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The Faith Factor and Prisoner Reentry[†]

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Abstract

Between 1980 and 2006, the U.S. prison population increased by 467 percent (from 319,598 to 1,492,973). The inevitable increase in the number of released prisoners returning to communities across the country (approximately 700,000 ex-prisoners per year) has created a national debate about how best to handle the prisoner reentry crisis. Religious activities can play a positive role in the lives of prisoners while they are incarcerated, and research shows that religiosity is associated with reducing negative outcomes and promoting prosocial behavior. Consequently, faith-based organizations can play an important role in helping to reduce recidivism. A multifaceted approach to prisoner reentry would require new public-private partnerships and a significant influx of volunteers, many of whom could be drawn from religious congregations. Intermediary groups are necessary to bring a comprehensive prisoner reentry effort to scale because these organizations serve as the bridge between ex-prisoners and the many social service providers and governmental agencies that are active in the areas of employment, housing, education, and counseling. Intermediaries can provide technical assistance and oversight as well as offering training to strengthen faith-based and community-based organizational capacity.

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As long as prisons have existed, prisoners have had difficulty in transitioning back into society. In the United States, the process of reintegrating ex-prisoners into society has been a problem in need of a solution for many decades. What is different now is the sheer number of prisoners returning to American communities each year (Osborne and Solomon 2006). What has been referred to as an unprecedented and disturbing development is now beginning to be recognized for what it is not: a temporary trend. Between 1980 and 2006, the U.S. prison population increased by 467 percent (from 319,598 to 1,492,973), and the parole population increased by 362 percent (from 220,438 to 798,202) (U.S. Department of Justice 2006). The inevitable increase in the number of prisoners returning to communities across the country has created a national debate about how best to handle what has become known as the prisoner reentry crisis, one of the most challenging dilemmas in correctional history (Travis 2005).

A number of well-known correctional programs have been implemented over the years to help manage the difficult adjustment period when prisoners transition back into society. Halfway houses, community corrections, intensive supervision, and community reintegration programs represent but a few of the various post-release efforts designed to make prisoner reentry into society less difficult for ex-prisoners while ensuring public safety (Petersilia 2003). But despite corrections expenditures that are now in excess of $60 billion annually, the likelihood that a former prisoner will succeed in the community has not improved (Bauer 2002). Indeed, about two thirds of all offenders who leave prison are rearrested within three years of their release (Langan and Levin 2002). Growing caseloads have made effective case management by parole officers increasingly difficult. A by-product is increasing occupational stress on parole officers (Finn and Kuck 2003). As a result of these conditions, there is increasing concern that the number of ex-prisoners returning to society could pose a major threat to public safety. Even though the problems faced by ex-prisoners returning to society are readily identifiable, public efforts to address these reentry and aftercare problems have been limited (Travis and Visher 2005). The question is not whether this is true but why it is true.

In general, policymakers are reluctant to support correctional policies that endorse or appear to favor offender treatment, job training, and counseling for ex-prisoners and their families in the community. Such efforts can be interpreted as taking a "soft on crime" approach. Even though one might argue that a prisoner reentry plan that includes such programs has the potential to reduce recidivism significantly and thus improve public safety, few policymakers have been willing to publicly defend such programs. Not surprisingly, law-and-order crime policies have consistently trumped those that favor offender treatment models (Cullen 2002).

Furthermore, the lack of a comprehensive governmental response to prisoner reentry is influenced by money. Creating new offender treatment and support programs in prisons as well as in communities would place a significant financial burden on correctional budgets that many Americans already regard as too high. In an era of finite resources and ever-tightening budgets, efforts to significantly expand existing educational, vocational, and counseling programs in prisons and communities have not received serious consideration.

However, it is both unrealistic and unfair to lay the sole responsibility of comprehensive prisoner reentry at the feet of government. Though often overlooked, the role of religion, religious volunteers, religious programs, and faith-based organizations in the criminal justice system has been a constant in U.S. history. This oversight is unfortunate, since numerous theoretical perspectives, published research, and common sense suggest that communities of faith have the potential to be powerful partners to the government in developing a comprehensive prisoner reentry plan. The following section reviews research documenting the role of religion in prisons and prisoner reentry and research connecting religion to crime reduction and prosocial behavior and thus provides a basis for the inclusion of a faith-based approach to prisoner reentry.

THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGION IN PRISONS AND PRISONER REENTRY

Religion and Prisons

The evolution of the U.S. correctional system has been accompanied by the constant influence of religion and religious workers. Terms such as *corrections*, *penitentiary*, *reformation*, *restoration*, and *solitary confinement* can be traced to religious origins (see, for example, McGowen 1995; Peters 1995). The role of religion in prisons not only is important in a historical sense, but also continues to be prominent and pervasive in correctional institutions. Faith-motivated volunteers in prisons are as likely to be involved in life-skills training or instruction in GED programs as they are to conduct Bible studies or lead worship services. In this way, religious volunteers have played and continue to play a vital role in the vast majority of American correctional institutions. Indeed, besides work, education, or vocational training, religious activities attract more participants than any other type of personal enhancement program offered inside a prison.[1]

There are many ways in which religion might be consequential for prisoners and ex-prisoners. However, where correctional decision makers and policy stakeholders are concerned, the overriding issue is whether an intervention reduces

[1] This conclusion is based on data from face-to-face interviews with 13,986 inmates in 1991 and published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Similar surveys were conducted in 1974, 1979, and 1986.

recidivism. In the mid-1990s, Prison Fellowship (PF), a nonprofit religious ministry to prisoners, commissioned research to determine the effects of faith-based interventions on prisoner recidivism. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, the study examined the influence of religious programs on prisoner adjustment (i.e., institutional infractions or rule violations) and recidivism rates (i.e., post-release arrests) in two matched groups of inmates from four adult prisons in New York State.[2] One group had participated in programs sponsored by PF; the second group had no involvement with PF programs. Researchers found that after controlling for level of involvement in PF-sponsored programs, inmates who were most active in Bible studies were significantly less likely to be arrested during the one-year follow-up period (Johnson, Larson, and Pitts 1997). A second study, conducted with an additional seven years of follow-up data, documented that after the sample was divided into groups of high and low levels of participation in Bible studies, high participants were less likely to be rearrested at two and three years post-release (Johnson 2004). The study concluded that more research is necessary to determine how religion might be related to offender rehabilitation, inmate adjustment, and prisoner reentry. This small but growing body of research indicates that participation in religious programs and activities can contribute to positive adjustment while the inmate is in prison as well as reducing the likelihood of recidivism following release from prison (see, for example, Johnson 2003, 2004).

From Bible Studies to Faith-Based Prison Programs

An overarching implication of this relatively new body of research is that religious volunteers and faith-based programs have the potential to play a significant role in how we think about prison management, safety, and offender rehabilitation. For example, preliminary research suggests that faith-based dormitories and housing units have the potential to significantly counter the negative and often debilitating prison culture that permeates so many American correctional institutions (see, for example, Clear and Sumter 2002; Johnson 2003).

A six-year evaluation of a faith-based prison program called the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI)[3] found that inmates who completed the program were significantly less likely than a matched group of offenders[4] to be rearrested (17

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[2] On the basis of a multivariate matched sampling method, seven variables most strongly predicted members of the PF groups: age, race, religious denomination, county of residence, military discharge, minimum sentence, and security classification.

[3] Founded in 1997, the InnerChange Freedom Initiative is operated by Prison Fellowship Ministries at the Carole Vance Unit, outside of Houston, Texas.

[4] The comparison group was matched with IFI participants on race, age, offense type, and salient factor risk score (a correctional assessment tool that is used in most prisons to help predict the level of risk that prisoners pose to correctional authorities).

percent versus 35 percent) or reincarcerated (8 percent versus 20 percent) during a two-year follow-up period (Johnson 2003). The study revealed a stark contrast between the areas of the prison that are controlled by the faith-based program and the areas that house prisoners from the general population. The general population was typified by the presence of a distinct prison code of behavior that often condoned rule breaking and other inappropriate behaviors. Not surprisingly, traditional prison culture often works to undermine the very premises on which a rehabilitation model is based.[5]

In contrast, the faith-based side of the prison was typified by educational classes, study, work, worship services, little free time, and the absence of television sets. Furthermore, the faith-based program enjoyed an atmosphere that promoted forgiveness, honesty, and personal accountability. Efforts such as IFI and Kairos, another faith-based prison program, are designed to discourage antisocial and destructive behavior and to encourage transparency, contrition, and spiritual transformation, all of which run counter to the pervasive prison code. Preliminary research lends support to the notion that faith-based units can create an environment that is conducive to effective treatment and to rehabilitation programs more generally (Johnson 2003). In this way, faith-based interventions have the potential to enhance the achievement of a secular goal and civic good: lower recidivism.

