



Touchstone

Best Practices to Expand Your Reach



Best Practice (BP) | Best practices are specific, discrete ministry activities that measurably increase program scale, effectiveness, and/or efficiency, and can be replicated by other National Ministries. Best practices should be supported by evidence (data).

BP#10: Sensitize Churches to the Needs of Prisoners and their Families

Benefits:

Sensitizing churches to the needs of prisoners and their families is discipleship. Hebrews 13:3 reminds us to, “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.” Jesus’s ministry on earth focused on the marginalized, the forgotten. That is the prisoner and their family. When we invite the church to open its arms and heart to the prisoner and their family, we are reminding them of the call of the body of Christ. The church is called to bear the light of hope, and prisons are often places of abandonment and fear.

Having churches engaged in visiting and contacting prisoners in the areas where prisons are located creates sustainable, effective ministry. The time spent building relationships with prisoners can be redemptive and lay the groundwork for reintegration when a prisoner is released.

Another benefit is that many hands make light work. The more people engaged in caring for prisoners and their families, the more the work can expand — and the deeper the work can go, as well.

Looking beyond someone’s sins and offering mercy, love, and friendship — this is what Christ did for all of us.

Planning Considerations (How to do it):

- Create a list/database of churches.
- Identify any churches currently working with prisoners and what the ministries are to determine how you can work together to invite more churches into the work.
- Build networks of pastors
 - o Connect those that work with prisoners with other pastors for encouragement and mentoring.
- Develop a presentation for churches:
 - o Highlight the Biblical imperative to visit/care for the prisoner.
 - o Show incarceration statistics from your national context.
 - o Address the stigma that prisoners face.
 - o Address the stigma that prisoners’ families face.

POC (whom to contact for more info):



- o Invite formerly incarcerated people to speak about the necessity of connection and hope.
- o Invite current prison volunteers to share their stories.
- Ask for opportunities to present to congregations.
- Develop a printed FAQ (frequently asked questions) guide for churches about prison ministry.
- Hold small discussion groups with churches to answer questions.
- Invite churches to regular practices that are tangible acts of care and solidarity.
 - o Visiting prisons.
 - o Prayer groups for prisoners. Offer to gather prayer requests from prisoners.
 - o Letter writing groups.
 - o Reintegration ministry – inviting those released from prison to join the church.
 - o Host family days at the church for families affected by incarceration.
 - o Transportation for families visiting incarcerated relatives.
 - o Annual Prison Ministry Sunday (which your national ministry could host).
 - o Care groups for families with incarcerated relatives
 - o Debrief sessions for prison volunteers.
- Invite church attendees to come to prison and see a Bible study or course in action.
- Offer to train or mentor churches or individuals to engage in prison ministry.

Required Resources (What you need to do it):

1. Human Resources.

- Someone will need to develop a list of churches.
- Someone will need to coordinate with churches.
- Someone will need to be available to churches as a subject matter expert on prison ministry.
- Someone will need to connect churches/families/prisons/prisoners.

2. Systems.

- You need a system to track churches and engagement.

3. Collateral

- Presentation focused on the Christian call to prison visitation/ministry.
- Printed FAQ about prison work/ministry.

3. Time

- Development of church map in your country.
- Time to establish communication with churches (ex. 15-minute phone call, 1–2-hour visit/lunch/church service).
- Time to build church presentations and collateral.
- Travel time to churches.
- Time to meet with churches/ministry leaders.
- Time to coordinate and host annual Prison Ministry Sunday.

4. Space

- You will need space to conduct presentations with churches or church leadership.

5. Cost

- The cost varies. Considerations include types of collateral (web or print), presentation types, meal/snack expenses, travel expenses, types of communication (email, phone, text).