

## RECRUITING & TRAINING WORKERS

The recruitment and training of prison ministry workers is essential if just starting a new effort, trying to replenish workers, or expanding an existing program. One hard reality is that this ministry tends to attract some that you do not want or need. A few are *weirdos* and others are attracted to any *new* thing but interest fades as enthusiasm turns to the next new thing. Prison ministry deserves the brightest minds and the energies of multi-talented men and women. So, how do you uncover, identify, recruit, train and keep such workers?

Do not expect much response to public announcements such as “meet me in Room 300 after services,” bulletin articles, website posts, etc. Each person is best approached face-to-face and one-on-one.

Never beg. Issue a challenge. State the need. Expect positive response. Keep asking. Be persistent. A “no” today may be a “yes” tomorrow.

Clearly identify and describe the specific work that needs to be done. When possible, seek a husband-wife *team* and “family” *teams*. Working on a “team” is not as intimidating as working alone. Plus, working together can strengthen relationships.

Who are the “most likely” to volunteer?

- (1) One who has “been there-done that” [Mark 5].
- (2) One whose life has been touched by a family member or close friend in trouble.
- (3) A crime *victim*.
- (4) A frequent forgiver of others.
- (5) One with unusual empathy – “There go I but for the grace of God.”
- (6) One involved or has been involved in law enforcement, corrections or substance abuse/treatment.
- (7) The hardest working member of the congregation – “If you need to get something done, ask the busiest person.”



Present so many “opportunity options” that at least ONE will be an exact fit for the right and ripe candidate (going behind bars, helping those released [halfway houses], substance abuse treatment centers, ministering to families and/or children, grade Bible courses, write letters, serve as a mentor, form a singing group, focus on teens, adults, be a driver, donate [provide employment, food, clothes, furniture, appliances, vehicles, funds], etc.). Don’t overlook involving church leaders.

Lead and motivate by example. You are not asking anyone to do something *you* are unwilling to do. You are “the hardest working person around” and *people want to help you* by lessening the load. They clearly “see” you need help. On-the-job training is most effective method. “Come go *with* me. Do this *with* me.”

Set up a “small *action* group” meeting (informal) focused on a specific area of work that needs to be done. Invite a limited number of individuals to join this “fact-finding” and *brain-storming* group. At the end of the meeting, you may decide to meet again (and invite others) or you may be ready to move forward and “meet the defined needs” with several in this group volunteering to get the job done. Mission accomplished!

Do not require “exclusive” commitment. This ministry may be the “only” way in which a few are involved in the church which is better than zero. But urge workers to also serve the Lord in other ways. A soul-winner in prisons ought to be a soul-winner in the community. A prison ministry worker has the heart of a servant.

Look beyond your *home* congregation. Set up speaking appointments in area pulpits and make presentations to Bible classes (*ladies’* groups, men’s breakfasts, area-wide singings, etc.). If you get ladies excited, they will get their husbands excited and get things done. Write appealing articles for bulletins and religious periodicals. Do not overlook senior saints, those retired and the handicapped.

Have easy-to-use “tools” ready to equip new workers. Books, newsletters, CD’s, videos, and other training materials like *Loosed & Forgiven*. Most of us fear failure – not

knowing *what* to do or *how* to get it done. Remove objections in advance. The NLB curriculum and structure is excellent at this.

Enlist a group to visit a prison where you go. Seek approval from officials in advance to bring your guests in for observation purposes only. Car dealerships love folks who are “just looking.” *Lookers* become *buyers*. The difference is that this “car lot” is behind razor wire.

Attending prison ministry seminars (or “hosting” one) promotes volunteerism and offers quality training. In time, help your workers see the “bigger” picture. They eventually need to see how what *everyone* does in this ministry contributes to success. Using volunteers is a matter of “maximizing *talents* and minimizing liabilities.”

Praise workers. Let them know they are appreciated. Do not take them for granted. If volunteers use their vehicles, supply the gas, food and occasionally lodging depending on the time and distance involved. Protect your workers by emphasizing safety. Bring in “success stories” – ex-offenders giving “testimonies” to thank workers. Everyone benefits by seeing “living proof” that what they are doing results in saved souls and changed lives. What a volunteer does *definitely makes a difference!*

Keep communication lines open. Invite fresh ideas to improve and fine-tune the work. It is inspiring for a volunteer to see his or her idea put into practice! Give workers *family time* (vacation, birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, reunions), etc. Do not let them *burn out*. Some *burn out* will occur despite all you do. Expect it. Have replacement volunteers ready to step in.

The real “pay off” is when longtime church leaders, members and spouses thank you for allowing them the privilege to be a part of this rewarding ministry. I have seen men and women who have faithfully served the Lord for 50-60 years say: “Because you helped me get involved in prison ministry, I can confidently now say that when I die and meet Jesus, I will not be *empty-handed*. For the first time in my life, I responsible for bringing a lost soul to God!”

*Praise the Lord!*