Faith-Based Prisoner Reentry: Shortcomings and Potential

As important as volunteer work within correctional facilities might be, it does not diminish the fact that reentry and aftercare tend to be largely overlooked by most religious volunteers and organizations. Compared to reentry, prison ministry is a much easier task to pursue and a safe service opportunity in what many consider to be an unsafe environment. Prisoners often appreciate the attention they receive from the outside world, and these exchanges tend to be overwhelmingly positive and nonthreatening for volunteers. Prison ministry, therefore, can be found in many U.S. congregations and among the thousands of religious volunteers who visit prisons every day. Likewise, faith-based organizations disproportionately opt for in-prison ministry rather than out-of-prison services because reentry and aftercare are anything but easy or safe. For example, Prison Fellowship Ministries (PF), the largest faith-based prison ministry in the United States, has always recognized that reentry and aftercare are vitally important, but PF's efforts have been only marginally involved in these areas. This oversight was recently

[5] The subculture of prisons has been an ongoing topic of sociological and criminological inquiry. Donald Clemmer (1958) coined the term *prisonization*, a process whereby inmates become socialized into prison culture. Assumptions of prisonization are that inmates internalize prison culture and that their subsequent behavior is a reflection of this internalization.

acknowledged by PF president Mark Early, at a White House "Compassion in Action" Roundtable event on prisoner reentry in March 2007, when he stated an intention to remedy the imbalance by significantly expanding the organization's aftercare emphasis.

While the disproportionate emphasis on volunteerism is in prisons rather than on aftercare in communities is undeniable, it would be inaccurate to suggest that faith-based prisoner reentry programs are nonexistent. Unfortunately, it is unclear how many faith-based reentry programs are in operation, though it is likely that they exist in many of the communities where prisons are located. Faith-based prisoner reentry programs tend to be small, isolated, and in need of coordination as well as evaluation.

Is There a Link Between Religion and Crime Reduction?

Systematic reviews and one meta-analysis of religion and crime literature have provided evidence that religious commitment and involvement are linked to reductions in delinquent behavior and deviant activities (Baier and Wright 2001; Johnson, Tompkins, and Webb 2006).[6] Recent evidence suggests that such effects persist even if there is not a strong prevailing social control against delinquent behavior in the surrounding community. For example, several studies found that young black males from poverty tracts in Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia were much less likely to be involved in crime and delinquent behavior if they regularly attended church (Freeman 1986; Johnson et al. 2000b). Similarly, research has found that highly religious low-income youths from high-crime areas are less likely to use drugs than are less religious youths in these same disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, these highly religious teens from crime "hot spots" were also less likely to use drugs than were less religious teens from middle-class suburban communities or "good places" (Jang and Johnson 2001). There is also evidence that religious involvement can lower the risks of a broad range of

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[6] Baier and Wright reviewed a total of sixty published studies and found that (1) religious beliefs and behaviors exert a moderate deterrent effect on individuals' criminal behavior and (2) conceptual and methodological approaches account for some of the inconsistencies in the research literature. In a second review, Johnson and colleagues reviewed 151 studies that examined the relationship between religiosity and drug use ($N = 54$) or alcohol use ($N = 97$) and abuse. The vast majority of these studies demonstrated that participation in religious activities is associated with less of a tendency to use or abuse drugs (87 percent) or alcohol (94 percent). These findings held regardless of the population under study (i.e., children, adolescents, and adult populations) or whether the research was conducted prospectively or retrospectively. In this same study, Johnson and colleagues reviewed forty-six published studies that examined the relationship between religiosity and delinquency. Seventy-eight percent of these studies reported that reductions in delinquency and criminal acts were associated with higher levels of religious activity and involvement.

delinquent behaviors, including both minor and serious forms of criminal behavior (Evans et al. 1996). Research also shows that religious involvement might have a cumulative effect throughout adolescence and might significantly lessen the risk of later adult criminality (Johnson et al. 2001). Studies find that religion can be used as a tool to help prevent high-risk urban youths from engaging in delinquent behavior (Johnson et al. 2000a, 2001). For example, African-American churches appear to play a key role in reducing crime among black youths from urban communities (Johnson et al. 2000a). It is precisely to these communities of disadvantage that many ex-prisoners will be returning.

There are many theoretical perspectives that help to explain why and how religious beliefs and practices can influence behavior. To review these would be beyond the scope of this article, but in sum, it is safe to say that religious involvement helps some people to learn prosocial behavior (i.e. actions that emphasize concern for other people's welfare). These prosocial skills can instill a greater sense of empathy toward others and thus lessen the likelihood of committing acts that harm others (Johnson et al. 2000a). Similarly, once individuals become involved in deviant behavior, it is possible that participation in religious activities can help to steer them back to a course of less deviant behavior and away from potential career criminal paths (Johnson 2009). An important study by Evans and colleagues (1995) found that religion, as indicated by religious activities, reduced the likelihood of adult criminality as measured by a broad range of criminal acts. The relationship persisted even after secular controls were added to the model. Furthermore, the finding did not depend on social or religious contexts.

