Jail/Prison Ministry 101

WHY BOTHER?

2010 United States Rate of Incarceration was the highest in the world per captia!

- FL FY 2010 3rd Largest Prison System in Country behind CA, TX
- FL ranks 2nd in 2010 prison growth

http://www.percenteronthestates.org/uploadedfiles/prison_count_2010.pdf

The majority of inmates in US prison are male – 93%

- Black Floridians are six times more likely than whites to be in prison.
    - One in 42.5 black Floridians compared to 1 in 250 whites.

Top five categories of primary offenses for male inmates incarcerated:

- Drugs
- Burglary
- Murder/Manslaughter
- Aggravated Assault including Forcible Rape
- Violent personal offenses such as carjacking

Women's primary offenses:

- Larceny
- Drugs/DUI
- Simple assault
- Counterfeiting
- Prostitution

➢ **85% of those re-entering society will re-commit a crime within 3 years of release.**

➢ **85% that received support did not.**

Admissions for violent felonies have remained relatively constant an increase in admissions for non-violent offenses accounts for much of Florida's prison growth.

Want to know a staggering reason for offenses?

Poor children lag behind their peers in many ways beyond income; they are less healthy, trail in emotional and intellectual development, and do not perform as well in school. The challenges that poor children face accumulate and interact, casting long shadows throughout their lives. Every year that we keep children in poverty costs our nation half a trillion dollars I lost productivity, poorer health and increased crime.

In Florida among all children, 1 in 6 is poor.

- 1 out of 3.3 Black children
- 1 out of 5 Latino children
- 1 out of 8 white Children
- 1 out of 9 Asian/Pacific Islander Children

Most states spend on average 2.8 times as much per prisoner as per public school pupil

- Florida ranks 36th Nationally per public school pupil $9,084
- Florida ranks highest in incarceration expense - $29,236

Florida Tax payers pay 33% higher than the National Average!

Do you know the differences between Jail and Prison?

Jail –

a. Place for the detention of persons awaiting trial or legal judgment
b. a secure place for keeping people found guilty of minor crimes sentenced for a year or less
c. (Juvenile Detention) is a secure residential facility for young people, often termed juvenile delinquents, awaiting court hearings and/or placement in long-term care facilities and programs.

Prison-

d. An intuition usually under state or federal control for confinement of persons serving sentences of a year of more for serious crimes.

Why would I want to get involved?

1) **Biblical**
   "For I was in prison and you came to visit me…when did we see you [in prison] and go to visit you?...I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me". Matthew 25:36-40
2) **Reformation** -
   John Wesley, Prison Reformer late 18th Century England
   a. Raise money to procure clothing and blankets for French prisoners of the Seven Years War detained in English Jails;
   b. In a period of nine months he preached at least 67 times in various jails
   c. raised money to buy linen and wool cloth to make clothes and distributed to the prisoners in greatest need;
   d. encouraged all his preachers to visit and to minister to the needs of prisoners;
   e. his brother, Charles, spent time visiting prisons.
3) **Restorative Justice**
   a. Caring and allowing for correcting the reason for crime
      i. 'Cradle to Prison Pipeline' (Children's Defense Fund)
   b. Caring and allowing for correcting for the victim
      i. allows for forgiveness and reconciliation where appropriate
      ii. 'Chance to make things right' (Zehr, Restorative Justice, 34)
   c. Caring and allowing for Communities to be strengthened and healed
      i. early interventions
      ii. post justice
4) **Social Justice –**
   United Methodist Book of Discipline
   a. Emphasizes 'Restorative Justice' believing 'through God's transforming power…seeks to repair the damage…" and that the 'Church is transformed when it responds to the claims of discipleship by becoming an agent of healing and systemic change".
   b. Opposes the Death Penalty in that it "denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings…" that "…all human life is sacred and valuable". By take the life of someone "then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person's life ends…the possibility of reconciliation with Christ" is taken away.

How do I get involved?

1) **Inside**
    a. Bible Studies
    b. Worship Services
    c. Mentoring
    d. Assisting Chaplain
2) **Outside**
    a. Re-entry
        i. Clothes, ID, Shelter, Programs, Employment
    b. Family Support
    c. Faith Based Organizations
        i. KAIROS
        ii. REC (Resident's Encounter Christ)
        iii. Celebrate Recovery
3) **Advocate for change**
    a. Mandatory Minimum Reforms
        i. Criminal Justice Reform
        ii. Juvenile Justice Reform

Action steps to ask if you want to get involved…

1) Does your church have a Jail/Prison Ministry already?
2) Ask your pastor if he/she is aware of nearby churches that may have ministry and combine forces
3) Find out where your closet jail/prison is and find out if there is a Chaplain that needs some volunteer help
4) Find out if there is an established Ministry already involved in ministry on the 'inside' such as Good News or Prison Fellowship.
5) Find out if there are 'outside' ministry opportunities such as Healing Hand, Celebrate Recovery, Drug Rehab Programs, etc…

Resources:

1) 2009 Journal of the Florida Annual Conference Part III
2) Alexander, M. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*
3) Beissenger, D. *Locked Up*; TN, 2008, Upper Room Books.
4) Cradle to Prison Pipeline – www.childrensdefensefund.org
5) Ehlig, B. & Payne, R. What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty; TX, rev 2005, aha!
6) Goode, W. *Ministry with Prisoners & Families: The Way Forward*; PA, 2011, Judson Press.
7) National Institute for Corrections - http://nicic.gov/
8) Sample, T. *Hard Living People & Mainstream Christians*
9) UMC General Board Church and Society - http://www.umc-gbcs.org
10) Zehr, H. *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*; PA, 2002, Good Books.