

January 2025



Reaching a Tipping Point of Transformation in the Prisons of the World

Theory of Change White Paper

There are 12.3 million people incarcerated globally, residing within 19,000, often overcrowded, prison sites. Justice systems around the world struggle to help restore or rehabilitate offenders, children of prisoners or victims alike. Focused on punishment, justice systems unwittingly cultivate the very thing they are trying to prevent. Without incorporating a response to the needs of the whole person, the system perpetuates the cycle of crime.

Since 1979, Prison Fellowship International (PFI) has helped people break this cycle – a pattern which says that crime is passed down the generations, and that continues to ruin lives and communities across the world. From those forgotten in cells in Ghana, to the marginalized in Brazil, to the desperate in Thailand – PFI has been sharing the Good News of Jesus’ love where it is needed most.

PFI works hand-in-hand with indigenous National Ministries in more than 120 countries to help prisoners change their stories, and bring healing, forgiveness and restoration to those affected by crime. For the victims, for the children of prisoners, for prisoners themselves. For our communities and our world – PFI is disrupting the cycle of crime.

But there is more to be done.

OUR THEORY

Humans are born with fundamental needs for survival (e.g., food, clothing, shelter) and flourishing, which concerns happiness and life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships.

Survival needs are essential to human existence, but flourishing needs are not meant to be secondary or less important. From a human flourishing perspective, crime is a sign of brokenness.

That is, although some steal and hurt other people to meet their survival needs, criminological theories tend to attribute crime to human failures in social relationships (e.g., pro-criminal associations and the absence or weakness of social bonds) and mental health (e.g., negative emotions) as well as a criminogenic event or condition (i.e., strain). Further, when a child has an incarcerated parent, many studies show they are 5-10 times more likely to end up in the criminal justice system themselves.

Our vision, to break the cycle of crime and restore lives, worldwide, through Jesus’ love, compels us to find ways to disrupt this cycle. We believe that by reaching enough people in our target communities with a holistic range of impactful programming, global crime can be significantly reduced – **prison by prison, family by family, community by community, country by country.**

To reach a tipping point for change and prove restorative prisons are possible, PFI aims to transform the lives of two million prisoners and their families annually, so they desist, or turn away, from criminal lifestyles.



While multiple factors contribute towards breaking cycles of crime, including creating opportunities for children of prisoners to build their resilience, helping governments and authorities understand alternative approaches to crime and incarceration, and supporting communities to be part of the reintegration process, two are particularly critical within PFI's context:

*Prisoners develop **positive social relationships** that provide **support and belonging** as they leave prison and return to their families and communities.*

*Prisoners form **new positive self-identities** that replace negative past self-identities.*

These ideas interconnect because former prisoners are more likely to seek and form positive social relationships as part of the transformational process of forming a new self-identity.

Imagining a reality where the cycle of crime is truly broken brings into focus a system centered on healing, growth and societal transformation, rather than punishment. In this world, prisons shift from punitive environments to centers of rehabilitation, where the emphasis is on providing individuals with the tools, skills and support needed to make positive contributions to their communities upon release.

TRANSFORMATION ELEMENTS

Prisoners Form Positive Self-Identities

When prisoners change how they see themselves – as a criminal or bad person to God's beloved child – they are more likely to desist from criminal behavior.

They need to make sense of their past lives and weave it into a new narrative that gives meaning for the future. Criminologist Shadd Maruna describes this process as developing a "**redemptive script**" – a person turns their past life, no matter how shameful, into something positive with purpose. Prisoners need to actively choose to put off the old self to be made new in the attitude of their minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Research on participants in PFI programs is also beginning to demonstrate how prisoners can reinterpret their negative past experiences ("old self") as a pathway to create a new identity that can lead to a sense of agency and the discovery of their "new self." This ongoing process can also create a desire to become a good spouse and parent, a productive citizen, and one who intends to put negative experiences to positive use by giving something back to the community and assisting others with the same problems with which they once struggled, what might be called imagining one's best "future self."

Prisoners Are Spiritually Transformed

Spiritual transformation is an ongoing process and requires prisoners to have positive social relationships as they transition back into the community. A prisoner's conversion experience alone is insufficient to maintain a crime-free lifestyle. Healthy (Godly) communities and relationships provide support for prisoners as they reorient themselves to life outside prison. Importantly, these communities also need to hold former prisoners accountable to stay away from bad habits or unhealthy relationships that negatively influence them. The conversion provides a bridge to healthy relationships and resources that could lead to a tipping point in an individual's life.

Without the engagement of children, families and communities, however, the

cycle of crime will continue. This is why programs that empower and engage children to make alternative lifestyle decisions, as well as engaging churches and other community institutions to be able to be part of the re-entry process cannot be minimized.

Prisoners Form Positive Social Relationships

Positive relationships do not form naturally and need to start well before prisoners are released. Incarceration isolates and cuts off prisoners from their families and other close relationships, which already may have been strained at the time of incarceration. Prisoners need opportunities to connect with their families and church so these relationships might grow and, in some cases, heal.

Communities in this reality play a proactive role in reintegration. Churches are another group that, as an expression of Jesus' love, can embrace former prisoners as they transition into life outside prison. Local businesses offer training programs and apprenticeships, faith-based and community organizations provide support networks, and mentors guide former inmates as they rebuild their lives. Reintegration becomes a collective responsibility, reducing recidivism by ensuring individuals returning from prison are met with acceptance, encouragement and opportunity rather than stigma and isolation.

