

CITIZEN CIRCLE:
A MENTORING MODEL FOR REHABILITATING EX-FELONS IN
DARKE COUNTY, OHIO

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NURTURING COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER MENTORS IN AN OHIO DEPARTMENT OF
REHABILITATION AND CORRECTION PAROLEE REENTRY SUPPORT PROGRAM
CALLED *CITIZEN CIRCLE* THROUGH A DISCIPLESHIP SMALL GROUP PROCESS

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worship is more than entertainment, more than teaching, and especially more than me. He taught me that worship is about God and that it is, first and foremost, the fundamental means in which we are to remember and reenact the salvation event that God has given us. And most important, he walked me hand-in-hand along the Canterbury Trail to a spiritual home in the Church that I never could have envisioned nor appreciated without his help, support and encouragement. My only regret is that Bob is not alive now to hear all that I have benefitted from this project and how far my ministry and my faith have come since we first met in that seminar 11 years ago.

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¹ Proverbs 31:29-31.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was for a group of mentors to be nurtured in their faith and understanding of criminal justice issues in Darke County, Ohio, through an Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction parolee reentry program called *Citizen Circle*. At the end of the three-year project 67 percent of the mentors showed spiritual growth, 45 percent increased in understanding of criminal justice issues, and 100 percent showed more compassion and acceptance of the sex offenders in the program. All learned that real ministry happens best with those the community rejects as beyond help, with those Jesus called “the least of these brothers of mine.”

CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND PURPOSE FOR STUDY

Introduction

“My name is Frank² and I am currently an inmate in prison and I heard of Good Samaritan Home through a friend who gave me the article you wrote for the newspaper.

“Sir, my release date is September 29, and I, like the men you wrote about in your article, am without any place to live and get started on the right track upon release. I am told that as a result of being released without being on parole or supervision that there are no halfway houses available in the area.

“I know Mr. Graham that you are probably a busy man, and without going into detail about the pain and loss I’ve caused for myself though the poor choices I’ve made while using drugs and alcohol, I quite simply have had enough. I am going to be 33 years old and I am humbled by the wreck my life has become. I have an 11 year old son, whom I want to be a good influence for in this life, and I can say with all sincerity that I am willing to make changes for this to become a reality. I would be grateful for any information and consideration for placement in Good Samaritan House. I see Good Samaritan Home as a life saving opportunity, and chance for hope again. Thank you for your time, sir. I will be praying for a favorable response.”³

Problem

Frank’s letter, and the dozens of other similar pleas for help, were the reason that Good Samaritan Home was founded in 2001 as a residential mentoring home for Christian men coming

² Names of all parolees have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

³ Inmate. Letter from Dayton Correctional Institution, Dayton, Ohio, January 21, 2004.

out of prison. They were the reason the ministry was expanded in 2005 with that addition of a homeless shelter for anyone in need of a safe place in an emergency. And they were the basis for another expansion in 2007 with the purchase of a third facility offering shelter and support for any parolee, whether they were Christians or not, coming home from prison with no job, no place to live and no hope. The motivation for all that we do has been two simple questions, “What is the need in the community?” and “how can we meet that need?”⁴

The reason that Frank’s letter is so common is because statistics show that the majority of parolees will likely return to prison. Nationwide nearly 70 % of ex-felons will be rearrested within three years. Yet that number can be cut in half when ex-felons are given on-going support from the community in which they are released. In Darke County, Ohio, for example, there are currently 96 people on parole. Yet other than a single 15-minute meeting each month with the parole officer, none of these parolees have any formal mentoring system to help them develop the skills necessary for successful reintegration back into the community. Without intervention statistically 67 of them will be reincarcerated, not only costing all Ohio residents \$25,000 per year per inmate, but Darke County must also designate an additional \$5.4 million – 39 % of the county budget – toward criminal justice issues that result from the recidivism problem in the community.⁵ Coupled with this is the hidden cost of incarceration. Whenever a man, and increasingly women as well, are incarcerated, their families are forced into poverty and onto welfare, oftentimes costing taxpayers additionally as much as \$16,000 per family per year.⁶ Not only does this lack of support for ex-felons create a severe financial stain on the community, but

⁴ A more detailed explanation of Good Samaritan Home can be found in the *Personal Observations* section in Appendix 16.

⁵ Carol Ginn. Darke County, Ohio, auditor. Phone interview, June 25, 2008.

more important, it places the citizens at risk.

While we tried to address this problem with a transitional discipleship house for Christian ex-felons, our efforts were too limited to impact the overall need because we could house only a small fraction of the parolees in the community. Not only that, but our program costs as much as \$1,100 per man per month. While less expensive than prison, it was still cost prohibitive. Finally, our residential mentoring program did not address the housing needs of the female parolees. A more inclusive and less expensive form of mentoring was needed; that is, a non-residential means in which all the ex-felons in the community could participate. This project addresses that need by training volunteers to help these ex-felons return to their communities.

Context

My wife and I have been committed to hospitality as a primary expression of our faith throughout our lives. In 1983 and again in 1985 while in the construction business in Texas, we invited two young men to live in our home and to work with me in order to mentor them. Two years later we had three college students from Idaho live with us for the summer. In 1988 and 1989 we had a Japanese exchange student living with us. This hospitality continued when I entered the ministry and we offered shelter to a homeless teenage girl who came to our church. And finally in 2001 we again opened our home to a homeless man until he was able to find a job and his own apartment. This understanding of mentoring through hospitality has always been a part of our personal commitment to Christ.

Until eight years ago I was the pastor of a small, mainline church located in the downtown area of Greenville, Ohio. Because of our location, we were often visited by homeless or transient persons looking for food, lodging or gasoline. We were also frequently called by

⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "\$16,000 per Family?" <http://www.cbpp.org/2-12-03tanf.pdf>. (Accessed November 18, 2008).

local residents looking for help with rent or utility bills. Through our many conversations with these people, we found that often they had felony offenses in their past that had adversely affected their ability to find and maintain meaningful employment. Although the community ministers' group had established a clearinghouse of sorts to help these needy persons, there was little contact between the ministers, and especially their church members and these needy persons. The end result was that while we in the Christian community may have met their immediate needs, there was little long-term impact on their lives and their faith. What was missing was what I call "radical hospitality," or a means for the church to be directly involved in the lives of hurting persons, much like the hands-on evangelism of Jesus and the apostles.

With this in mind, in 2001 when I heard about a residential mentoring program located in Chicago for Christian men coming out of prison, I left my church ministry, bought an old house in the community and began a similar program in Greenville. Our intent was to offer much-needed help to new those parolees who had made a spiritual commitment while in prison, but who were in desperate need of practical, as well as spiritual support, when released. In this program as many as three male ex-felons would live with us for up to 18 months following release from prison. During that time each man would be mentored by my wife and me as well as a volunteer mentor from a local church who would commit to work with him on a weekly basis. As part of their mentoring, they would be required to get a job and begin paying for their room and board. That in turn would allow us to offer them practical mentoring since money problems often led them to prison in the first place.

However, there were a myriad of shortcomings to this reentry program that greatly limited its impact on those coming home from prison. The primary limitation was that it was residential. We could only house three persons at a time, and therefore, could do nothing to help

the other 93 parolees in the county. And because we initially opened our home to male parolees, we could not accept qualified females because of the complications of a residential setting for both genders. Finally, the program involved too few churches and mentors from the community. The end result was that the program was too limited and too expensive to have any real impact on the community.

A more inclusive, and less expensive, form of radical hospitality was needed, a non-residential means of mentoring all the ex-felons and their families in the community. That need was met with the *Citizen Circle* program. This is an Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction reentry support program that couples volunteer mentors with the parolees in the community who are looking for help getting back on their feet following incarceration.

Definition of Important Terms

The key term in this thesis is hospitality, but as understood in its biblical context, and not as it is defined in our Western culture. That is to say, throughout scripture hospitality referred to an obligation to serve the needs of all those we meet, including strangers, and especially the outcasts in the community. Thus the focus of this paper is showing the love of Christ by offering reentry support for parolees returning home from prison.

Another term to be defined is conversion. It is intended to mean more than a doctrinal change of opinion, but a literal change in lifestyle direction, a change that encompasses the entire thought and actions of the convert.

Evangelism also has a more holistic meaning as well. In our Enlightenment-based Church culture, evangelism is too often understood as sharing the ideas of the faith. But in this thesis it is defined in terms of sharing the faith through acts of godly compassion.