In sum, religiosity is now beginning to be acknowledged not only as a key protective factor that buffers or protects from harmful outcomes, but also as a variable that can promote prosocial behavior (Johnson 2007). If congregations can be viewed as institutions dedicated to improving the plight of at-risk populations, faith- and community-based organizations could represent key factors in helping ex-prisoners transition to society.

HARNESSING HUMAN AND SPIRITUAL CAPITAL THROUGH INTERMEDIARIES

President George W. Bush signed an executive order in January 2001 establishing the White House Office of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives.[7] Over the next several years, Centers of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives were created in

[7] Executive Order 13199 created the White House Office of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives on January 29, 2001.

eleven federal agencies through a series of executive orders.[8] In his executive orders and speeches on the initiative, President Bush acknowledged the long tradition of faith-based and community organizations helping Americans, especially those who confront serious disadvantages. The president was also convinced that the federal government had not been a very good partner to the faith- and community-based groups that have been working to target serious social problems. Furthermore, he believed that the federal government had made it difficult for faith-based and community groups to compete for funds on an equal standing with secular nonprofit service providers for far too long. The 2001 White House report *An Unlevel Playing Field* systematically reviewed federal funding and identified the barriers that stand in the way of effective government partnerships with faith- and community-based organizations (White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives 2001). For example, the report found that the Office of Justice Programs at the U.S. Department of Justice estimated that in fiscal 2001, it would award about 0.3 percent of total discretionary grant funds ($1.9 million of $626.7 million) to faith-based organizations ($1.9 million of $626.7 million) and 7.5 percent ($47.2 million) to community-based providers ($47.2 million).

Since 2001, considerable progress has been made in overcoming obstacles (for example, before 2001, references to faith-based groups were virtually absent from federal funding announcements covering social service delivery or demonstration projects) that have prevented faith-based and community organizations from seeking grants to build capacity and thereby strengthen outreach to underserved populations, including prisoners and ex-prisoners. Since 2001, conferences for faith- and community-based groups have been offered in all regions of the United States to identify and explain the federal funding processes. Indeed, no American president has devoted more funding, resources, and attention to the plight of ex-prisoners and their families than has George W. Bush. First as a governor and then as president, he has consistently favored public-private partnerships whose mission is to assist offenders, prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their children. Although the president has indicated that the government has a very clear role to play when it comes to prisoner reentry, he has been equally firm in asserting that government is not equipped to provide the mentoring, care, and

[8] Executive Order 13198 created five Centers for Faith-Based & Community Initiatives on January 29, 2001; Executive Order 13280 created two Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives on December 12, 2002; Executive Order 13279 requires equal protection for faith-based and community organizations as of December 12, 2002; Executive Order 13342 created three new Centers for Faith-Based & Community Initiatives at the Departments of Commerce and Veterans Affairs and the Small Business Administration on June 1, 2004; and Executive Order 13397 created a new Center for Faith-Based & Community Initiatives at the Department of Homeland Security on March 7, 2006.

social supports that are essential for any effective and holistic plan for prisoner reentry.

Stated differently, government cannot effectively address the prisoner reentry crisis by itself. The alternative is also true: Faith-based organizations and individuals cannot effectively address the prisoner reentry problem by themselves. In fact, sacred and secular partnerships represent our best hope for developing an effective prisoner reentry strategy.

In the concluding chapter of their book *Prisoner Reentry and Crime in America*, Jeremy Travis and Christy Visher (2005) ask two important questions:

> Is it possible to imagine a world in which the agencies of the justice system—corrections, police, courts, and parole—work together with other public and private institutions—housing providers, workforce development agencies, drug treatment providers, foster care agencies, and churches and other faith institutions—to systematically reduce the risk of failure around the time of reentry? . . . What would such a strategy look like? (pp. 255–256)

As a result of President Bush's belief in the role of intermediaries as well as his interest in prisoner reentry, two major prisoner reentry initiatives are now beginning to give us some preliminary answers to these questions. A third and related initiative, commonly referred to as the Second Chance Act, was passed by Congress three years after first being introduced, and the president signed it into law in April 2008. Intended to reduce repeat offenses and to improve former prisoners' chances for success in the community, the Recidivism Reduction and Second Chance Act authorized $165 million annually over two years to support mentoring programs, substance abuse treatment, literacy classes, job training, and other assistance intended to help ex-offenders pursue productive, crime-free lives after their sentences are up. The bill authorized grant funding for fiscal years 2009 and 2010 for state and local governments to launch or continue programs to improve ex-offenders' return to society. It also allocated competitive grants to faith-based and community nonprofits to offer programs that link ex-offenders with mentors or that help them seek and keep jobs. The bill included elements of the Bush Administration's Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI), launched in 2004, which connects ex-offenders with religious and secular nonprofits for mentoring and other programs to help them make a successful transition to community life.