Empowered Children Experience Generational Change

In this reality, children of prisoners, supported by family-oriented programs, attend school regularly and are provided with mentors, counseling and enrichment opportunities. They experience security, knowing their parents are working toward a better future. For these children, the stigma of incarceration is lessened, and they are empowered to pursue education and

careers rather than feeling destined to repeat cycles of crime. With support, these children become resilient, confident and motivated to achieve their goals.

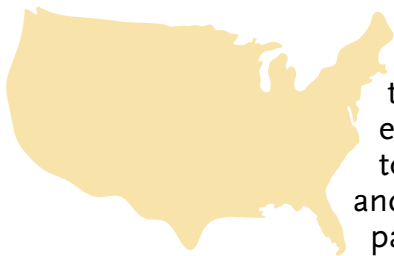
SATURATION MODELS

There are credible instances around the world where saturation of a prison environment with meaningful, impactful programming and support for those who are incarcerated is happening at significant scale. Several comprehensive models serve as lighthouses, or beacons of hope, for what alternative justice systems and programs can look like.

The **Association for the Protection and Assistance of the Convicted (APAC)** prison model is an innovative approach to incarceration that originated by Prison Fellowship Brazil, and focuses on rehabilitation, humane treatment and community reintegration. Unlike traditional prisons, APAC facilities are managed with minimal security and emphasize dignity, responsibility and personal development. Prisoners, referred to as "recovering individuals," are encouraged to participate in vocational training, educational programs and psychological counseling to foster positive behavioral change. Staff members work to create a supportive environment where mutual respect and self-discipline are core values. The APAC model has shown promising results in terms of reducing recidivism rates and promoting successful reintegration, proving to be a potential alternative to conventional punitive prison systems. APAC facilities tailored for other country contexts have opened in Germany, The Netherlands, Italy, Malawi and Colombia. In APAC facilities globally, the opportunity for transformation 100% of the population.



In the United States, **Prison Fellowship Ministries (PFM) Academies** are faith-based, in-prison rehabilitation programs that offer transformative education and life-skills training to inmates, focusing on restoration and societal reintegration. These Academies operate as intensive, community-based programs in the prison environment, guiding participants through character development, moral education and emotional healing. The curriculum is structured around principles of accountability, personal growth and responsibility, integrating spiritual teachings to inspire hope and change. Additionally, PFM emphasizes the importance of mentorship, pairing inmates with trained volunteers who offer guidance, support and practical advice. The program extends beyond prison walls, providing transitional support to help former inmates rebuild their lives, avoid recidivism and contribute positively to their communities. Through this holistic approach, PFM's Academies aim not only to reduce



recidivism rates but to foster personal transformation, empowering participants to embrace new identities and healthier, productive paths forward.

THE 20% MODEL

While comprehensive support, faith-inspired programming and skills training are proven to be highly impactful within a prison environment, research suggests that complete saturation may not be essential to achieve transformative change. Drawing on principles like the **Law of Diffusion of Innovation**, the **Pareto Principle** and the concept of the **Tipping Point**, PFI sees that the "20% theory" could, and in many cases already is, effectively applying to prison contexts globally.

LAW OF DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION

This principle suggests that social change and the adoption of new ideas spread through populations happens in predictable stages. According to this model, a small percentage of "innovators" and "early adopters" will first embrace new concepts, and gradually, the rest of the population follows as the change becomes more normalized. In this context, if a core 20% of the prison population meaningfully engages with the Gospel, the 'living word' or the mystery of the Holy Spirit, and experiences true identity transformation, they represent the innovators and early adopters. As they begin to live out principles of personal accountability, identity transformation and reconciliation, this example sets a new social norm that others in the prison can observe. The effect ripples outwards, gradually influencing the behaviors and attitudes of the larger prison population.

PARETO PRINCIPLE (80/20 RULE)

The Pareto Principle holds that roughly 80% of effects come from 20% of causes. Applying this rule here, PFI theorizes that if 20% of the prison population undergoes a meaningful transformation, this small group could influence 80% of the overall behavioral outcomes in the prison, such as reductions in violence or an increase in rehabilitative behavior. The 20% who engage deeply with the Gospel would be responsible for creating a disproportionate positive effect on the broader prison culture, such as encouraging personal responsibility, improved relationships and de-escalating conflicts.

THE TIPPING POINT

The Tipping Point, a phrase used since the 1950s and popularized by author Malcom Gladwell in his 2000 book, *The Tipping Point*, suggests that small, well-placed changes can reach a critical mass and trigger widespread transformation. In a prison context, once a certain percentage of individuals (in this case, the 20% core group) experiences significant personal transformation, this group could reach a tipping point that dramatically alters the social environment of the prison. Through peer influence, visible changes in behavior and a reformed sense of community responsibility, the broader prison population could be drawn toward these changes, potentially resulting in less violence and a shift toward accountability.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Successful models of Gospel-centered programs have been identified not only through PFI's proprietary programming, but through the study of experts in the field of human flourishing and offender rehabilitation, including Dr. Byron Johnson and Sung Joon Jang.

"Love in action," or diaconia, offers a compassionate, human-centered approach to prison ministry that can open doors and build trust in ways that structured programming alone often cannot.

Unlike programs that focus strictly on skill-building or behavioral modification, diaconia emphasizes personal connection, genuine care and the holistic well-being of prisoners. By meeting immediate, practical needs – such as providing spiritual support, emotional encouragement and basic resources – this approach creates an atmosphere of trust and safety, breaking down barriers that structured interventions may leave untouched.