A fourth key term in this thesis is mentoring, or as it is often called in the Church, discipleship. While both terms generally refer to teaching or sharing of ideas, in this thesis they have a broader understanding, more of a coming alongside another, a walking with people in their daily activities, not unlike the catechumenate period of the apostolic Church in which new converts were matured in the faith by partnering them with seasoned believers.

And finally, the singular, uppercase term Church is used rather than the plural lowercase churches when referring to the followers of Christ, whether ancient or modern. This term refers to the universal body of believers, regardless of their particular groupings or denominations. The intent is to serve as a constant reminder that there is one God, one faith, one baptism and one Church. Therefore, all these terms, while rooted in a vertical relationship with God, are defined horizontally.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to measure the impact that participating in the *Citizen Circle* program will have on the spiritual maturity and social justice attitude of the community mentors. *Citizen Circle* is an Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction reentry support program that pairs volunteer mentors with all the ex-felons living in the community. They then work with the parolees and their families in an effort to help them link with support services so they can more successfully reintegrate into the community.

Citizen Circle volunteers meet together with parolees – literally in a circle – to help and support them following incarceration. *Citizen Circle* is primarily interested in the practical aspects of reentry, such as finding a job, a permanent place to live, getting a driver’s license, and a host of other issues that can be overwhelming for someone just out of prison. To do that, *Citizen Circle* uses a “strength-based” approach that focuses on the positive aspects of the

parolees, not their weaknesses, which too often they are too focused on themselves. It is also important to note that the *Citizen Circle* conveys another important message to parolees – that acceptance back into the community comes with responsibility and accountability.

This project used a Case Study Action Research small group process. The method of study is qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, research for several reasons. First, quantitative research is based on factual evidence to define progress. However, faith is not factual, and certainly not measurable. While the surveys were, in one respect, quantitative, the survey scores were based on the subjective answers of the mentors. Second, ministry is neither objective nor dispassionate. In other words, a researcher who has faith will begin to assume a proactive research stance as a natural response to his/her faith. In fact, action research emphasizes the involvement of the researcher in the project. Thus the intent is not so much the acquisition of knowledge, but the development of all those involved in the project, including the researcher.

Although the initial plan was to recruit up to 12 persons to participate in the Circle, that number eventually grew to as many as 28 mentors. In the beginning they were recruited through letters to community and church leaders as well as newspaper articles explaining the program and inviting the general public to participate. There were no requirements for participation in the Circle other than a willingness to be supportive rather than condemning. Parolees were referred to the *Citizen Circle* by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction parole officer for Darke County.

The original intent was to meet as a group for 12 weeks, but because the *Citizen Circle* only met once a month, it was soon realized that more mentoring meetings with the parolees were needed to have any measurable impact on the volunteers. Therefore, the project time was greatly expanded to 37 meetings over a three-year period.

Goals

The primary goal is to enhance the spiritual faith of volunteer mentors in the Darke County *Citizen Circle* group through their participation in the three-year reentry program. A second goal is to enhance their understanding of criminal justice issues, and in particular, their acceptance of those who have been incarcerated. This will be measured through objective measures, such as attendance, pre- and post-project scores on a Religious Status Inventory, and two Crime and Rehabilitation surveys; also subjective measurements will be conducted through personal reflections from the mentors offered at the end of the project.

While the immediate goal is the spiritual benefit of the Darke County mentors involved in the project, a secondary goal is to aid the other 28 *Citizen Circle* reentry support groups in the state. Because church members are a primary source for Circle mentors, it is the hope of this researcher that the results of this project can be used to recruit and train mentors statewide to better aid the parolees in their care. Because the *Citizen Circle* program is still in its infancy stage statewide, and because most of the research to date has focused solely on the benefits afforded the parolees, no research has been done on the effect of the *Citizen Circle* on the community mentors. Therefore, the project will be the first of its kind.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HOSPITALITY AS A PRIMARY EXPRESSION OF FAITH

Introduction

To gain a thorough understanding of the full meaning of hospitality as it has been defined and practiced throughout the history of the Church, it is important to first look at the biblical teachings on this subject. For this researcher, the Bible is the inspired, and living, words of God. It is not only the record of God's self-revelation in history, but it is the standard by which the people of God must model their actions, and even their attitudes. The Bible, therefore, is the basis, the rule, the primary authority in the life of the people of God.

However, the Bible must be understood in the context of the culture in which it was written. It must also be understood within the historic traditions of the Church. In that respect, the theological method of this project incorporates much of John Wesley's quadrilateral four components: Scripture, Christian tradition, experience and reason. Therefore, to understand the spiritual basis of the *Citizen Circle* program, let us first consider what Scripture has to say on the issue of hospitality.

Hebrew Scriptures on Hospitality

Every culture in the world holds up some standard of hospitality as a basis for civilized behavior. While most Americans define hospitality as mere social etiquette when entertaining friends for dinner, the actual meaning of the term, especially in its biblical understanding, is much different, much stronger, and even much more radical. The Hebrew words for hospitality

are *hachnasat orchim*, and they mean “the welcoming of guests,”⁷ on the surface, a rather benign term. But when translated into the Greek, they take on a fuller meaning that better captures the cultural understanding and practice of the biblical culture. The Greek term used was *philoxenia*, and it literally means “loving the stranger,”⁸ a far more revolutionary understanding and application of hospitality than simply being a good party host, or even a greeter at the Sunday church services as many American churches often defines it. It is this radical, life-encompassing understanding of hospitality that cares for the infirmed in a *hospital* and the dying in a *hospice*. Both are places of selfless caregiving, even in the face of death. Biblical hospitality, then, is a form of healing, a means of making the love of God present in the face of pain, suffering and death. It is an understanding of faith in action, especially in action with the stranger, the hurting, the outcasts, in the community. So that leads to the question of what specifically does the Bible have to say about hospitality, and that is the question that will be addressed in this section. Consider first the Hebrew scriptures. How did the Israelites understand hospitality within their relationship to their God? More important, how did this understanding affect their daily living?

Genesis 18:1-15

Probably the most notable example of hospitality in the Hebrew scriptures is the encounter of Abraham with the three messengers from God, and perhaps even God himself, in Genesis 18:1-15. Although Abraham did not know who they were, he not only opened his home to them, but also insisted they honor him by staying. In v3 he said, “If I have found favor in your

⁷ Aharon’s Jewish Books and Judaica. <http://www.jewishlinks.us/hebrew-words/hebrew-words-h.html>. (accessed August 4, 2004).

⁸ W. E. Vine, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of the Original Greek Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers*. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1961.) 575.

eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by.”⁹ This statement is important because it shows clearly Abraham’s attitude toward welcoming strangers into his home. It is not God whom he is welcoming, for that is not known to him yet, but just three travelers. Therefore, his hospitality takes on greater meaning.¹⁰

His attitude becomes more apparent in the manner in which he treats his visitors. First of all, it should be noted that his hospitality was offered to strangers, particularly toward those who appear unexpectedly. One might expect this sort of welcome if his visitors were known to him, or even if they were members of his clan, but there is nothing in the passage to indicate any previous relationship with the visitors. Second, his ongoing treatment of them reflects his respect for them as honored guests. For example, he immediately ran to meet them. In v2 it states, “And when he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.” These gestures express both the warmth of Abraham’s welcome and his deep respect for his visitors.¹¹ Not only that, but he hurries so much that the sentences describing his actions often lack verbs or “and” connections. In fact, “haste” language appears five times in this passage, in vv 2, 6-7, and 24:18-20.¹² Third, Abraham gives them the best he has in the form of a calf. V5 says he offered “something to eat,” but that is a commonly understated phrase in this culture. To say otherwise would have made guests feel as if he were offering too much and would have made them uncomfortable, as if they were putting their host to too much effort.

⁹ All scripture quotations unless otherwise noted are from the New International Version.

¹⁰ Gordon Wenham. *Genesis 16-50 in Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 2*, ed. By David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1994), 45.

¹¹ Other passages in Genesis also reflect this attitude of respect when greeting visitors. In 29:13, and 33:4 people run to greet long-lost relatives, and they bow down to the high and mighty in 23:12, 37:9 and 42:6.

¹² Wenham, 46, 47.

