

**Statement of Richard A. Lewis
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Before the House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Crime
U.S. House of Representatives
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Introduction

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and the Members of the Committee. On behalf of ICF International, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the *Efficacy of Faith-Based Programs: Improving Outcomes for Prisoners, Ex-Prisoners, and their Families and Communities*. For more than 20 years, I have managed programs and conducted research in criminal justice. Currently, I serve as a senior manager for ICF International. ICF, a global professional services firm, partners with government and commercial clients to deliver consulting services and technology solutions in energy, climate change, environment, transportation, social programs, health, defense, and emergency management. Prior to joining ICF, I served as the director of research for Prison Fellowship and as a social science analyst for the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

Overview

American prisons at the beginning of the twenty-first century are in crisis. Perhaps the most pervasive problem challenging modern corrections is the ominous nexus of overburdened prison systems and record numbers of prisoners returning to communities each year. Today, the burgeoning correctional population includes more than 2.3 million prisoners and 5.1 million adults on probation or parole.¹ At year end 2007, the total Federal, State, and local adult correctional population, including those incarcerated and those being supervised in the community reached a new high of 7.3 million.² The driving force behind the nations incarceration binge is more than two decades of "get-tough" sentencing reforms including mandatory minimums, truth-in-sentencing, and the abolition of parole.³ While credited with reversing the tide of unprecedented crime rates, these reforms have resulted in exponential increases in incarceration that present formidable challenges for corrections planners and policymakers.⁴ Among these challenges are record numbers of prisoners (over 600,000 ex-prisoners each year) returning to communities each year having spent longer terms behind bars with inadequate assistance in their reintegration.^{5 6 7} There are also public safety concerns—due to rising rates of recidivism among the majority of released prisoners.⁸ Still other challenges involve a lack of self-sufficiency—most returning prisoners have difficulties re-connecting with families, affordable housing, and livable wage jobs—and many remain plagued by substance abuse and health problems.^{9 10 11} In addition, many released prisoners are faced with the challenge of reentering poor, urban communities plagued by the deadly nexus of drugs, gangs, and guns.^{12 13} Finally,

challenges include escalating confinement and community corrections costs in an economic climate of increasing demand for services and declining resources.¹⁴ While formidable, the aforementioned challenges provide an opportunity to think more broadly about prospective partners in navigating the prison and reentry landscape. The following discusses the historical role of religion in corrections, reentry, and current research. This brief points out that the faith community is a promising partner in prisoner reentry—promoting public safety via the provision of services to support the successful reintegration of returning prisoners.

Religion and Corrections: The Role of the Church

Since the beginning of prisons and jails, religion has influenced philosophies of punishment and rehabilitation. Whether motivated by a religious beliefs or a sense of civic duty, "the church" has helped direct the course of modern corrections. For more than a century, the church has been relied upon to provide spiritual guidance and support to prisoners. The church has also provided, and continues to provide, a wide-range of secular services to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families. Traditionally, these services include the provision of food, shelter and clothing. Other social services involve education, employment, and housing assistance. Still other services include crime prevention, substance abuse counseling and treatment, and victim assistance in communities across the nation. Today, the social services provided via the church are vital to increasing public safety. In many instances, local churches provide the aforementioned services in poor, urban environs that are disproportionately impacted by incarceration.

Over the past 30 years, there has been a resurgence of religion in corrections. As a result, increasingly diverse faith practices have entered prison settings, and the number of religious services and activities has increased. Today, a variety of faiths are practiced in correctional facilities and there is wide variance among types of religious program services. While fiscal constraints have reduced religious programming in some instances, nearly every state and federal correctional institution provides support for the four "traditional" denominations—Catholicism, Protestantism, Islamism, and Judaism.¹⁵ The revival of religion in corrections settings is partly attributed to exponential growth in church membership among "non-denominational" Protestants.¹⁶ Recent trends in church membership suggest both continuity and change among Christians, and an increase in the number of Jews, Muslims, and Agnostics. These data also suggest that church members are potential neighborhood partners in prisoner reentry—particularly in urban communities.

Consistently, the historic role of the church combined with its potential for volunteer resources uniquely position the faith community to support the successful reintegration of returning prisoners. While the church has historically been in the business of enhancing social services, relatively few faith-based organizations have developed formal partnerships aimed at

reducing crime problems. In recent years, however, the faith community has gained prominence in the provision of a variety of criminal justice program services (e.g., life skills development). As a result, federal and state funding for promising faith-based programs and neighborhood partnerships to continue their "good works" in collaboration with criminal justice agencies is expected to increase.¹⁷

Religiosity and Research: Delinquency, Crime and Recidivism

The extant body of research literature is consistent with criminological theories supporting the claim that religious beliefs are inversely related to crime and recidivism.^{18 19} Johnson, De Li, Larson and McCullough (2000) conducted a systematic review of the religiosity and delinquency literature. Results show that the literature is not disparate or contradictory, as previous studies have suggested. Religious measures were generally inversely related to juvenile delinquency in the 13 studies that used reliability testing of religious measures. These findings also show that religiosity had a negative effect on deviance in the most methodologically rigorous studies. While many of the studies did not use random sampling, multiple indicators to control measurement errors, or reliability testing of their measures, the higher-quality studies generally found a negative relationship between religiosity and delinquency.²⁰