A hybrid approach that combines diaconia with structured programs leverages the strengths of both: the empathetic connection of diaconia builds rapport and fosters receptiveness, while structured programming offers tools and strategies for lasting change. This dual model not only addresses immediate needs but also empowers prisoners to rebuild their lives, fostering real, sustainable transformation rooted in community and support.

Quantitative Evidence

The Prisoner's Journey Longitudinal Study

Successful models of Gospel-centered programs have been identified not only through PFI's proprietary programming but also through the study of experts in the field of human flourishing and offender rehabilitation, including Dr. Byron Johnson and Sung Joon Jang.

In 2021, Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion was commissioned to conduct a comprehensive, longitudinal evaluation of The Prisoner's Journey (TPJ), one of PFI's in-prison evangelism and discipleship programs. Empirical evidence was found that proved that this program truly transforms prisoners' lives. Findings show that through increasing religious engagement, TPJ increases indicators of successful rehabilitation and actions that typically lead to positive culture change in prisons. Findings include:



Identity Transformation – Program participation was positively related to crystallization of discontent, a sense of meaning and purpose in life, along with positive virtues, including forgiveness, accountability and self-control. Prisoners experienced increased cognitive motivation for identity transformation, perceived presence of meaning and purpose in life, and virtue development.



Emotional Transformation – Identity transformation variables contributed to emotional well-being by lowering depression, anxiety, anger and frustration. Interpersonal aggression was reduced by forgiveness and accountability as they are both related to empathy. Program participants become more respectful and obedient, leading to a "culture change" in prisons.



Responsibility and Accountability – Program participants were better at taking active responsibility, as they could acknowledge their wrongs and fault. Responsibility-taking helps prisoners rebuild agency, establish positive relationships with family and avoid committing crimes after their release.

The Prisoner's Journey Pre-Post Survey

The ongoing survey of incarcerated individuals who have graduated from TPJ has also revealed encouraging results about lasting transformation in an increase in prayer life, hope for the future, family visits and reduced acts of violence.

PFI, in partnership with Dr. Byron Johnson, created and launched an internal study to evaluate TPJ's ongoing effectiveness through quantitative evidence in the lives of program graduates. The survey is administered to a participant before they begin the course and then again after course graduation. To date, data from over 2,500 prisoners has been collected.

The results are clear:



Prayer Habits – Before program participation, 67% reported they rarely or never prayed. After course completion, only 1.7% reported they pray rarely or not at all. 67% now report that they pray at least daily.



Hopefulness – Before program participation, 79% reported they felt negatively about the future. After course completion, 94% expressed positivity and hope for their future.



Life Satisfaction – On a scale of 0-10 for happiness levels, participants averaged 2, indicating general life dissatisfaction. After course completion, the average was 7.5.



Violent Acts – 69% had committed a violent act within 30 days of survey completion. After course completion, only 22% reported the same outcome – a 68% reduction.

Qualitative Evidence

Reports have been shared from across the globe with accounts from prison officials about the direct correlation between the presence of faith-inspired programming in a prison and the significant improvement in prisoner behavior and shift in culture behind walls.

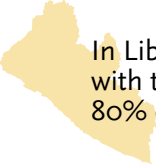
The positive impact of PFI programs, such as **The Prisoner's Journey (TPJ)** and **Sycamore Tree Project (STP)**, can be seen in prison cultures and prisoner behavior across several countries, including Lebanon, Liberia, The Gambia, Uruguay, Zimbabwe and Eswatini. These programs are based on principles of accountability, reconciliation, and personal transformation, often drawing on Christian teachings, but they have also **attracted participation from non-Christian inmates, particularly Muslims** in Lebanon.

Reduced violence and increased peace among prisoners, as seen in Lebanon's Roumieh Prison and Liberia's Monrovia Central Prison.


In Zimbabwe, TPJ's transformative effect is seen in **behavior changes** and **improved relationships** between inmates and staff.

In The Gambia, STP **penetrated the entire prison population**, phasing the program out due to the lack of new participants.

Uruguay saw notable **reductions in violence**, with governmental support growing as a result of the program's impact.



In Liberia, **recidivism dropped** significantly, with the program being responsible for around 80% of this positive change.



In Eswatini, evenings are filled with the **sound of Bible pages flipping** in place of lots of noise and vulgar language.

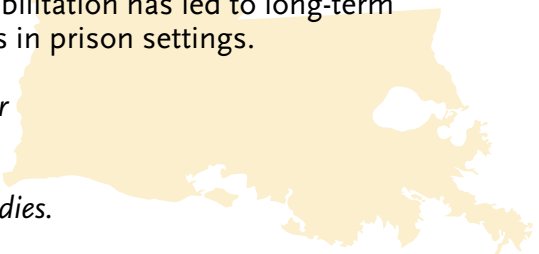
Across these countries, the programs are noted for their ability to **rehabilitate prisoners**, leading to improved inmate-staff relationships and **changes in prison culture**. Governments and prison authorities often attribute these improvements to the structured and reflective nature of the programs, which allow prisoners to express themselves, take responsibility for their actions, and develop new interpersonal skills. The use of the "talking piece" in STP, for example, is a simple yet powerful tool for teaching respect and fostering peaceful dialogue among prisoners.

Some national judicial systems have recognized the programs' effectiveness, using course completion as a criterion for early release.

This underscores the program's credibility and wide-reaching impact on both individual inmates and broader prison systems.