Instead it was the custom to say “something” and then bring on a feast as Abraham did.¹³ He then continues to honor these strangers, now his guests, by not only preparing and serving the food himself, but he even goes so far as to remain available to them from the time they first arrived until the time they leave his camp. According to John Skinner, this sort of response was expected for guests of high rank only.¹⁴ Finally, he shows great courtesy to them, first by bowing to greet them and then later by his humble request to “find favor in your eyes.” That statement confirms that he understands himself to be their servant.¹⁵ In fact, Gordon Wenham states that Abraham is actually “laying on the charm” with his greeting because the literal wording for “Sir” is “my lord” and in some transcripts is actually translated as “sovereign.”¹⁶ Therefore, it can be concluded that the understanding of biblical hospitality, established by Abraham, is best defined in terms of overt actions of welcome, concern and care for strangers, especially strangers in need.

Leviticus 18-20

Abraham’s attitude of hospitality toward others as a spiritual response to God was codified in the Levitical Code of Moses, most notably in Leviticus 18-20, and chapter 19 in particular. The clear understanding of the book of Leviticus is the summons to holiness, which is most pronounced in 19:2: “Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”¹⁷ Chapters 18 through 20

¹³ Wenham, 47

¹⁴ John Skinner. *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 299.

¹⁵ Terrence .E. Fretheim, *Genesis in The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. 1*, ed. By Neil M. Alexander, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 464.

¹⁶ Wenham, 46.

¹⁷ Samuel E. Balentine. *Leviticus: Interpretation - A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 2002), 149.

form a literary and theological unit composed of a frame and a center. The frame, found in chapters 18 and 20, shows that the journey toward holiness goes through the ethics of human relations; that is, a vertical relationship with God that is lived out in a horizontal relationship with others. The center, chapter 19, shows precisely how that horizontal relationship is to be lived out. According to Samuel Balentine, neither the frame nor the center can stand alone. Without the frame, the summons to holiness too easily slides into theological abstraction. Without the center, the summons to ethical relationships with others is cut loose from the anchor that provides its moral authority.¹⁸ In other words, chapters 18 through 20 lay the groundwork for James' statement that "faith without works is dead."¹⁹ It is also this connection that John reaffirms in his first letter: "Let us love one another for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."²⁰

There are four specific topics, or exhortations, throughout these three chapters. First, there is the place of God in the community. "I am the Lord your God" occurs 26 times as constant reminder that they are not only a priestly kingdom, but a holy nation. Therefore, obedience to God's instructions is linked to life itself.²¹ Second, as people of God, they are unique, separate from the people of other nations, most notably Egypt and Canaan. This separateness is to be embodied in their daily conduct that should be noticeably different from the conduct of other nations. In fact, in chapter 18 God warns the Jews eight times they are to be

¹⁸ Balentine, 167.

¹⁹ James 2:26.

²⁰ 1 John 4:7,8.

²¹ Balentine, 152.

different.²² Third, moral impurity is not just a private matter. While ritual impurity may defile the sanctuary, moral impurity has more serious consequences because it affects the whole created order. This then accounts for the seeming Levitical preoccupation with sexual conduct. It is not the physical act that is the focus here, but rather the creation act of God that it represents, because creation is at the root of humanity's relationship with God and sexual impurities violate the creation ethic.²³ Thus Leviticus 18 and 20 expand the idea that unethical behavior damages all of life, not just spiritual life.²⁴ And fourth, holiness is not just the ritual holiness of a select few priests and only within the temple. Rather it is a moral demand on all the community at all times. The end result is that Leviticus 18-20 democratizes holiness in that it is now available and attainable by everyone. However, that holiness is done best by conforming one's actions to the actions of God. To be the people of God, therefore, means that holy love for others is equal to, if not greater than, the requirement of holy love for God.²⁵

Concerning Leviticus 19, in American Reform Judaism it is considered the "grand chapter" of the book, so much so that it is one of the most quoted and most often read chapters. In fact, it is the assigned Torah reading for Yom Kippur afternoon in that tradition.²⁶ The theme for this chapter is found in v2, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." Here the character of God personally stands behind the moral duties required of humanity. Other ancient religions did not appeal to the person, nature and actions of their deities as the basis for moral

²² Balentine, 152.

²³ This theme is reiterated in Numbers. 33:33-34, Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Isaiah 24:5-6, Jeremiah 3:1-10, Ezekiel 33:16-18 and Ezra 9:10-11.

²⁴ Balentine, 154.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 151.

²⁶ Walter L. Kaiser, Jr, *Leviticus* in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 1*, ed. by Neil M. Alexander, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1131.

thinking and acting. Instead pagan deities were portrayed as more sensual in their actions and character than the mortals who strove to worship them; in effect, as exaggerated humans. Not so with Yahweh, who is portrayed as the embodiment of holiness itself and a model for all.²⁷

To illustrate just how all-encompassing this chapter is, a list of examples is given from almost every area of life. So representative and so wide is the range of the laws and commandments found in this chapter that it might be characterized as a brief Torah. Moreover, the refrain that is repeated no less than 15 times is: “I am the Lord (your God),” which marks the end of almost every one of the 16 paragraphs. In fact, the New Interpreter’s Bible even directly connects Leviticus 19 with the 10 Commandments.²⁸

<u>10 Commandments</u>	<u>Leviticus 19</u>
1 / 2	v4
3	v12
4 / 5	v3
6	v16
8 / 9	vv11,16
10	v18

A holy faith and holy actions are so connected that they are inseparable. So much so that faith can only demonstrate its authenticity by the way it operates in the ordinary affairs of life. That is to say, the religious life must have ethical outcomes if it makes a claim to authenticity.²⁹ For the people of God, to be holy, that is, to have holy actions, is not an arbitrary religious requirement, but a mandate because it goes to the heart of what it means to imitate God’s very nature in all our conduct. To be holy is to get involved in the world. That is why in this chapter on moral holiness, the emphasis falls on social justice.³⁰ So it naturally follows that hospitality is

²⁷ Kaiser, 1131.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid, 1132.

³⁰ Kaiser, 1136.

so closely connected with holiness because holiness can only find expression in loving; and holy love moves the people to show mercy to the poor and the needy. This decree and all the others here concerning daily actions of mercy say that those whom God blesses have an obligation to be mindful of the needs of the outcasts among them.³¹

The spiritual connection between hospitality and spirituality for the people of God is seen most clearly in 19:33, “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living among you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” Sometimes it may seem that the standard to which God calls his people may seem unrealistically high. But in remembering what God has done for them, it serves as a reminder to the community of God’s great, outreaching love, particularly when it is coupled with their time as aliens in Egypt. Since God has done so much for his people, he can, therefore, ask them to do as much for others. When Israel does this, they are acting like God to others. And when they do that, everyone benefits. The aliens benefit because they receive the kindness of God through the people of God; and the people of God benefit because they are making themselves holy as God is holy.³² According to Allen Ross, Leviticus 19, and the whole of the Levitical Code for that matter, can be summed, “God’s people must conform to his holiness by keeping his commandments - which is the letter of the Law - by dealing with others in love - which is the spirit of the Law - by living according to God’s standards of separation in the world and by demonstrating kindness and justice.” And that can only be done through acts of holy living, or hospitality, in the world.³³ Thus this passage makes clear that

³¹ John Hartley, *Leviticus in Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 4*. ed. by David A. Hubbard and Glenn Barker, (Dallas, Texas: Words Books, 1994), 323.

³² Ibid.

³³ Allen P. Ross. *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 2002), 365.

horizontal action is the key to vertical faith. And therefore, it is not the sanctuary in which faith must be expressed, but rather in the community, especially among the strangers, the needy and the outcasts among us.

Numbers 35:9-15

The Levitical understanding of hospitality to others as the embodiment of holiness unto God is continued in Numbers 35:9-15 in which Moses is commanded by God to set aside six towns in the land promised them as “cities of refuge.” The intent was to protect those accused of a crime and awaiting trial. The principle of asylum is an ancient one found in many cultures. This developed in response to the custom of blood vengeance which enshrined the duty of the next of kin of a murdered man to shed blood for blood. This was a deeply rooted principle, and for the sake of the stability of the community, a time of respite would obviously be required if distinctions between murder and manslaughter were to be made effective.³⁴ However, these cities were not intended as a place to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused, but rather as a place of safety until that could be proven by trial. These cities functioned for all Israelites, as well as for resident aliens in the land.³⁵ Nonetheless, there were restrictions on those who sought sanctuary in these cities. For example, they must remain there until the death of the high priest. The high priest is the representative of the community at large, and his death expiates the blood shed accidentally. If the guest fails to observe this rule, his life may be forfeited at the hands of the next of kin. Like all the other commands, there was an underlying spiritual theme that was

³⁴ Phillip J. Budd, *Numbers in Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol 5, ed. by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1994), 383.

