

The Role of Correctional Chaplains

Handout/Outline by Chaplain Roscoe Barnes III, Ph.D.

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I. Duties and Trends

PAUL'S NOTE ABOUT MINISTRY

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" 1 Corinthians 9:22 (NIV).

a. Duties

- * Counseling offenders and staff
- * Preaching and teaching
- * Distribution of literature
- * Distribution of care packages
- * Arrangement of emergency phone calls/emergency leave requests
- * Community outreach
- * Training and supervision of volunteers
- * Arrangement of special programs and events
- * Marriages/weddings
- * Filing regular reports of all activities

b. Trends

- * More administrative duties
- * More education
- * More evidence-based programs
- * More diversity
- * More positions eliminated or changed to program directors

II. Frustrations and Challenges

PAUL'S NOTE ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES

"But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me" 1 Corinthians 16:8-9 (NIV).

a. Frustrations

For all of its many rewards, prison ministry is not without its moments of frustration. Some days you may have the temper of Moses when he struck the rock for the second time. Some days you may feel like Paul with the Galatians: "Who has bewitched you?" But this is life, and frustrations are a part of it.

- * Offender complaints/lawsuits/grievances
 - Religious Diets
 - Time schedule – they want things on their own terms
- * Offender games
 - Deception involving ER calls
 - Deception involving gifts, care packages, food items, etc.
- * Struggle to survive
 - Gambling
 - Gang loyalty

b. Challenges

"My idea of an ideal jail chaplain is one who is flexible in the face of constant change, can function in stressful situations, has the ability to work collaboratively, and is a compassionate and faith-filled minister to the imprisoned." ACCA Chaplain

I would say flexibility is one of the most important qualities to have in prison ministry.

- * Frequent changes and interruptions

- * Multiple tasks

Chinese proverb: The tree that bends is stronger than the oak that doesn't bend

Working in a multi-faith environment

- * Handling lockdown restrictions

- * Transfers

III. Victories and Answers to Prayer

PAUL'S NOTE ABOUT PRAYER

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" Philippians 4:6 (NIV).

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" Ephesians 3:20 (KJV)

a. Victories

What does victory look like inside a prison?

For me the ultimate case of victory is the born-again experience. It looks like the story I wrote about Bruno ... in your handout.

"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" Luke 15:7 (NIV).

- * Conversions

- * Discipleship

- * Ministry during lockdown status

- * Change to MDOC policy

b. Answers to Prayer

What do you see when you look at a jail or prison?

I see a great mission field ... a great harvest

"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" Matthew 36-38 (NIV)

One of the most remarkable answers to prayer in my life occurred when I was praying to come to Mississippi and serve as chaplain. God's provision could be seen every step of the way, beginning with the job interview.

- * Ministry of volunteers
- * Creation of new programs
- * Fundraiser for care packages

Future: Revival meetings twice a year; water baptism and communion each quarter

Conclusion

"Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" 2 Corinthians 4:1-2 (NIV)