In *Religion and Misconduct in "Angola" Prison*, the transformation of prisoners at Angola Prison in Louisiana is examined through the impact of religious conversion and participation in faith-based programs. The study finds that inmates who engage in religious activities, such as Bible studies, worship services and faith-based mentoring, experience profound changes in self-identity. These prisoners begin to see themselves less as "criminals" and more as

"new men in Christ." This identity shift leads to tangible changes in behavior, including reduced rates of violence and misconduct within the prison. Angola, once one of the most violent prisons in the United States, has seen a significant cultural shift as religious programs have encouraged rehabilitation over recidivism. Johnson emphasizes that the prison's unique faith-based environment has played a crucial role in fostering accountability, hope, and personal transformation among inmates. The study aligns with the broader findings in Lebanon, Liberia, Zimbabwe and other countries, where the combination of spiritual reflection, personal accountability and structured rehabilitation has led to long-term culture changes in prison settings.



See Appendix for a more detailed breakdown of country case studies.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Continuity of program delivery is a key factor to effective implementation, outputs and outcomes of prison-based programming. Over the past decade, PFI has worked intentionally to glean a spectrum of proven best practices from the field, for integration across the globe. This has proven wildly successful, especially when launching PFI programs in new countries. Many stumbling blocks to program implementation are anticipated and therefore preempted by strategy.

- Program access to prison is restrictive in nature. In contexts adverse to Christianity and religious programming, this is a key challenge.
- Prison volunteer access is restrictive and volatile based on a multitude of factors: political unrest, election cycles, prison staff transfers and individual permissions.

- Insufficient staffing of correctional facilities is a constant challenge, one exaggerated by seasonal holidays.
- Mobilization and management of volunteer workforce is a constant challenge to maintain program continuity.
- Financial resourcing is a challenge to reaching and maintaining a national tipping point year over year.

While powerful, The Prisoner’s Journey and Sycamore Tree Project programming are insufficient to engage two million prisoners per year.

More prisoners and families must be reached if a decrease global crime levels and its effects on societies worldwide is truly to become a reality.

This is why PFI plans to identify and promote other innovative, evidenced-based programs like APAC. Taken together, we believe we will achieve a tipping point in countries that serve as "beach heads" in our campaign to break the cycle of crime.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implement Current Programs to Saturate Markets

Prison Fellowship International uses its evidence-based programming to build capacity within its global association of national affiliates to deliver effective and scalable programs. These programs are created and tested and provide a range of program interventions that National Ministries (NMs) can deploy to make a profound holistic difference in the lives of prisoners, children of prisoners and victims of crime.

Program partnerships, as they are designed, build organizational capacity by increasing ministry effectiveness, scale and sustainability. This organizational change enhances the sustainability of the organizations and deepens their impact for years. In fact, 76% of NMs that participate in a program partnership with PFI demonstrably increase their rate of growth, their capacity to minister in the prisons of their country, and their long-term sustainability. Through the partnership with PFI, a set of capacity building interventions are released, targeting specific areas of organizational development and boosting performance.

Deployment of program partnerships is a tried and tested way to ensure NM growth, reaching hundreds of thousands of more prisoners and families annually.

New Program Design and Adaptation

PFI plans to launch its first-ever Center of Excellence (COE) and a third-party, multi-year study to measure the efficacy of international prison programming in offender rehabilitation, recidivism reduction and general correctional reform. The COE is the lynchpin of the PFI journey to fulfill its vision. The pilot program, based in Colombia and launched in collaboration with nationally-ranked Pepperdine University, Prison Fellowship Colombia, the Colombian National Penitentiary and Prison Institute and the Colombian Senate, will work together to evaluate 12 faith-based programs, working inside and outside of prison with prisoners, families and communities to help explain how people can live crime-free, a question that’s never been answered until now. These findings begin to unfold a giant laboratory in Colombia. The data collected will help create projects and legislative initiatives aimed at making rehabilitation the standard, not the exception, in Colombian facilities.



By tracking prisoners while studying their families and children, puzzle pieces will come together that help explain how people can live crime-free.

As a hub for innovation, best practices, evaluation and training, the COE will position PFI as a leader in the global campaign to impact prison systems around the world, one country at a time. It will serve as an innovation hotbed and catalyst for accelerating the adoption of evidence-based best practices through the PFI global network. This includes leadership development, enhancing public awareness and deepening cultural and institutional influence within each country.

PFI's commitment to rigorous research is an attempt to be both accountable as well as a good steward of the resources and investments made in this important work.

Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement

Prison Fellowship International, chaplaincies, the local church, strategic partners and prison officials in key countries around the world each have a unique and essential role in engaging with prisoners, creating a comprehensive support network that addresses various aspects of incarceration and rehabilitation.

- ***Chaplaincies:*** Serving as spiritual leaders within correctional facilities, chaplains provide essential pastoral care and guidance. They create a safe space for prisoners to explore their faith, offer counseling during difficult times, and facilitate worship services and Bible studies. Chaplains are uniquely positioned to build relationships with inmates, helping them find hope and purpose during their incarceration. Their presence is vital in addressing the spiritual and emotional needs of prisoners, which can be a crucial factor in their rehabilitation.