Ready4Work

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Labor launched Ready4Work, a three-year pilot program to address the needs of ex-prisoners through faith-based and community-based organizations. Ready4Work emphasized on-the-job training, job placement, case management, mentoring, and other aftercare services. Community and faith-

based organizations were selected to provide services to adult ex-offenders in eleven cities.[9]

Ready4Work purposely targeted participants who had a high probability of recidivism;[10] ex-prisoners in Ready4Work had extensive criminal histories, and half had previously been arrested five or more times (Farley and Hackman 2006). Once individuals entered the program, they were eligible for services lasting up to one year. Participants were also matched with mentors in one-to-one and/or group mentoring relationships. Job placement specialists helped participants to find jobs, and case managers continued to provide assistance after participants became employed.

The Ready4Work pilot ended in 2006, and results indicate that a total of 4,482 former prisoners enrolled in Ready4Work. Of these ex-prisoners, 97 percent received case management services, 86 percent received employment services, and 63 percent received mentoring services. Ready4Work sites placed 2,543 participants (57 percent) into jobs; 63 percent retained jobs for three consecutive months after placement (Farley and Hackman 2006).

Public/Private Ventures (PPV), an action-based research, public policy, and program development organization, oversaw the Ready4Work demonstration project as an intermediary. PPV reported that only 2.5 percent of Ready4Work participants were reincarcerated within six months and that 6.9 percent had been reincarcerated at the one-year post-release mark. Although this was not a randomized design, the findings are impressive.

Over 60 percent of Ready4Work participants received mentoring as part of their services. We already knew that mentoring matters for youths; this study demonstrated that mentoring affected outcomes for Ready4Work participants. Ready4Work participants who met with a mentor remained in the program longer, were twice as likely to obtain a job, and were more likely to stay employed than were participants who did not meet with a mentor (Farley and McClanahan 2007). PPV researchers conclude that “while mentoring alone is not enough, supportive

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[9] The eleven sites were City of Memphis Second Chance Ex-Felon Program (Memphis, TN); Allen Temple Housing & Economic Development Corporation (Oakland, CA); East of the River Clergy, Police & Community Partnership (Washington, DC); Exodus Transitional Community (East Harlem, NY); Holy Cathedral/Word of Hope Ministries (Milwaukee, WI); Operation New Hope (Jacksonville, FL); SAFER Foundation (Chicago, IL); Search for Common Ground (Philadelphia, PA); Union Rescue Mission (Los Angeles, CA); Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church & the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (Houston, TX); and America Works Detroit (Detroit, MI).

[10] Participant eligibility for Ready4Work was determined on the basis of three factors: age of the ex-offender, presenting offense, and length of time before or after release. Ex-prisoners between the ages of 18 and 34 years who had most recently been incarcerated for a nonviolent felony offense and were no more than ninety days pre-release or post-release were eligible to enroll in the program.

relationships—which can be fostered through mentoring programs—should be considered a core component of any reentry strategy" (McClanahan 2007).

Ready4Work gives us an important preliminary snapshot of what is possible when an intermediary brings together public and private entities to address prisoner reentry in a comprehensive and coordinated strategy. Early results from Ready4Work support the notion that a comprehensive prisoner reentry plan is possible and that it can be accomplished without a massive expansion of the existing criminal justice system. As far as federal projects go, the Ready4Work initiative in eleven cities represents a major demonstration project. Additionally, Ready4Work has helped to highlight the work of faith- and community-based groups that are addressing prisoner reentry, such as Exodus Transitional Community in New York and Word of Hope Ministries in Milwaukee or the Safer Foundation of Chicago.