³⁵ Thomas B. Dozeman. *Numbers in The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol.2*, ed. by Neil M. Alexander, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 264.

intended to remind the people of their relationship with and responsibility to God.³⁶ It was with this understanding of sanctuary that later on in Israel's history the altars dedicated to God were considered as places of asylum as well. For example, in 1 Kings 2:28-35 when Adonijah competes with Solomon for the throne of David, and when Solomon is elected, both Adonijah and Joab, David's general who supported Adonijah, flee to the sanctuary and "grasp the horns of the altar" for protection from Solomon.³⁷ The dominant theme in Numbers, as a priestly book, is that the land must not only be secured and properly assigned, but it must also be properly protected from all possible defilements. Proper steps must be taken to ensure that the holiness of the land is secured. This is consistent with the overall priestly theological view that the holy God lives at the center of the community in the middle of the land, and for Israel to be God's holy people, they too must be holy; and that holiness requires holy actions toward one another, especially the outcasts among them while in the land of God.³⁸ It is this understanding of a separate, safe place of refuge that is at the heart of the *Citizen Circle* reentry attitude and actions of welcome for parolees – those who too often are aliens and strangers in their own community.

Deuteronomy 24:19

Community was a key element in Hebrew life and faith. While work was an integral part of daily living, and prosperity was often used as a measure of God's blessing on the people for their faithfulness, there was also a deep awareness that left unregulated, prosperity could undermine the very basis of the community with its kinship values and commitments. A nation of landowners and merchants could not easily be a nation of brothers. The laws in Deuteronomy

³⁶ Budd, 384.

³⁷ Fretheim, 264.

³⁸ Budd, 386.

23:19-25:4 are aimed at achieving a balance between the necessity for commerce while at the same time setting limits on it.³⁹ This community awareness strongly pervades the book of Deuteronomy, setting a sharp distinction between those who were within the community and those who were outside it. However, the resident aliens and orphans within the community often lacked the full support of natives, and so they were often vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. They had only a dependent, client status in society, so they had to rely on the protection and help of others. As a result the people were required to leave “forgotten” sheaves of grain or gleanings of olive trees or vines during harvest. It was a way to provide some assistance to the poor that enabled them to share both in the workload of harvest and in its rejoicing and fruits. The community was ultimately seen as a single entity that could prosper as a whole, but in which even the least fortunate were to participate.⁴⁰ Here again, and in practical ways, the people of God are commanded to care for the outcasts among them with acts of hospitality; and that we in our consumer culture, like those in Israel, need to be first a community of brothers, especially to the strangers among us.

1 Samuel 25:2-38

Hospitality - or rather the consequence of denying hospitality - was exemplified in the story of David and Nabal in 1 Samuel 25:2-38. When David asked Nabal for food for his men because he had protected his flock for him, Nabal not only refuses, but demeans David and his men as less-than-worthy of his attention. His food and drink are only for his own men, not David's, he said. David's first response was that he would kill Nabal and all the males in his camp, saying Nabal has “returned me evil for good,” but Nabal's wife Abigail intervenes with food, drink and

³⁹ Ronald E. Clements. *Deuteronomy in The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol 2*, ed. by Neil M. Alexander, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 466.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 471.

above all, remorse over her husband's lack of hospitality. She calls him a "worthless man."

David then relents. But when Nabal hears of his near-execution by David, he has a heart attack and dies. However, the story has a two-fold meaning because not only is Nabal punished for his inhospitality, but David is saved from committing murder by Abigail's act of hospitality.⁴¹

Abigail has done this and thus forestalls vengeance. Not only were lives saved, but the spiritual future of the kingdom was saved because David chose mercy over violence.⁴² That theme of inhospitality was reaffirmed by Ralph W. Klein who views Nabal as a literary presentation for Saul. Nabal is selfish, ungrateful and the kind of person who returned evil for good. Not only did he show disrespect toward David, who as the future king served as a literary model for God, by denying him food, but worse still he used his provisions only for himself, even to a drunken excess.⁴³ In that respect, both Nabal and Saul are prophetic warnings for all of Israel. Since these men, who benefitted from all the wealth of the land God had given them, died when they disregarded God's command for holy living through acts of hospitality, so too, Israel will die if it disobeys. This passage, then, stands as a stark example of the necessity to show God's welcome to the needy in our community, not just for our own sake, but for the future sake of our community.

Isaiah 32:5-8

Here the prophet Isaiah compares a fool and a righteous king to remind the people of their covenant with God to offer hospitality to all those they meet. The mind of the fool is full of

⁴¹ Perhaps it is this story that Paul had in mind in Romans 12:20 when he states, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink."

⁴² Bruce C. Birch. *Samuel in The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol 2*, ed. by Neil M. Alexander, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1170.

⁴³ Ralph W. Klein. *1 Samuel in Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 10*, ed. by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1994), 253.

evil because he practices ungodliness and spreads error concerning the Lord. He does that most noticeably when he leaves the hungry without food and the thirsty without water.⁴⁴ According to John Watts, the use of the fool is a common literary tool in which he is often contrasted with the wise person in prophetic literature. The fool is one who has failed to master the disciplines of wisdom, has weak character, is easily tempted, and is impetuous in his decisions. The results of having a fool in charge include among other things the neglect of welfare programs and failure to take care of water resources in a dry country. As reprehensible as the fool is to the prophet, it is the knave who is regarded as even worse. He knows better, yet he deliberately chooses conduct that is evil and hatches evil plots. And most reprehensible, his victims are the poor and needy, God's special ward, according to the prophets and the Torah. A noble, on the other hand, is one who has no ulterior motive, who can deal objectively, thinking in ways that are not dictated by his personal interests.⁴⁵ However, it is not only the one who commits acts of inhospitality that the prophet holds accountable. All those who fail to recognize and speak out against the fool and knave in leadership are equally at fault. And when the people of God fail to act against injustice, when they allow inhospitality to occur within the community, they will be judged along with those who commit the injustice.⁴⁶

According to Christine Pohl, these narratives were addressing more than a social issue. Rather they revealed the underlying nature of a person or community. More important, they demonstrated covenantal loyalty, or the lack of it, to God. Granted, all cultures at that time practiced some form of hospitality, even sacred hospitality, but what seems to be unique to the

⁴⁴ David Peterson. *Isaiah 1-39 in The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol 6.* ed. by Neil M. Alexander, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 265.

⁴⁵ Wenham , 411.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 414.

Jewish culture is that they must give more than a dutiful response to the stranger; they must show love to the stranger as an outward expression of their love for God. Lev. 19 states that the people of God must love their neighbor (v19) and the alien (v34) “as yourself.” That response to strangers, she states, thus embodies their response to God in a real way. “The theological and moral foundations for hospitality in the Hebrew scriptures were tied closely to Israel’s special relationship of dependence on and gratitude to God.”⁴⁷

Therefore, it can safely be concluded that helping parolees successfully reenter the community following prison is consistent with the beliefs and practices of the people of God in the Hebrew scriptures.

New Testament Scriptures on hospitality

Some may contend that this sort of radical hospitality was a necessary survival response common, not just among the Israelites, but in all nomadic cultures; but by the time of Jesus, the Jews were no longer nomads and dependent on acts of hospitality for survival. More important, with the coming of the New Covenant with Jesus, his followers were no longer bound by its demands of the Law. However, the Gospel teachings of Jesus clearly state otherwise.

Matthew 5:43-48

Probably the most notable teaching in the New Testament on hospitality as the primary expression of faith in God is found in the Sermon on the Mount, and specifically the section dealing with loving one’s enemies. Although Jesus is referencing Leviticus 19:18b when he declares, “but love your neighbor as yourself,” he is actually addressing what Dale Allison called the “common folk wisdom” of the day. Hating an enemy is not found anywhere in the Law of

⁴⁷ Christine D. Pohl. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 29.

