

I Was in Prison, and You Came to Me (Matthew 25:36)
Some Thoughts on Jail and Prison Ministry
Provided by Rev. Darren Pflughoeft

1. This ministry is of two basic kinds:
 - a. Jail ministry: This kind of ministry usually is conducted in small(er) facilities to prisoners serving short(er) sentences (you might meet a jailed prisoner only one time). Adjust your ministry accordingly.
 - b. Prison ministry: This kind of ministry usually is conducted in larger facilities to prisoners serving long(er) sentences (you might get to know an imprisoned prisoner over the course of many years). Adjust your ministry accordingly.
2. Some suggestions for beginning a jail or prison ministry include:
 - a. Contact the jail or prison and find out what you need to do to be allowed in to conduct ministry there. Then, do that.
 - b. Begin your ministry with a simple Bible study emphasizing the basics of the Gospel. Allow and encourage the prisoners to ask whatever questions they might have and to say whatever they might want to say. . .yes, whatever. . .and be prepared not to react with shock. Then, listen to what they ask and say. This will help you to understand better what to study next.
 - c. If you are unsure what to study next, I would suggest focusing on basic Bible history, beginning with the Gospels and the life and ministry of Christ. Consider that just the first verse of the Gospel of Mark leads us all the way back to the beginning of the book of Genesis and all the way forward to the end of the book of Revelation.
3. Some materials for jail or prison ministry include:
 - a. The Bible. I would recommend either the English Standard Version or the New King James Version. Both are accurate and respected.
 - b. Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation (paperback edition);
 - c. Lutheran Service Book (paperback Ministry Edition)

Please note that these first three materials are available for \$10.00 (I think) as a Prison Ministry Kit through our synod's Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry. Please contact the ministry's manager, Pastor Brian Heller, to order this packet (lcmsprisonministry@lcms.org, or 888-843-5267).

- d. Write your own Bible studies. For example, I usually lead the prisoners at the Wyoming Women's Center through the seasons of the first half of the Historic Church Year. We study the Annunciation(s) and the Nativity during the Advent and Christmas seasons; we study the life of Christ during the Epiphany season; we study the Passion and the Resurrection during the Lenten and Easter seasons, etc.
- e. Consider using other Bible studies which might be available especially through Concordia Publishing House. It is not necessary that the studies be specific to prison ministry. In my experience, if prisoners have specific prison-related ministry needs, then eventually they will ask you to address them (either publicly or privately). And, in my experience:
 - (1) After you have spent even a little bit of time conducting prison ministry, you will discover that the prisoners are not really any different than any other person you minister to outside of the jail or prison, and your Bible study with the prisoners will seem very much like your Bible study with your congregation(s).
 - (2) And, the prisoners appreciate being treated like the regular people they are, that is, like sinners who need to hear the good news of forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation by God's grace through the gift of faith in Christ their Savior (John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9).

4. Some other thoughts:

- a. Be respectful of the administrative and security staffs (Romans 13:1-7). And, be prepared to minister to them, too.
- b. Be consistent. Keep on going in to the jail or prison, no matter the number of prisoners you have attending your Bible study. The number might fluctuate greatly.
- c. Be Evangelical (Confessional) Lutheran. Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), but do not be afraid to speak the truth. For example, by God's grace in Christ, I have been able to teach lengthy Bible studies about marriage (over against the homosexuality, the lie of transgenderism, etc., so prevalent in our jails and prisons), about the occult (over against the witchcraft and other satanic arts so prevalent in our jails and prisons), about Holy Baptism and Holy Communion (over against the Catholic and Reformed false doctrines related to these), etc., etc.

Together in Christ,
Pastor Pflughoeft
August 2024