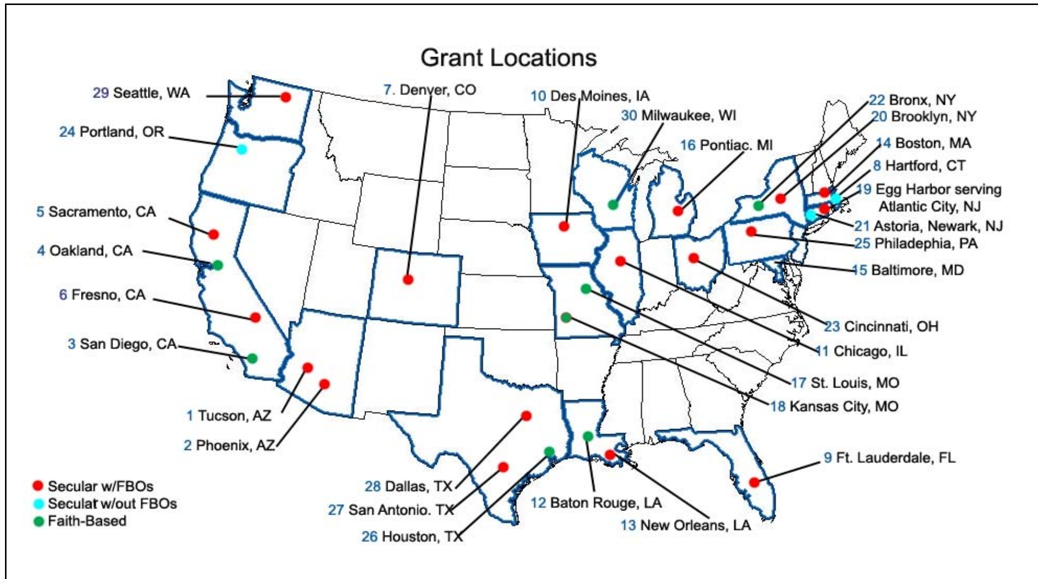
The President's Prisoner Reentry Initiative

The Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI), which President Bush announced in 2004, grew out of the U.S. Department of Labor's Ready4Work project. PRI was designed to further test the proposition that prisoner reentry could be effectively accomplished by a comprehensive strategy that is designed to draw heavily from partnerships with community and faith-based groups. The PRI helps to connect former prisoners with faith-motivated groups as well as secular community-based organizations that are willing to help ex-prisoners locate employment and stay out of trouble by following prosocial paths. Currently, thirty PRI grantees across the country are providing mentoring, employment, and other transitional services to thousands of ex-inmates.

PRI sites began serving program participants in the spring of 2006, and the results, like those of Ready4Work, have been promising. It is important to note, however, that these early outcomes are very preliminary and are not based on a randomized design with strict controls. A total of 10,361 PRI participants had been enrolled as of November 2007, and about 6,000 participants have been placed in jobs. Participants' one-year post-release recidivism rate is currently 20 percent. These early findings are positive.

As can be seen in Figure 1, nine of the thirty PRI grants went to faith-based organizations. Twenty-one grants went to community-based organizations, and all but three of these secular organizations report working with faith-based organizations. Indeed, collaborations with faith-based organizations appear to be important for faith-based as well as community-based PRI recipients. These alliances confirm the premise that sacred and secular partnerships can be essential in establishing a network of social supports necessary for comprehensive and coordinated prisoner reentry.

Figure 1: Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) Grants



KEYS TO A COMPREHENSIVE AND SCALABLE PRISONER REENTRY PLAN

Any prisoner reentry plan that is comprehensive and can achieve a large scale will require new people as well as programs that do not currently exist in most jurisdictions. It is unlikely that governments will or can provide these programs. Faith- and community-based groups represent a crucial piece of the reentry puzzle that has yet to be integrated in a systematic fashion. A comprehensive prisoner reentry plan will be sustainable only if partnerships between sacred and secular as well as national and community groups are encouraged rather than discouraged. A healthy atmosphere of mutual respect must replace the suspicion that still too often typifies relations between public and private organizations and between secular and religious groups that nonetheless have similar social service missions. This represents another way in which intermediaries can be strategic in building bridges and alliances to address social problems.

For example, religious individuals and faith-based groups need to recognize that ongoing training regarding correctional issues is something to be coveted rather than merely tolerated. Religious volunteers should be required to undergo basic training regarding custodial and security issues before being allowed to do volunteer work. Furthermore, ongoing training for religious volunteers should be endorsed as well as widely promoted by faith-based organizations. This is especially true for faith-motivated volunteers who are interested in mentoring prisoners and ex-prisoners.

Faith-based groups need to understand that accountability, assessment, and evaluation of their efforts—which will surely follow if these groups partner with government—are extremely useful tools. Overstating program effectiveness without empirical evidence has often been a problem for religious volunteers and faith-based organizations. If their efforts are to be taken seriously, religious volunteers must understand that faith-based programs, like others, must be evaluated objectively. This kind of accountability will go a long way toward improving relationships with other private and public groups whose confidence faith-based groups need in a comprehensive and coordinated response to prisoner reentry.