Moses, but it was commonly believed by the people that it was, in fact, acceptable to hate an enemy, he states.⁴⁸ Not only that, but Jesus goes even further by confronting the common definition of a neighbor. The Pentateuch, like subsequent Jewish tradition, understood “neighbor” to be an Israelite. But Jesus said it is anyone we are in a position to help, even an enemy.⁴⁹ The obvious conclusion, therefore, is if one loves even an enemy, who then will not be loved? More important, the context of Jesus’ command indicates that he is including not only political enemies, but spiritual enemies as well. Thus it is not just personal opponents that we are to love, but even opponents of God - something that takes on a whole new meaning when read in the light of the crucifixion.⁵⁰

But what is meant by love? The word used here is “agape,” which is a godlike love that loves without variables, loves when the object of love is unlovely or hateful, loves for no reason at all, even when there are ample reasons to discourage love.⁵¹ Most of all, it is a love that is embodied in actions. These actions were modeled by God’s actions, in that he gave his one and only son who died for us.⁵² In response, we are to model God’s love through our actions as well. We do that by greeting our enemies as well as friends and especially by praying for our persecutors.⁵³ That is why the cross is the constant reference point of God’s love. It is the

⁴⁸ Dale C. Allison. *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1999), 99.

⁴⁹ Allison, 100.

⁵⁰ Allison, 100.

⁵¹ James Montgomery Boise. *The Sermon on the Mount: An Expository Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books. 2002), 141.

⁵² It is this sort of love in action that Paul referred to in Romans 5:7,8: “God demonstrated his love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

⁵³ John Driver. *Kingdom Citizens*. (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1980), 97.

culmination of God's actions. Love is not a matter of feelings; it is a matter of the will and it always expresses itself in good actions.⁵⁴ It is as C.S. Lewis stated:

“The rule for us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less...The difference between a Christian and a worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections or likings and the Christian has only charity. The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he ‘likes’ them; the Christian, trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on – including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.”⁵⁵

Matthew 25:40

Jesus later further clarified his new understanding of hospitality when teaching on the final judgment of God. He said whatever his followers did to the “least of these brothers of mine” - referring to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned - they were actually doing it to God. In other words, the basis for acceptance into the kingdom is established by deeds of mercy and compassion.⁵⁶ While most scholars believe this parable was intended to eliminate the distinction between Jew and Gentile, it also blurred the line between Jesus' disciples and those Jews who were not directly following Jesus. All will ultimately be judged, not just by their doctrines, but by their response to human need.⁵⁷ True disciples will

⁵⁴ Boise, 143.

⁵⁵ C.S. Lewis, in Boise, 144.

⁵⁶ D. A. Carson. *Matthew in The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol 8.* ed. by Frank E. Grabelein, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 519.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

love one another and serve the least brother with compassion; in so doing, they unconsciously serve Christ.⁵⁸

Luke 10:25

In case his hearers were still not sure what he meant by loving one's enemies, Jesus, as he so often did, drove his point home with the story of the good Samaritan. The neighbor for the Jew was a fellow Jew only. But Jesus said any man from any nation who is in need is our neighbor. And we must help a man even if he has brought his trouble on himself, as the traveler had done by knowingly traveling in a dangerous area.⁵⁹ However, it should be noted that the religious persons in the parable were not acting contrary to expectations, just contrary to how God defines love. While the Law was being observed, there was no mercy in it. Jewish leaders at the time of Jesus held that the commandment to love one's neighbor applied only to pure Jews, not half-breed Samaritans and definitely not Gentiles. But this parable shows that love for one's neighbor knows no bounds. There is no limit to the love expected of the people of God.⁶⁰ For that reason, the Samaritan's act of love is even more pronounced to Jesus' Jewish audience. Outwardly this man was a heretic, but the love of God was in his heart based on his actions toward the needy man he encountered. In the end, Jesus was saying we will be judged not by our nationality, nor even by our doctrines, but by our actions of love toward one another.⁶¹ That is

⁵⁸ Carson. *Matthew in The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol 8*, 522.

⁵⁹ William Barclay. *The Daily Bible Series: The Gospel of Luke*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1975), 140.

⁶⁰ Norval Geldenhuys. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Luke*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 311.

⁶¹ Barclay, 140.

why in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount in 6:36 he uses the word "merciful" in place of "perfect" as Matthew does.⁶² Whoever needs our help - our hospitality - is our neighbor.

Luke 19:10

If any doubt still remained as to what Jesus was saying, he removed it completely in this passage when he offers the people a living example of his teaching. Zaccheaus, the tax collector, whom most Jews felt was even worse than the Samaritan, invited Jesus into his home to eat with him, something that was at best embarrassing for a devout Jew. But much to the horror of those with Jesus, he agreed to the request. Zacchaeus was so overwhelmed by Jesus' act of love that not only his heart was changed, but his life as well. That fact was apparent when he offered to give all those he had cheated four times what they had lost, something that went far beyond the requirements of the Law.⁶³ In that respect, he was showing the people what Jesus had been saying; that God's people do not just say they love their neighbor, they show it through their acts of biblical hospitality. Or as the New International Commentary on the New Testament states, accepting Jesus brings about an effective and practical revolution in one's life, both inwardly and outwardly.⁶⁴

Epistles on Hospitality

As stated, hospitality was not simply a Jewish cultural custom. It was a foundational practice for the people of God. Jesus continued, and even expanded, that practice when he taught his followers, "You have heard it said,but I tell you...." While some may contend that this

⁶² Walther L. Liefeld, and D.A. Carson. *Luke in The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol 8.* ed. by Frank E. Gabelein, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 943.

⁶³ Barclay, 235.

⁶⁴ Geldenhuys, Luke, 471.

sort of radical hospitality was more an expression of the Israelite culture than the Israelite religion, and that Christians, who were increasingly from the Gentile culture, were no longer bound by its practice, the letters of the Apostles to the new Christians contradict that view.

Romans 12:13

Paul's primary concern with the newly-formed church, once he had given them the doctrines of the faith, was now to build a community in which those doctrines could be lived. Starting in 12:9 he lists increasingly more specific ways they can show practical love. First, they must reject what was evil and hold to what is good, then they are to show real affection for one another, and finally in v13 he says "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." Both sharing and welcoming are necessary, according to Handley Moule, because they both incorporate fellowship; that is, they create the unity that Paul wanted in the church community.⁶⁵ Not only that, but this verse also acts as a transition to vv14-21 that follow, and they make it clear that hospitality toward all persons is to be the norm for the church. While "bless those who persecute you," and "be willing to associate with people of low position" could refer to other believers, v20 clarifies that stating, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink."⁶⁶ It is this sort of radical hospitality that was one of the two primary hallmarks of the church, according to Ed Loring. The first was diversity expressed by sharing God's love outside the Jewish community; and the second was hospitality, because no one in the church ever was in need.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Handley C. Moule. *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*. (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1899), 337.

⁶⁶ Everett F. Harrison. *Romans in The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol 10*. ed. by Frank E. Gabelein, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 134.

⁶⁷ Ed Loring. *I Hear Hope Banging at My Back Door*. (Decatur, GA.: JZ Editing & Publishing, 2000) 54.

1 Timothy 3:2

“A bishop must be above reproach..hospitable..” Hospitality was a universal virtue during this period, among both Jews and Gentiles, and it referred literally to taking in trustworthy travelers as guests. However, there was a practical reason for this. Inns during this period usually functioned as brothels, and because of that, Jewish people were especially willing to take in fellow Jewish travelers, as long as they had letters of recommendation certifying their trustworthiness.⁶⁸ However, there was another benefit to Christian hospitality other than the safety of the traveler. The church grew both spiritually and physically because believers from widely scattered areas would get to know one another, thus encouraging one another in their faith, especially during times of persecution.⁶⁹

Titus 1:8

“(A bishop) must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, one who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.” As he had written to Timothy, Paul charged Titus that a spiritually mature person must be godlike in his public actions as well as his private faith. This was especially important for Titus because the church in Crete was dealing with false teachers and that had created disorder among the believers. To resolve the problem and revive the church Paul required the leaders not only have right doctrines, but right actions.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Craig S. Keener. *The Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 613.

⁶⁹ Ralph E. Earle. *1,2 Timothy in The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol 11, ed. by Frank Greabelein*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 364.

⁷⁰ D. Edmund Hiebert, D;. *Titus in The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol 11, ed. by Frank Greabelein*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 431.