- ***Local Churches:*** Local congregations play a key role in fostering community connections and support networks for former inmates. By partnering with non-profits and chaplaincies, churches can offer mentorship programs, discipleship opportunities and support groups designed to help individuals transition back into society. They can also advocate for prisoners' rights and work to change public perceptions about incarceration, promoting a message of forgiveness and redemption. Through their outreach efforts, local churches can provide ongoing support and encouragement, ensuring that individuals feel valued and accepted within their communities.
- ***Prison Officials and Staff:*** Collaborating with prison administration and staff is essential for the success of programs aimed at supporting prisoners. This partnership ensures that initiatives are effectively integrated into the daily operations of the facility, fostering an environment conducive to rehabilitation and growth.
 - ***Understanding Protocols and Policies:*** Organizations can gain insights into the specific protocols, security measures and policies that govern the facility. This understanding allows for the design of programs that are not only effective but also compliant with institutional regulations. Such alignment reduces the risk of misunderstandings or disruptions that could hinder programming.
 - ***Building Trust and Credibility:*** Establishing a strong relationship with prison staff can enhance the credibility of external organizations. When staff members recognize the value of a program and see it as beneficial for the prisoners, they are more likely to support its implementation. This trust can lead to increased participation from inmates, as staff members can encourage them to engage in opportunities that promote personal development and spiritual growth.

- **Facilitating Access and Resources:** Collaboration with prison administration often provides access to vital resources, such as meeting spaces, materials and even staff support. These resources can significantly enhance the quality of programming offered to prisoners. Additionally, administrative support can streamline logistics, ensuring that programs are delivered smoothly and efficiently.
- **Promoting a Positive Culture:** Working together fosters a culture of cooperation and mutual respect within the facility. When prison staff, administration and outside organizations collaborate, it sends a message to inmates that there are people invested in their well-being and future. This can be transformative, helping to shift the atmosphere from one of isolation to one of hope and opportunity.

Ultimately, collaboration with prison administration and staff creates a **sustainable framework** for ongoing support and programming. By embedding these initiatives within the institutional culture, organizations can help cultivate a lasting impact on the lives of prisoners, contributing to **lower recidivism rates** and fostering a sense of community both inside and outside of prison.

Together with Prison Fellowship International affiliates, the Chaplaincy, the local church and other similar strategic partners, these organizations create a multifaceted approach to prisoner engagement, addressing not only the immediate needs of inmates but also **fostering long-term transformation** and reintegration into society. This collaboration not only enriches the lives of prisoners but also strengthens communities as they embrace the principles of compassion, redemption and hope.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

To measure the impact of a faith-based program on **prison culture and inmate outcomes**, various studies, including Dr. Byron Johnson's work, which has extensively evaluated faith-based interventions in correctional facilities, can be looked at. These programs typically aim to reduce recidivism, improve inmate behavior and positively impact the prison environment, often focusing on providing inmates with moral guidance, social support and skills to facilitate reintegration into society.

Separately, supporting **children of incarcerated parents** is crucial, as they face unique challenges including emotional stress, stigma and an increased risk of adverse life outcomes. Extending faith-based programming to children of prisoners can provide these children with a support network, improve their emotional resilience and help break the cycle of intergenerational incarceration. Similar metrics can be adapted for assessing the impact of such programs on children of prisoners, using insights from studies and Dr. Byron Johnson's approach to measuring outcomes.



Prison culture and inmate outcome measurement considerations include:

Academic Performance and School Attendance: Measures improvements in academic performance, school attendance, and engagement in education.

Emotional and Psychological Well-Being: Evaluates the child's emotional health, including reductions in anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation.

Social Skills and Behavior: Measures social skill development, including improved peer relationships, conflict resolution skills, and reduction in negative behavior.

Sense of Identity and Self-Worth: Measures self-esteem, self-confidence, and a sense of identity independent of parental incarceration.

Community and Peer Support Networks: Assess the child's access to a supportive community, friendships and connections outside of the family.

Spiritual Growth and Ethical Development: Measures spiritual growth and the child's development of moral and ethical values.

Reduced Risk of Juvenile Delinquency: Track's the child's risk of engaging in delinquent behavior or encountering the juvenile justice system.



Children of incarcerated parents measurement considerations include:

Recidivism Rates: Measures the percentage of inmates who re-offend or are reincarcerated after release.

Support and Community Building: Measures inmates' access to social support networks within and outside prison, including relationships with volunteers, mentors, and family connections.

Moral and Spiritual Development: Assesses changes in inmates' moral perspectives, spirituality, and engagement in personal reflection and growth.

Post-Release Employment and Community Reintegration: Evaluates employment rates, housing stability and community support for inmates following release.

Psychological Well-Being and Resilience: Measures psychological outcomes such as hope, resilience, emotional regulation and mental health.

Cultural Impact on Prison Environment: Assesses the overall culture, relationships, and morale within the prison, influenced by inmates' and staff's attitudes and behaviors.

Family Reconciliation and Improved Relationships: Measures improvements in inmates' relationships with family members and commitment to family responsibilities.

This theory of change aligns with the idea that cultural shifts often start with a small, motivated core group and grow exponentially once certain thresholds are met. If 20% of the prison population meaningfully engages with the Gospel, their **transformed identities** and newfound sense of accountability could catalyze **broader cultural change**.

Based on the Law of Diffusion of Innovation, they would lead by example, encouraging others to follow. The Pareto Principle suggests that this small group's influence could account for **significant improvements in prison dynamics**. Finally, as this movement reaches a tipping point, the **entire prison environment could transform**, with reduced violence and a more rehabilitative culture taking hold.

In other words, if 20% of prisoners meaningfully engage with the Gospel or become involved in faith-inspired, evidenced-based programming in prison, they can create a “tipping point” within the entire prison system.

Prisoners would begin to share the Gospel spontaneously with other prisoners, which would spread virally from one cell to another, transforming the prison from the inside out.

