jesus in those who are who there.

A Role for the Local Church

The Church can play a critical role in receiving recently released citizens back into their communities. Indeed, we are called to “let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured” (Hebrews 13:1). The Re-entry Programs will also serve as a hub for community organizing, healing the neighborhoods that are most affected by mass incarceration. They will employ five urban church leaders to act as first-contacts for released citizens and will also serve guides for congregations that are learning how to be good partners. They will organize within the local community to help restore neighborhoods and to identify assets within the community that can support those being released²⁰. Discrimination against the recently released is rampant, and is on top of the racial and economic discrimination one may have faced even before entering prison. Those released from prison often have a hard time finding a job that will pay them a living wage, and they no longer qualify for student loans to help improve their employability. They are often denied safe, affordable housing, and are not allowed live in public housing (even if living with family

²⁰ Urban Faith, Article By. Katelin Hansen

members that do qualify). They often lose access to food stamps and other government support benefits, at the very moment they need it most. Friends and family may have turned away, and it can feel like there is nowhere left to go. Could this be where God's Church is needed most?

First Steps

Jesus himself was put on trial, found guilty, imprisoned, placed on death row, and ultimately subject to capital punishment by the state. If we are to identify with Christ, we are to identify with those who find themselves in similar situations today. Local churches can play a vital role in God's plan for transformation. Encourage your congregation to engage in authentic intentional prayer for the incarcerated and for local prisons. Pray for those about to be released and those who have recently reentered their communities. Pray for the renewal of both the imprisoned as well as of the systems and structures that brought them there.

Include these prayers in the regular liturgy of your church, perhaps along with other 'prayers of the people,' if that is a tradition in your setting. Do not let the incarcerated men and women of our society be forgotten or left out of our daily prayers, but rather be diligent in lifting them up to God²¹. In doing so, watch as our prisons and neighborhoods are blessed with God's redemptive. As prayers continue to be lifted, consider beginning a small group or bible study around the issues of mass incarceration. In partnership with willing correctional institutions, begin to send birthday and Christmas cards to specific inmates. Have all the members of your church sign these cards as part of their Sunday morning routines. Begin to ponder what it would look like for your church to become a sanctuary for recently released citizens. It is important to engage your congregation early and often around these issues to help increase awareness and

²¹ God Behind Bars By John Perry

compassion. Similarly, it is important that the entire worshiping community remain mindful and prayerful together, not simply leaving it as a specialized interest of a few.

Lift up the prisons and those ministering with them as a community, knowing that you are responding to God's call to remember the incarcerated. Be prepared for some challenges. The bureaucracy associated with prison ministry can be daunting. So too can be the cultural differences we may experience in prison ministry work. We learn many things about ourselves and our own culture's assumptions and values when we encounter those different from ourselves. And it is in so doing that we see the face of God.

Isaiah 61:1 says "the Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound." What does it mean to take these words seriously? What witness would we bear by living out God's challenge to walk beside the imprisoned? Imagine how such a commitment might radically transform not only the individuals we help, but also profoundly alter our own lives, our local churches, and indeed entire communities for the glory of Christ.

LOCAL JAIL MINISTRY

Jail ministry is the front line in the battle for an inmate's soul. This ministry requires dedicated men who are willing to sacrifice the time needed to make a weekly trip to an unfriendly environment when he could be at home with his or her family. The first month in a new jail, he will be tested by other inmates in the jails. If he survives, he will have a tremendous ministry for the Lord, and will have the opportunity to lead society's worst failures to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Many churches have made fitful starts at a jail ministry and fallen by

the wayside because they did not understand the degree of commitment required and the amount of both work and emotional pain involved. If this is a ministry for you, your first step is to make sure that you have at least two men who are willing to hang in for the long haul.

Religious Programs and Recidivism

There are some studies that have reported an association between religious involvement in prison and low rates of recidivism. Faith based program have been effective for reducing recidivism for certain offenders under certain conditions. There are conflicting research findings on the relationship between Prison Ministry including chaplaincy and recidivism. However, research findings indicate that Prison Ministry programs have resulted in a number of positive outcomes. Firstly, research has consistently found that Prison Ministry programs can have a significant affect in reducing inmate infractions. This is an important finding because infractions impact on staff, inmates and on the smooth running of the prisons as well as having financial implications. Secondly, increased religiosity is associated with lower levels of depression and assist prisoners to adjust to prison life²². Acceptance of religious teaching appears to help prisoners deal with guilt and use religious teaching as a way of establishing a road map for the way they conduct their lives. Further, it is clear that some prisoners establish a relationship with God as a result of being in prison. Thirdly, the chaplains and Prison Ministry team help some prisoners stay connected to their families and community. Fourthly, some prisons are connected with a community as a result of the post release program run by Prison Ministry programs²³.

In Conclusion: God seeks to set prisoners free—not always from their physical prison, but certainly from their imprisonment by sin, ignorance, rebellion, and foolish choices. Jesus identified Himself as the source of this freedom. As this is an important part of God's work, it is

²² Prison Ministry By Lennise Spitale

²³ Exploration of catholic Ministry By. Ruth Webber 2014

an important part of the Church's work as well. Society may intend prison to be a place of punishment, but God can use it as a place of refinement and transformation. He does not give up on those in prison, but pursues them in love. And because the Church is now His representative on earth, prison is where we should be as well calling the sick to the healing touch of our Lord and Savior; still recognizing in them the dignity of God's creation, no matter how far they have fallen; trusting that no one no one is beyond Christ's love and power to redeem. Jesus identifies strongly with the weak, the helpless, and the outcast. He considers the way we treat them to be the way we treat Him. He wants us to identify with them as well, putting ourselves in their shoes and caring for them. A person's past does not have to dictate his future.

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