Hebrews 13:1-3

There are actually two distinct references to hospitality in these verses. The first is v2 in which the writer, obviously alluding to Genesis 18, cautions the readers to “not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” Then again in v3 he tells his readers to “remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoner, and those who are mistreated as if you yourself were suffering.” Although Craig Keener believes the focus here is on those imprisoned because of the Roman persecution of the church at that time,⁷¹ that interpretation may be too limited. Instead Joel Kline purports that the followers of Christ must regard anyone who is suffering the way Christ regarded them. “Compassion literally means ‘to suffer with.’ When scripture speaks of Jesus being ‘moved to compassion,’ it is far more than a fleeting moment of tenderhearted care; Jesus enters deeply into the person’s situation - the pain, the hurt, the confusion - standing with that person, bringing words of encouragement, healing and salvation.”⁷² It is that sort of attitude and actions of radical hospitality that this passage indicates should be the attitude and actions of all the followers of Christ toward “the least of these” in the community, regardless of who they are.

1 Peter 4:9

“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” It is important to see this verse in the light of the preceding passage. Starting in 3:8, the author’s concern is that since Christ suffered to save humanity, then his followers will also suffer for doing good. And because of their new life of faith, he says in 4:2, “*(You) do not live the rest of (your) life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*” He then lists some obvious sins that they are no longer to

⁷¹ Keener, 682.

⁷² Joel D. Kline. *Reaching Out In Word and Deed*. (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1991), 17.

indulge in, such as drunkenness, adultery, idolatry. The key element here is that sin in 1 Peter always means wrong actions, not just wrong doctrines. By the same token, faith will always result in right actions, not just right doctrines. And among the Christ-like actions expected of them is radical hospitality.⁷³

James 2:24-26

“You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone....As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” This epistle, and particularly this passage, embodies the view of all the scriptures concerning the necessity of acts of hospitality as a primary expression of faith. But it is important to note that it is not just our individual acts of hospitality, but the sum of all our actions that embody our faith. It is a lifestyle of godly actions that James Adamson says is the theme of this epistle, or “faith at work” as he calls it.⁷⁴ The emphasis is on the conduct of the follower of Christ because the crucial test of faith is works. “Christianity is a life of faith, but faith is realized in conduct,” he states.⁷⁵ That view was confirmed by the New Interpreter’s Bible, which not only purports that the 10 Commandments could be found in Leviticus 19, but Leviticus 19 can be found in James as well.⁷⁶

<u>Leviticus 19</u>	<u>James</u>
v12	5:12
v13	5:4
v15	2:1,8
v16	4:11
v17b	5:20

⁷³ Peter H. Davids. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle of Peter*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 149.

⁷⁴ James B Adamson. *James: The Man and his Message*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 267.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kaiser, 1136.

Apostles, but was, in fact, the foundational expression of the Christian faith for all believers. More important, this biblical hospitality of the Apostles was always defined and expressed in everyday acts of kindness, love and compassion to all, whether a believer in the Church or an unbeliever in the community.

Hospitality throughout the history of the Church

With this understanding of the biblical basis for radical hospitality as a primary expression of faith, let us now look at the historic response of the Church.

At its formation with the apostles, there was neither confusion regarding the meaning of hospitality, nor the Church's responsibility to live that hospitality through faith in action in the community. They clearly understood it to be what the word *ekklesia* meant, the people called out by God.⁸⁰ They were forced outward because they had no formal worship buildings and therefore, had to meet in their homes. The sense of welcome found naturally in the home was then transferred easily to the home church. According to Michael Green, this contributed greatly to the outreach and growth of the early Church. First of all, the numbers involved were small. Not only did that allow for greater interaction of ideas, but more important, "The sheer informality, and relaxed atmosphere of the home, not to mention the hospitality which must have gone with it, all helped make this form of evangelism particularly successful."⁸¹ Green cites as examples of this the Jerusalem church that first met in the upper room of a house owned by the mother of John Mark; and as the Church expanded the members met in Jason's house at Thessalonica, and then homes of Titius Justus and Stephanus in Corinth, Philip's house at Caesarea and in Philippi Lydia's house as well as the jailer's - all were the focus of worship and

⁸⁰ Spiros Zodhiates, ed. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*. (Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG Publishers, 1992) 541.

⁸¹ Michael Green. *Evangelism in the Early Church*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 207.

hospitality evangelism. Green concludes, “It is hardly surprising that the ‘church in the house’ became a crucial factor in the spread of the Christian faith.”⁸²

However, hospitality evangelism was not limited to just welcoming people into the house church. The emphasis remained as it had throughout the history of God’s people - embodied in acts of love for the outcasts they met. In the second century, for example, the Pastor of Hermas told the believers to “give abundantly of them to the needy.”⁸³ Origen even said the Church should pursue the needy. “The practice of hospitality does not simply mean that we should entertain those who come to us. It means that we should go out and invite others to come in.”⁸⁴ And if there was any doubt about just how radical Christian hospitality should be, Ambrosiaster made it clear that even enemies are to be shown love through acts of kindness, acts that required involvement with them, acts that today would be called mentoring.

“Paul teaches us not just to let God take revenge, but also to give good things to our enemies, so that they may demonstrate that we do not have these enemies because of anything we have done. Rather, we are trying to get them to desist from evil by doing them service. If by their ungodliness they continue in their evil ways, our service to them will lead to punishment for them..Thus the Lord not only forbids us to repay our enemies in kind, but also exhorts us to seek friendship by acts of kindness, both because that serves to mature us and because it is a means of winning others to eternal life.”⁸⁵

The Church practiced this radical hospitality so well that even Rome itself was forced to take notice of the emerging faith. The Greek apologist Aristides, for example, in a letter to Emperor Hadrian defended the Christians, noting their generous treatment of outsiders and

⁸² Green, 208.

⁸³ Driver, 38.

⁸⁴ Gerald Bray, ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Vol 6*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 316.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 320.

disadvantaged.⁸⁶ Later on John Chrysostom warned the Christians that while they could benefit from entertaining persons of high status, they should instead entertain those with little or nothing to offer in return. They should even set aside in their home a room literally marked for Christ and it would be for the “maimed, the beggars, and the homeless.” And even if it is not much of a room, he said, “Christ disdains it not.”⁸⁷ Similarly Jerome challenged clergy to “let poor men and strangers be acquainted with your modest table, and with them Christ shall be your guest.”⁸⁸ Augustine, too, seeing the decline of the Roman empire and the ensuing social chaos that followed, declared, “On this occasion of so many strangers and needy and suffering people, let your hospitality and your good works abound.”⁸⁹

However, it is important to note that a shift occurred at this time in this appreciation for the connection between doctrine and action. Because the Christians had practiced their love for “the least of these” so well for three centuries, and because so many people were converted to Christ due to the radical faith they saw lived in the Church - and especially because Roman Emperor Constantine endorsed Christianity, Christians ceased to be a persecuted minority. Instead they now began to enjoy, because of imperial favors, a new privileged status. That resulted in a flood of new “converts” who neither understood nor practiced the radical faith of the apostolic fathers.⁹⁰ The end result was that the Catechumenate soon was populated with candidates whose lifestyle and motives seemed sullied when compared to previous generations. So much so that John Chrysostom lamented:

⁸⁶ Driver, 38.

⁸⁷ Pohl, 154.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 18,19.

⁸⁹ Pohl, 170.

⁹⁰ William Harmless. *Augustine and the Catechumenate*. (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 52.

“I see many after baptism living more carelessly than the uninitiated, having nothing particular to distinguish them in their way of life. It is, you see for this cause, that neither in the market nor in the Church is it possible to know quickly who is a believer and who an unbeliever; unless one is present at the time of the mystery, and see the one sort dismissed, the others remaining within – whereas they ought to be distinguished not by their place, but by their way of life.”⁹¹

During the Medieval period, as the church became more intertwined with, and therefore compromised by, the political power structures, it was through those who rejected that failed system and instead practiced radical hospitality, primarily through a lifestyle of poverty, that the church was called back to its spiritual roots. In the 12th century the Cathar movement spread quickly among the oppressed classes when it denounced the superfluous riches of the church.⁹² Peter Waldo, in turn, renounced his wealth so that he might preach the gospel with integrity. In reading the gospels, he was convinced the message could only be preached by those who embraced poverty.⁹³ The Waldensian movement was a form of evangelical social protest, directed against the economic attitudes and practices common in Medieval Christendom. Its focus, and therefore, the majority of its adherents, were not just the poor, but the outcasts who had no civil rights - manual workers, day laborers, peasants, handicapped, single mothers. The Waldensians renounced not just worldly goods, but also the political and economic power that accompanied it.⁹⁴ The Lombards, who followed Waldo, believed that by choosing poverty they would be freed from their servitude to money and to the system it represented.⁹⁵ However, it was Francis of Assisi who best embodies the radical hospitality of this period in the Church’s history.