PFI doesn't expect to achieve a tipping point in every country simultaneously. Instead, the organization's strategy is one of establishing footholds in countries around the world where it can gain access

and saturate prisons with evidence-based programming. These countries then become examples for the rest of the world, lighthouses, demonstrating that restorative programming, does indeed, work.

Through expansion of program partnerships, the launch and expansion of Centers of Excellence, and identification and adoption of evidence-based best-practices, as well as engaging in meaningful and strategic partnerships with the chaplaincy, like organizations, the local church and prison officials,

Prison Fellowship International believes that a global reduction in crime levels is possible within the next ten years.



APPENDIX

Detailed qualitative stories of impact of faith-inspired, evidence-based programming in prisons worldwide.

Louisiana, United States

In Religion and Misconduct in "Angola" Prison, Byron Johnson and Sung Joon Jang provide a compelling case study of the transformative power of faith-based programs at Louisiana State Penitentiary (Angola Prison), specifically focusing on death row inmates. Angola, once known as one of the most violent prisons in America, experienced a dramatic shift in culture due to the introduction of religious programming and the influence of inmate-led ministries.

The authors highlight how religious involvement and participation in faith-based programs significantly reduced instances of violence and misconduct, even among the most hardened offenders, including those on death row. The presence of seminary-trained inmates who took on roles as spiritual leaders helped cultivate an environment of peace, reflection, and rehabilitation. These inmate ministers regularly counsel their peers, offering spiritual guidance and helping fellow prisoners confront their past actions through accountability and forgiveness.

Johnson and Jang found that death row inmates who were actively engaged in religious programs exhibited far fewer disciplinary problems than those who did not participate. This was a notable change, as death row prisoners are often viewed as having little to lose and prone to volatile behavior. However, through these faith-based interventions, many inmates found a sense of purpose, hope, and personal transformation, despite the finality of their sentences. These changes mirrored the positive outcomes observed in other global

contexts where Prison Fellowship International programs, like The Prisoner's Journey and The Sycamore Tree Project, have been implemented.

The study at Angola Prison provides an example of how religious programs can bring about meaningful behavioral changes in even the most high-risk inmates. It aligns with the broader findings in Lebanon, Liberia, Zimbabwe, and other countries, where the combination of spiritual reflection, personal accountability, and structured rehabilitation has led to long-term culture changes in prison settings.

Lebanon

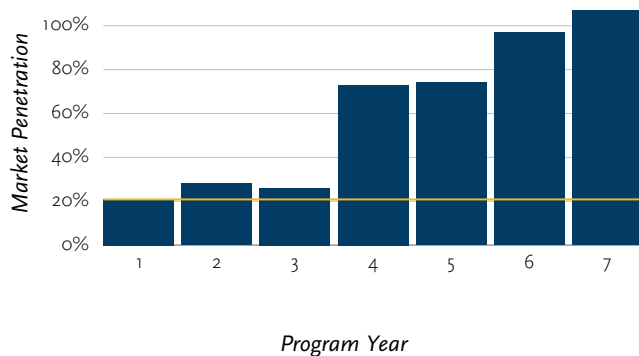
Prison Fellowship Lebanon enjoys working in the prison as prisoners have a desire and willingness to come to their programs and the atmosphere is positive. Since PFI programs The Prisoner's Journey and The Sycamore Tree Project (an eight-week program that joins offenders and victims to discuss accountability, increasing awareness of how crime creates harm began), the atmosphere in the convicted area of the prison is much more peaceful, and there are fewer riots and violence. The remand area is more violent and serves as a control group as PFLB doesn't have sustained access. Prison authorities and Prison Fellowship Lebanon attribute 100% of this atmospheric change to these programs.

Because TPJ and The Sycamore Tree Project (STP) are known to improve the behavior of prisoners, the Lebanese government uses course completion as a determining factor when assessing prisoner eligibility for early release. Onsite interviews concluded that "judges recognize the transformative impact of TPJ and STP."

For seven consecutive years, between 20%-100% of the prisoner population inside Roumieh (Convicted) Prison

graduated from TPJ and STP, annually. PF Lebanon’s President reports “Graduates consistently express how much the program has a direct and positive impact on them and how this program was a turning point in their life. Even prison staff attended program sessions and they were impressed by the prisoners who showed commitment and respect for this program. These prisoners showed a dramatic change in their behavior after the program when they became very peaceful among each other. The rate of arguments and problems has also decreased. Almost all the prisoners have agreed that the little talking piece has controlled them and taught them how to listen and respect the other prisoners. According to the prisoner participants, neither the authority of the prison staff nor the prison’s bars could control them as much as the talking piece and program methodologies have now taught them about how to control themselves.”

Below is a depiction of the percent of prisoners inside Roumieh Prison that complete TPJ and STP, annually. The consistent program penetration of at least 20% of this closed prisoner population is attributed to improved prisoner behavior and healthier prison culture.



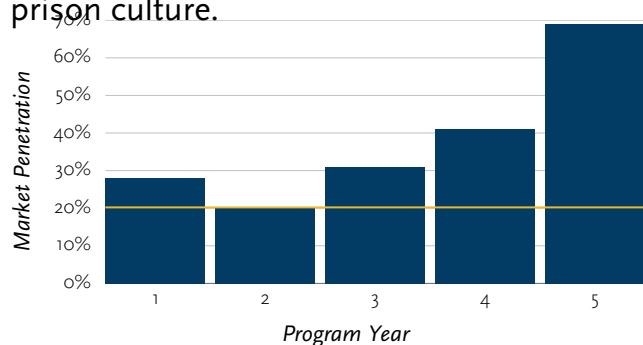
Hussein, a graduate of the STP program serving a 27-year sentence in Lebanon, states STP allows prisoners "to express their opinions freely and have private time for them to have social and spiritual benefits from this program so they can achieve peace whether behind bars or

outside the jail. [Prisoners] learned to respect each other even with smallest tool in STP –the talking piece.” This program element "organizes conversations in the most appropriate way" and has "the capability to control the prisoners even more than the authorities.”