The Role of Volunteerism in Prisoner Reentry

An effective and positive impact on prisoner reentry will require a paradigm shift for many religious programs. Instead of leading a Bible study in prison, religious volunteers will need to consider developing strategies to improve, for example, housing and employment conditions for ex-offenders who are already living in the community as well as for prisoners who will eventually be returning home. The importance of mentoring relationships that are established in prison and carry over to the community cannot be overemphasized. Research confirms that mentoring matters—not just for children, but also for adults. The problem is that there is a severe shortage of mentors, especially for prisoners and ex-prisoners. This is precisely why communities of faith, America's most volunteer-rich organizations, are uniquely positioned to assist (see, for example, Cornwell and Harrison 2004; Musick and Wilson 2007). However, faith communities have not been approached in any meaningful way on a national scale to provide these mentors. Another possibility is having properly trained volunteers to specifically assist parole and other community corrections personnel. Ultimately, a comprehensive prisoner reentry plan will require very large numbers of committed and trained volunteers and partners as well as a willingness to connect them, along with their varied networks of social and spiritual support, to correctional, governmental, and secular entities that are committed to prisoner reentry and aftercare. Without a comprehensive approach that coordinates public and private, secular and sacred partnerships, the lack of effective prisoner reentry support will remain a national emergency. There is great promise if government and faith-based groups collaborate in meaningful partnerships to successfully address prisoner reentry problems.

We know that lack of housing, employment, transportation, counseling, and mentoring are substantial obstacles that make the transition from prison to society difficult for ex-prisoners. Obviously, tackling these problems will call for a great deal of new human and financial resources as well as the participation of key community leaders. Thus, any comprehensive strategy for confronting the

problems of prisoner reentry will require an infusion of an unprecedented number of new volunteers who have or can develop strategic alliances focused on each of the problems ex-prisoners encounter. But where will these new volunteers and resources come from?

Organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA), the largest mentoring organization in the world, have developed immensely successful strategies for recruiting mentors. In the last eight or nine years alone, BBBSA has more than doubled the number of children served (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America 2005). Along with many other grantees, BBBSA has led the Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) efforts nationally, in a partnership program known as Amachi. It took BBBSA ninety-five years to make 120,000 matches; there are currently 250 MCPs in forty-eight states partnering with over 6,000 churches to serve more than 100,000 children (Amachi 2008). Conversations with Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Goode, who has directed the amazing growth of Amachi, reveal the foundational role of congregations in recruiting mentors. The Amachi experience confirms that when people are asked to volunteer, many will do just that (Musick and Wilson 2007). A comprehensive plan for prisoner reentry that draws heavily on volunteers will need to develop strategies for recruiting mentors, although this effort will certainly look different from the BBBSA and Amachi models.

The vast majority of the many thousands of correctional volunteers tend to come from religious congregations. No source is more volunteer-rich than are America's houses of worship (Musick and Wilson 2007), and there are approximately 361,000 congregations in the United States (American Church Lists 2008). Religious congregations not only mobilize volunteer labor for the church itself, but also are feeder systems for many other nonprofit and volunteer organizations. Furthermore, religious volunteers do not necessarily choose between volunteering for the church and volunteering for a secular organization; many do both (Clain and Zech 1999; Cornwell and Harrison 2004). Surveys have consistently found a positive association between religious affiliation and attendance and charitable behavior in terms of both financial giving and volunteering (Brooks 2006; Independent Sector 2002). Harvard University scholar Robert Putnam and his colleagues in the Saguaro Seminar echoed this finding when they observed:

> Houses of worship build and sustain more social capital—and social capital of more varied forms—than any other type of institution in America. Churches, synagogues, mosques and other houses of worship provide a vibrant institutional base for civic good works and a training ground for civic entrepreneurs. Roughly speaking, nearly half of America's stock of social capital is religious or religiously affiliated, whether measured by association memberships, philanthropy, or volunteering (Putnam et al. 2001: 54).

Research confirms that volunteers will respond if they are approached with the right message, but it is not enough simply to attract large numbers of volunteers. The coordination and mobilization of volunteers and organizations are equally important.

The Role of the Intermediary in Prisoner Reentry

As was discussed above, developing a truly comprehensive prisoner reentry plan is difficult because there are so many different challenges that complicate an ex-prisoner's effort to make a successful transition back into society. Focusing on housing without giving proper consideration to employment is a recipe for failure. Likewise, concentrating on transportation without planning for mentoring and other social supports is likely to be unsuccessful. Any comprehensive prisoner reentry plan must be able to coordinate all the major obstacles to successful reentry. Ready4Work and the PRI have provided a very preliminary and positive glimpse of a multifaceted reentry plan that owes much to the contribution of an intermediary organization to coordinate such efforts. In the case of Ready4Work, Public/Private Ventures is overseeing the demonstration project as a national intermediary. PRI has utilized a different approach by funding community- and faith-based organizations to serve as local intermediaries coordinating reentry efforts (see Figure 1).