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, in Harmless, 73.

⁹² Driver, 90.

⁹³ Ibid, 91.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 98.

⁹⁵ Driver, 97.

Francis saw the presence of Christ in the midst of ordinary people who shared their bread with the hungry. Not only that but he believed the desire to acquire, accumulate and conserve worldly goods frequently led to violence against one's neighbors. For him choosing a life of poverty promoted social peace and justice. "This idea was radical at a time when salvation was found only in the sacraments of the church, and the sacraments were effectively unrelated to everyday existence."⁹⁶

In the 14th century John Wyclif, clearly contradicting the church structure of his day, preached that only those who served others could be lord of others. Spiritual authority grew out of an authentically biblical life of service – radical hospitality - rather than an ecclesiastical appointment.⁹⁷ Then in the 15th century Peter Chelcicky of Bohemia advocated, again contrary to the current ecclesial hierarchy, that true faith was fulfilled only through loving actions and goodwill. Because he took the Bible as his primary source, and because he interpreted the New Testament literally, he dared to question the church's hierarchy and identified deeply with the suffering of common people.⁹⁸

Although the Reformers were most noted for their emphasis on doctrinal reform, the renewal of biblical hospitality was also part of their message. John Calvin, for example, regarded biblical hospitality as the hallmark of the Christian. "Hospitality is not one of the least acts of love," he said in his commentary on Romans 12:13.

"That is, that kindness and liberality which are shown toward strangers, for they are for the most part destitute of all things, being far away from their friends: he therefore

⁹⁶ Driver, 107.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 121.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 133, 135.

distinctly recommends this to us. We hence see, that the more neglected any one commonly is by men, the more attentive we ought to be to his wants.”⁹⁹

For that reason he mourned the demise of ancient hospitality in the Church. “The office of humanity has nearly ceased to be properly observed among men; for the ancient hospitality celebrated in histories, is unknown to us, and inns now supply the place of accommodations for strangers.”¹⁰⁰ A century later Puritan theologian John Owen echoed Calvin’s lament. “In the younger days of the world, hospitality was offered to needy strangers, but with us it is applied unto a bountiful and it may be profuse entertainment of friends, relations, neighbors and acquaintance and the like,” he wrote.¹⁰¹ However, Christine Pohl cautions that while there was a new appreciation for biblical hospitality in the Church at this time, its sacramental quality was never fully regained. “It became mostly an ordinary but valued expression of human care. This was made even worse with increased dependence on institutions for hospitality care,” she states.¹⁰² John Wesley, for example, tried to return personal care to the practice of hospitality by asking preachers of the gospel to actually eat with poor persons as a means of connecting with them physically and spiritually; and while early Methodists did genuine acts of hospitality, they did not see it as evangelism. And because of that, biblical hospitality lost the dynamism and transforming power it had in the early Church.¹⁰³

The end result was that as the culture became increasingly more successful, increasingly biblical hospitality was practiced outside the gathered church community, especially as

⁹⁹ John Calvin. *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), 467.

¹⁰⁰ Pohl, 36.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 37.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 52.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 54.

professional care givers became the primary practitioners of it.¹⁰⁴ Even though evangelism was still the accepted mandate of the Church, as it grew and prospered within the American culture, and as Christian converts in the Church moved toward a more respectable and settled status, they lost their willingness to reach out to the most vulnerable strangers.

While there were some who still practiced biblical hospitality, such as the Salvation Army in the 19th century whose members deliberately took on a marginal identity so they could become friends with urban poor, even adopting monastic practices of dress, strict discipline and restrictions on marriage and property, and Dorothy Day in the 20th century who took Matthew 25:40 so literally that her home was often overrun by the needy in New York; nevertheless, on the whole as Christians became more established in positions of influence and wealth, their marginal status was diminished and their hospitality was more likely to reflect and reinforce social distinctions rather than to undermine them.¹⁰⁵ Since Constantine, the church has focused primarily on doctrines of the faith which it considered essential for belief. Unfortunately, there has been little focus on the fundamental role of radical love which should characterize the disciple of Jesus.¹⁰⁶ It was this denial of radical biblical hospitality as the foundational expression of the faith that caused Dietrich Bonhoeffer to lament,

“If our Christianity has ceased to be serious about discipleship, if we have watered down the gospel into emotional uplift which makes no costly demands and which fails to distinguish between natural and Christian existence, then we cannot help regarding the cross as an ordinary everyday calamity, as one of the trials and tribulations of life. We have then forgotten that the cross means rejection and shame as well as suffering.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Pohl, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 111, 113.

¹⁰⁶ Driver, 99.

¹⁰⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. (New York: Collier Books, 1937), 98.

Since the beginning of the story of God in relationship with his people four millennia ago, the consistent example throughout all the history of the people of faith, from Abraham to Bonhoeffer, has been that genuine faith in God must be lived out in acts of radical hospitality – acts of agape love - to all we meet, and especially to the outcasts in the community who, more than anyone else, need to know that God loves them. To do any less, has been, and still remains, a denial of God’s presence in the world and to the world.

Theological foundation for a biblical understanding of hospitality

It is with this biblical and historical understanding of hospitality that we now must ask the key question that the Church has always wrestled with - what next? In other words, how do we move from orthodoxy to orthopraxy, from right doctrine to right practice? And more specifically, how will this impact the *Citizen Circle* project?

According to Dennis Sweetland, that is the question the Protestant Church has been wrestling with for nearly 500 years. “Protestant justification by faith alone can too often define faith as ‘trust,’ while ‘good works’ are viewed as unimportant and unnecessary.”¹⁰⁸ However, this can lead to an incomplete conversion that focuses merely on believing “all the right things and saying yes to the right questions.”¹⁰⁹ That is precisely the sort of spirituality that Jesus rejected in Judaism. The rabbis instructed their disciples to follow the Torah, to have a conversion of the mind. But Jesus was clear in Mark 1:17 that his disciples needed more than a conversion of the mind. He called them to have a conversion of their actions.¹¹⁰ “Come, follow

¹⁰⁸ Dennis M. Sweetland. *Our Journey with Jesus: Discipleship According to Mark*. (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier Publishing, 1987) 86.

¹⁰⁹ Tom Sine. *Taking Discipleship Seriously: A Radical Biblical Approach*. (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1985), 21.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 19.

me,” he said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” Genuine faith, therefore, is a conversion of the actions as well as a conversion of the attitudes.

It is this sort of faith in action that Al Hsu alludes to when he states that the gospel is both vertical and horizontal. “Jesus reconciles us to God and to each other.”¹¹¹ This understanding of the vertical and horizontal dimension of the Christian faith is at the heart of our discussion, and it is what Robert Webber calls “holism.” “Our Western world has been shaped primarily by Greek thought rather than Hebraic thought. Greek thought separates, divides, and sees things in parts, whereas Hebraic thought sees things as a whole and continuous.”¹¹² To truly understand biblical faith we need to “undergo a kind of intellectual conversion,”¹¹³ as he calls it. In other words, genuine faith must be lived, not just believed.

But what exactly does a lived faith look like? First of all, it has a new - or rather renewed – understanding of the Church. Webber defines the Church as a new order, a new creation, even a new humanity, who share a common life together in Christ. Thus the Church is literally the body of Christ, still present in the world in the form of his people.¹¹⁴ That means that Christ is no longer trapped in stained-glass windows or books of systematic theology, but incarnate in every sense of the word. It was that realization that led social activist Shane Claiborne to conclude, “Our bodies are temples of God, and that’s not just a reason to eat less cholesterol. We are the body of Christ, not in some figurative sense, but we are the flesh and blood of Jesus alive in the

¹¹¹ Al Hsu. *Grace and Peace: How a Simple Salutation Points Us Toward a New Society*. Christianity Today Online. <http://christianitytoday.com/ct./2008/june/22.50.htm>, (accessed June 14, 2008).