TPJ is attractive not only to Christian inmates, but also to Muslim inmates who started participating more openly this year, despite pressure from other Muslim prisoners not to enroll in TPJ. Muslim interest and follow-through, despite resistance, is evidence of culture change.

Liberia

Since The Prisoner’s Journey was introduced in Monrovia Central Prison, there has been reduced violence and calm in the prison. PF Liberia reports most gang leaders have been transformed. Prisoners now address their issues calmly because of the interpersonal skills they have learned through TPJ. Relationships between correctional officers and inmates have also improved, prisoners are seen in a new light because they became trained TPJ facilitators. The Justice Department is urging PF Liberia to continue the program, calling it “one of the leading social programs in the country.” The recidivism rate has dropped to around 10% (~30-40% before). PF Liberia determined The Prisoner’s Journey was responsible for approximately 80% of these positive changes. Below is a depiction of the percent of prisoners inside Monrovia Central Prison that complete TPJ, annually. The consistent program penetration of at least 20% of this closed prisoner population is attributed to improved prisoner behavior and a healthier prison culture.



The Gambia

In a tiny country like The Gambia, which boasts only 3 (sparsely populated) prisons, the correlation between PFI's STP program and reduced recidivism rates was easy to prove quickly.

In The Gambia, immense support for the program quickly ballooned, born from the positive impact of the program on prison culture, and in the individual behavior of course graduates. Stakeholders in the country quickly took notice of the program after its launch, applauding its positive impact and ability to transform prisoners. The Program Coordinator reported, "Whatever we are asking in the name of STP, the prison authorities are giving us, because of the transformative impact they are seeing from the program. The ministry's credibility in the prison system has increased because of this program. Even prisoners themselves are witnessing a transformative change in their peers. One prisoner was not at all interested in enrolling in STP. But he changed his mind and asked to join the program after seeing the incredible change in his cellmate, from taking STP."

In The Gambia, an informal study was conducted to evaluate the recidivism rates of STP graduates compared to non-STP graduates. In one of the nation's three prisons, Mile 2, on average, 95% of the prison population are re-offenders. Reports indicated that once released, very little time passes before a released prisoner returns to prison. It appears all of the April 2018 STP graduates have not been re-arrested. The STP Program Coordinator began recording data to compare the re-arrest rates of STP graduates compared to non-STP graduates, to present evidence, on a national level, of program impact. Findings supported that when prisoners participated in the STP program, they did not immediately re-offend. The STP program is now defunct in

The Gambia because nearly the entire national prison population was penetrated with STP. There were not enough new prisoners to continue delivering the program in a structured way.

Uruguay

In Uruguay, the Commissioner of Prison stated that the "lack of opportunities for rehabilitation and integration" was leading to "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment" of the prisoners.

When TPJ first launched in Uruguay, Josua Fernandez, the Director at Minas Prison reported "The level of violence has definitely come down at Minas because of TPJ...there have been only two incidences of violence at Minas Prison [in the last 12 months]". At the time of this onsite interview, 59% of the prisoner population inside Minas participated in TPJ.

Positive behavioral change in prisoners, as a result of in-prison programming, quickly led to PF Uruguay receiving outstanding government support. Montevideo municipal government has donated office space to PF Uruguay for program implementation. The municipal government also agreed to fund PF Uruguay's program staff. PF Uruguay has a formal partnership with the municipal government in support of prison program implementation.

Comcar Unit 4 Prison

After six years of TPJ delivery in Comcar Prison, 20% of the prison population began participating in the program annually. In the same year, PFI conducted an onsite interview with the Commissioner of Comcar Unit 4 Prison, Jorge Camargo. He reported, "The programs have been of great help in carrying out socio-educational tasks. They have been well accepted by the prisoners and the staff who work with them. There are behavioral benefits for [the prisoners]. These programs have rehabilitated pavilions [sections of the prison] that were

forgotten, which generated a growing interest in the courses from the prisoners.”

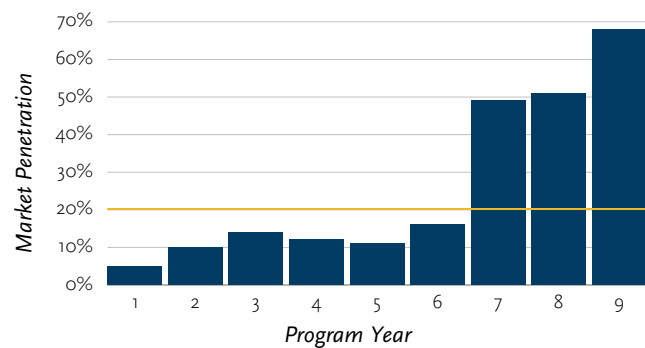
Comcar Prison staff member Flavia Lopez recalled “a TPJ graduate that would talk about the big change in his life, of how he was away from conflicts thanks to [the program]. I listened to his words carefully but with resistance, as I knew him as a dangerous inmate. A year later, I assumed a new role at Canelones Prison. There, I was pleasantly surprised with the positive transformations occurring in the course participants. I saw how inmates who were demanding and problematic began to lower their anxiety and violence. This change started to become visible in the sectors they inhabited and in dealing with prison staff and peers. They worried about having decent accommodation spaces. They mediated in conflicts, always trying to solve the situations peacefully and inviting others to join this new form of being. It is very difficult to express how highly beneficial these practices are for prisoners, their families and the system in general. I thank PFI for the opportunity to witness this work and will work to provide the program to all facilities.”