But what exactly is an intermediary, and what roles do intermediaries play? Meredith Honig (2004) offers a helpful definition of an intermediary:

> Intermediaries are organizations that occupy the space in between at least two other parties. Intermediary organizations primarily function to mediate or to manage change in both those parties. Intermediary organizations operate independently of these two parties and provide distinct value beyond what the parties alone would be able to develop or to amass by themselves. At the same time, intermediary organizations depend on those parties to perform their essential functions (pp. 65–87).

In recent years, the federal government has begun to utilize intermediaries to help faith- and community-based organizations build capacity, strengthen programs, and improve the delivery of social services. Perhaps the best recent example is the Compassion Capital Fund, established by Congress in 2002, which provides funds to be distributed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to intermediary organizations across the country to provide training, technical, and financial assistance to faith- and community-based organizations.

The role of faith- and community-based intermediaries in social service provision is still relatively new and underdeveloped. This is unfortunate, since intermediary organizations could be the most important underutilized element in

building successful prisoner reentry models that incorporate working with volunteers, especially volunteers from religious congregations. Intermediaries can be a bridge between ex-prisoners and the many social service providers and various governmental agencies. Intermediaries can coordinate reentry efforts of community- and faith-based organizations, volunteers, social services, mentors, and parole officers. Additionally, intermediaries can serve in many important ways by providing management and oversight to groups and organizations; technical assistance to agencies, groups, and ministries; and ongoing training to strengthen capacity and sustainability.

Without this kind of assistance, there is a strong likelihood that small grassroots groups will ultimately fail (McKinsey & Company 2001). According to Mike Doyle, Executive Director of the Cornerstone Assistance Network, a faith-based intermediary organization in Fort Worth, Texas, failure to develop a sound organization will cause even successful programming to suffer if not to surrender to financial and reporting pressures. Intermediaries can play a key role in coordinating the efforts of fragmented community and faith-based organizations (Fink and Branch 2005). Too often, these small groups operate in relative isolation from each other and, as a result, are not able to build or sustain capacity. Influential and well-networked intermediaries are well positioned to coordinate resources locally and beyond. Organizations such as the United Way provide an example of how organizations, through targeted mission statements, can have a substantial and scalable influence.[11]

Intermediaries are essential to a comprehensive and coordinated prisoner reentry plan that can recruit a large number of skilled and trained volunteers while developing private and public partnerships to confront key reentry and aftercare problems.

Finally, intermediaries can interact with governmental entities while drawing on the substantial human capital of volunteers as well as the social and spiritual capital of individuals and organizations in the private sector. The Compassion Capital Fund, the Faith and Community Technical Support Project, the Latino Coalition for Faith and Community Initiatives, and Nueva Esperanza provide but a few examples of the unique role intermediaries can play at local and national levels.

CONCLUSION

Because prisoner reentry is a problem facing communities all across the United States, the goal of any plan should be to establish a model that not only is effective in a particular area, but also can be effective on a larger scale in multiple

[11] The United Way is a national network of more than 1,300 locally governed organizations that work to create lasting positive changes in communities.

communities. It is one thing to have isolated local success; it is quite another to succeed at a statewide level. For example, although not a prisoner reentry program, Amachi Texas is a unique public-private partnership that was designed to reach a statewide scale.[12] What has been missing until recently is a prisoner reentry model or template that links all the nonnegotiable elements of reentry together in a way that can be replicated and sustained in cost-effective ways in local communities, in regions, or statewide. We need a plan in which coordination and collaboration are central, the goals of the reentry model are realistically achievable, the specific elements of the plan are replicable in any community, and the plan is affordable and does not add new costs to already overburdened correctional budgets.

The role of the government in reentry and aftercare is important, even central, but it should not be all-encompassing. The criminal justice system should be viewed as a key partner among other public and private partners collaborating with the many reentry initiatives that are being led in the community and coordinated through intermediaries. Ready4Work and PRI provide initial evidence that sacred and secular groups as well as national and community government institutions can work together to address comprehensive prisoner reentry in a scalable way. To replicate these experiences, the federal and state governments need to continue to welcome and accommodate religious and community-based volunteers and groups. Additionally, faith- and community-based intermediaries will have to bring much needed expertise in coordinating and training volunteers as well as organizations in the areas of employment, housing, education, and counseling. In this way, sacred and secular partnerships can play a catalytic role in a truly comprehensive and scalable approach to prisoner reentry.

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[12] Amachi Texas, a joint initiative between the Office of the Governor, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the Texas Workforce Commission, OneStar Foundation, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Texas, was launched in 2005. The program helps children of prisoners by working in communities throughout Texas via mentoring relationships. The Amachi Texas initiative is currently the subject of a three-year evaluation that incorporates a randomized controlled study.

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