There is also a growing body of empirical evidence indicating that religious beliefs reduce crime and recidivism among adult prisoners. Johnson and Larson (2003) conducted a preliminary evaluation of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative, a faith-based prisoner reform program. Results show that program graduates were 50 percent less likely to be rearrested and 60 percent less likely to be re-incarcerated during a two-year follow-up period.²¹ Similarly, Johnson, Larson, and Pitts (1997) estimated the impact of religious programs on institutional adjustment and recidivism rates in two matched groups of inmates from four adult male prisons in New York State. One group had participated in programs sponsored by Prison Fellowship (PF) and the other had no involvement with PF. Results show that PF and non-PF inmates are similar on measures of institutional adjustment (measured by both general and serious prison infractions) and recidivism (measured by arrests during a one-year follow-up period). However, after controlling for level of involvement in PF-sponsored programs, inmates who were most active in Bible studies were significantly less likely to be rearrested during the follow-up period.²²

In addition, Johnson and Larson (1996) in a study of the relevance of religion in facilitating inmate rehabilitation find that prison culture and the cost of quality treatment programs are among the primary obstacles to prisoner rehabilitation. The authors suggest that religious programs may mollify these barriers. Utilizing a comprehensive research approach, this study provides at least partial support for a framework that helps explain how religious programming may be uniquely suited to

both facilitate and augment the ongoing process of prisoner reentry. Results show that religious programs combat the negative effects of prison culture and that religious volunteers are a largely untapped resource pool available to administer educational, vocational, and treatment services at little or no cost.²³

The aforementioned findings suggest that faith is the forgotten factor in reducing crime problems and religious program research may hold a valuable key to developing criminal justice system solutions.²⁴ While these and other prior research findings are promising, the prisoner reentry crisis combined with the resurgence of religion in prisons reveal the need for further research. Rigorous research combined with strong methodology is required to determine the relevance of religion in facilitating prisoner reentry and reintegration. Additional research is also essential to examine the efficacy of religious programs and their ability to foster pro-social attitudes among prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families. In addition, further research is necessary to provide information regarding the therapeutic integrity of religious programs as compared to secular alternatives.

Compassion Capital Fund Research: Horizon Program Evaluation

The Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) supported four separate research projects, one of which was awarded to ICF International (formerly Caliber Associates) to evaluate the Horizon Program in Tomoka Prison in Daytona Beach, Florida. The Horizon program is an outgrowth of Kairos Prison Ministry begun in 1976, which has over 20,000 active volunteers in 270 prisons in the U.S. and abroad. Horizon Communities, a faith-based residential rehabilitation program for prisoners and their families, seek to address the whole person, by offering mental, spiritual, and emotional support. Begun in 1999, the goals of the yearlong program are to increase personal responsibility, family responsibility and employability. These goals are achieved through volunteer-led programs including informal mentoring, anger and stress management, family relations and fatherhood, financial management, addiction recovery and education. Prisoners in the program also participate in daily devotionals and their choice of religious services. The program at Tomoka Correctional Institution in Daytona Beach (FL) was implemented in 1999, and is the main focus of the ongoing evaluation. The following are results of the study.

- The Horizon program participation promotes a safer correctional environment, particularly during and immediately following program participation.
- Horizon program participants had significantly lower rates of discipline reports and segregation stays—compared to both the matched and waiting list comparison samples.
- Horizon program participation appears to promote public safety—less than one-third (32.7%) of participants were rearrested during the follow-up period and program participants had fewer total charges across all arrests.

- Among Horizon program participants less than a fifth (19.2%) were rearrested during the first six months after release and less than a third (30.4 %) were rearrested in the first year following release.
- Horizon program participation generally delayed the onset of rearrest—participants had significantly longer periods of time to first rearrest compared to the matched comparison sample (3.5 months and 1.4 months, respectively).
- Horizon program participation potentially improves outcomes for children and families—program graduates are more likely to fulfill their child support obligations.

Summary

American prisons are in crisis. Overcrowded prison systems, record numbers of prisoners returning home, and escalating confinement costs have profound implications for corrections and communities. The faith community, however, is a promising partner in prisoner reentry, and is uniquely positioned to provide a variety of services to support the successful reintegration of returning prisoners. Religious programs and evidence-based research hold a valuable key to developing criminal justice system solutions. While research findings are promising, further research is required to determine whether and under what circumstances faith-based programs continue to reduce crime and recidivism.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my formal statement. I am pleased to answer any questions you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have.

Endnotes

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⁷ Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2003. *Reentry Trends in the United States*. Online document. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

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- ¹⁵ American Correctional Association. *Religion in Corrections*, 2000.
- ¹⁶ Princeton Religion Research Center, Princeton, NJ, *Religion in America*, annual. Based on surveys conducted by the Gallup Organization, Inc.
- ¹⁷ White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.
- ¹⁸ Hirchi, Travis. *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- ¹⁹ Gottfredson, Michael R., and Travis Hirchi. *A General Theory of Crime*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.
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- ²¹ Johnson, Byron R., and David B. Larson. *The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of America's First Faith Based Prison*. University of Pennsylvania, CRRUCS (June, 2003).
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