For the last seven years, Prison Fellowship Uruguay has graduated 45-100% of the prisoner population in Canelones Prison.

For six years, only 5-16% of the prisoners inside Comcar Prison graduated from TPJ. However, in each of the last three years, PF Uruguay has reached a TPJ “tipping point” in Comcar. Despite many reports of transformation, violence among prisoners persists. In December 2023, Santiago Vasquez (Comcar Unidad 4 Prison), 6 prisoners died in a fire determined to have been ignited by rivaling prisoners; some surviving prisoners were later charged with murder. In late September 2024, a similar fire was presumably started again by rivaling prisoners; at least 6 prisoners have died so far as a result.

Continuity of achieving a “tipping point” within a single, closed prison is a key factor to achieving long-term culture change. Further, this prison is divided into subunits or pavilions. A national ministry could achieve tipping points in closed subsections of a single prison, while culture change has not yet occurred in the unpenetrated pavilions.

Below is a depiction of the percent of prisoners inside Comcar Prison that complete TPJ and STP, annually. The consistent program penetration of at least 20% of this closed prisoner population is attributed to improved prisoner behavior and healthier prison culture.



Zimbabwe

In 2022, PFI launched The Prisoner’s Journey in Zimbabwe. Never before had the >20K men and women behind Zimbabwe’s prison walls been able to access PFI’s uniquely designed journey through the Gospel of Mark. In the first year, The Prisoner’s Journey launched inside 10 of the nation’s 73 prisons. Per government procedure, prison directors from all 73 prisons submit monthly reports to the National General Chaplain of Prisons. During an interview with the director, he explained in amazement that when TPJ first launched concurrently in 10 of the 73 prisons, it was immediately clear that something unusual was occurring. As a direct result of implementing a highly effective, evidence-based program (TPJ), reports from the TPJ prisons demonstrated greater levels of cooperation between

inmates and correctional staff. Acts of aggression and violence among prisoners decreased. Prisoners engaged in the program began demonstrating signs of transformation. Some prisoners were selected to undergo training to become a TPJ program facilitator, alongside external, church volunteers. Empowering the incarcerated to attain training credentials, as well as assume responsibilities related to course delivery and coordination, resulted in a new dynamic within the prison. Compared to the 63 prisons without TPJ, reporting from the 10 TPJ prisons demonstrated increases in positive behavior, trust, and a healthier climate, while instances of aggression, violence, and distrust waned.

All other non-TPJ prisons became control prisons when TPJ launched in ~10. The national chaplain reported positive changes in the ~10 TPJ prisons, while the "control" prisons did not show positive change.

In its most recent quarterly report, PF Zimbabwe explains how “game-changing” it is when it establishes a core group of trained internal (prisoner) volunteers in each prison implementing TPJ. Recently, a special group of prisoners were selected and trained as TPJ facilitators for the first time in a maximum-security prison. PF Zimbabwe reports how notable it is “that internal facilitators in maximum security prisons are now owning the [TPJ] program, ensuring that the program standards are maintained...They [prisoner course facilitators] are working well under the supervision of the chaplains and/or rehabilitation officers, [as well as working well alongside released] inmates” now serving as external facilitators. (It is also noteworthy that in scenarios like this, the TPJ program is birthing stronger connections between those inside prison and those on the outside. Prisoners participating in TPJ form connections with both church-based volunteers as well as

released prisoners—both are new connections to the outside for the incarcerated. Listen to the partial recording [here](#).

In the most recent year of program delivery, PF Zimbabwe delivered TPJ in three maximum-security prisons. For each of these prisons, the following is the percent of the (closed) prison population that graduated from the 8-session TPJ course in PF Zimbabwe’s most recent program year:

- Chikurubi Maximum Prison (28% completed TPJ in 12 months)
- Khami Maximum Prison (20% of the prison population completed TPJ in 12 months)
- Hwahwa Maximum Prison (23% of the prison population completed TPJ in 12 months)

In 2024, just two years after the first TPJ session began in Zimbabwe, the program is active in >25 prisons—with 20% of Zimbabwe’s national prison population (21K prisoners in Zimbabwe) graduating from TPJ.

As one example of many, Justin T. is a prisoner inside Hwahwa Prison, who regularly exhibited aggressive behavior. His records demonstrate altercations with other inmates were a common occurrence. After completing TPJ, however, there were reports of his changed behavior. Justin shared he “was a very harsh person before joining this program. If someone wronged me, I always took revenge, no matter how badly someone pleaded with me for mercy. I have been to the disciplinary office numerous times to be punished.” But during the TPJ course, Justin said he “could feel the toughness drain out of my body...that was the turning point. I looked at myself and started condemning my behavior. People in my cell are surprised by the way I am behaving these days.”



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About Prison Fellowship International

Since 1979, Prison Fellowship International has helped prisoners experience transformation from the inside out through the healing power of the Gospel. Its mission is to transform the lives of prisoners, their families and victims through a global network of ministry partners.