¹¹² Robert E. Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-forming Community*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 20.

¹¹³ Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 20.

¹¹⁴ Robert E. Webber. *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 50.

world through the Holy Spirit – God’s hands, feet, ears.”¹¹⁵ For this reason, the Church cannot isolate itself from the pain and suffering – and sin – of the world. Instead it must be in and among the broken sinners of our world, crying out to God, groaning for grace. Because where the Church is found, here is where the grace of God will manifest itself as love and reconciliation.¹¹⁶ Webber goes so far as to say that it is only the Church that can truly address the ills that we face in our communities. “As a new order, a new humanity, the church has always had within it the power to be an explosive force in society and in the history of the world. The current attempt to bring renewal by putting chairs in a circle, singing with a guitar, meeting in homes, and studying the Bible in small groups without the discovery of the incarnational nature of the Church may be less the beginning of renewal than the last gasp of death.”¹¹⁷ Therefore, we can only conclude that the Church, our faith, cannot be built around isolating ourselves from evildoers and sinners, by creating a community of religious piety and moral purity. As the Church, we are called to be actively and regularly involved in making a difference for the kingdom of God in our own community – right now. As Tom Sine cautioned, “Salvation must not be seen as merely an individual event in which the individual has a part. The kingdom of God has come to transform the world, and us with it, by the power of God in Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁸ When the Church is the Church as it was intended to be, the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of what Charles Marsh called “the Beloved Community.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Shane Claiborne. *Irresistable Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 79.

¹¹⁶ Sweetland, 163.

¹¹⁷ Webber, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity*, 51.

¹¹⁸ Sine, 24.

¹¹⁹ Charles Marsh. *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, From the Civil Rights Movement to Today*. (New York, NY.: Basic Books, 2005), 1.

In citing the role of the Church in the civil rights movement between 1955 and 1964, he said, “The logic of (Dr. Martin Luther) King’s dream was theologically specific: beloved community as the realization of divine love in lived social relation. It was the passion to make human life and social existence a parable of God’s love for the world. It was agape: the outrageous venture of loving the other without conditions – a risk and a costly sacrifice.”¹²⁰ It was this understanding of the Church as the literal presence of Christ on earth that allowed civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer to look beyond the evils of segregation, racial hatred, beatings and even death threats on a near daily basis, and rightly conclude, “Christianity is being concerned about others, not building a million-dollar church while people are starving right around the corner. Christ was a revolutionary person, out there where it was happening. That’s what God is all about, and that’s where I get my strength.”¹²¹

Therefore, we can conclude that to be part of the Church, the Body of Christ, our faith must be lived, not just believed. But the question then that naturally arises is how do we get this lived faith? Or as the rich young man asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life.”¹²² Too often the focus of this verse has been on “eternal life.” But Robert Webber sees this as not only a misreading of the text, but more critical, a misplaced spirituality that focuses on us, our satisfaction, rather than God’s. “A spirituality shaped primarily on need, private interest, and self misses the point of a biblical and historical Christianity,” he said.¹²³ N.T. Wright goes even further, stating that a future tense understanding of salvation deludes and diminishes the present

¹²⁰ Marsh, 2.

¹²¹ Charles Marsh. *God’s Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights*. (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 33.

¹²² Mark 10:17, NIV.

¹²³ Robert E. Webber, ed. *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 15.

work – and even the salvation – of the Church. Salvation, he said, was not going to heaven some time and place in the future, but heaven-like living in the here and now.

“Every act of love, gratitude and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one’s fellow human beings, and for that matter, one’s fellow nonhuman creatures, and of course, every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world – all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make.”¹²⁴

Miraslov Volf defines salvation in terms of gift-giving. God gave us salvation – a relationship with him, not just for our own personal enjoyment, but that it would be a gift that keeps on giving. “Giving to others is the very purpose for which God gave us the gifts,” he said.¹²⁵ In fact, this gift-giving, or more accurately, grace-sharing, is the means by which God makes himself known in the world. His gift giving “flows through the giver.”¹²⁶ Thus even though our faith is personal, salvation cannot be understood as solely a personal experience. It must be communal. To be otherwise would destroy the very nature of salvation, for it is not intended by God as merely a means for our self-improvement, but rather “to make us agents of the transformation of this earth, anticipating the day when, as we are promised, ‘the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.’”¹²⁷ That is how Jesus answered the rich young ruler’s question concerning eternal life in Mark 10:17. He said eternal life begins here and now because salvation must be lived out in this world, not the next. “Go, sell

¹²⁴ N.T. Wright. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church*. (New York, NY: Harper One, 2008), 208.

¹²⁵ Miroslav Volf. *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 49.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 54.

¹²⁷ Wright, 200.

everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”¹²⁸ Or as Shane Claiborne put it, “Jesus came not just to prepare us to die, but to teach us to live.”¹²⁹

But what does it mean to live like Christ? Dietrich Bonhoeffer would say it means making disciples. “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”¹³⁰ While there is merit in that definition, especially considering the Great Commission of Jesus that his followers are to “Go and make disciples of all nations,”¹³¹ that understanding alone does not fully answer our question because discipleship has too often been defined as evangelism, and evangelism has too often been defined as solely an intellectual defense of the faith - sharing the right doctrines, giving the right answers, winning the right arguments. The end result, according to Shane Claiborne, is an evangelism without the Good News and a discipleship that produces no disciples. “I believed all the right stuff – that Jesus is the Son of God, died and rose again. I had become a ‘believer,’ but I had no idea what it means to be a follower. People had taught me what Christians believe, but no one had taught me how Christians live.”¹³² It is this sort of distortion that Bob Webber addressed when he cautioned that sharing our faith, making disciples, is best understood as a Hebrew concept that means “to follow after,” or more precisely, to literally walk on a journey with another. “The Great Commission demonstrates that Jesus did not introduce various programs for evangelism, discipleship and Christian formation. Instead, following in the

¹²⁸ Mark 10:21.

¹²⁹ Claiborne, 117.

¹³⁰ Sine, 17.

¹³¹ Matthew 28:18-20 “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

¹³² Claiborne, 38.

tradition of Hebraic holiness, Jesus taught that becoming a disciple is a process that takes place in a continuous way in the worship and community life of the church.”¹³³ Or in the words of a seventy-year old nun, Sister Margaret, who had spent her life working with Mother Teresa ministering to the outcasts of Calcutta, “We are trying to shout the gospel with our lives.”¹³⁴

It is this lived faith that is the focus of the postmodern generation who are more interested in the tangible display of faith rather than the abstract argument for faith. “The emerging church reflects a growing concern to bridge the gap between theory and practice,” Webber states.¹³⁵ An example of evangelism as lived faith is the Koinonia community founded by Clarence Jordan in 1942. Koinonia is a Christian community, set in rural Georgia, that strives to be a “demonstration plot for the Kingdom of God.”¹³⁶ Here members “preach” Jesus’ gospel through the way they live, through a shared life modeled after the early Christian communities, and most important, through racial equality, which at that time and place – in the heart of the racism, segregation and violence of the Old South – was a message that equality in Jesus was radical to the extreme. But Jordan believed the only way authentic change in the hellish culture of racial hatred and violence would occur was through “incarnational evangelism,” and that meant making Christian truth concrete in the community by actually living racial equality in their everyday lives. Jordan called it “evangelism at its highest,”¹³⁷ because it is not based upon a sermon, nor a theory, not even an abstract doctrine, but upon the Word of God lived out in the everyday actions of those who follow him. “We were trying to call attention to the implications of the Christian faith for all

¹³³ Webber, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity*, 22.

¹³⁴ Claiborne, 127.

¹³⁵ Webber, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, 18.

¹³⁶ Koinonia website, <http://www.koinoniapartners.org/whatis.html>

¹³⁷ Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 56

humanity. Nothing made any difference to us but human need, that was the measure, and you went because people were in need, it didn't matter who they were, or where or how they lived," Jordan said.¹³⁸

Civil rights activist John Perkins said discipleship always involved what he called "redemptive release" from all forms of physical and economic oppression, and that Jesus Christ – whose message was "explicitly economic" – identified with the poor to the point of equating himself with the poor system. "A transformed mind without transformed social practices is worthless," he said.¹³⁹

Charles Marsh rightly concluded that evangelism is the hallmark of the Church, and that Christians must never cease preaching the good news of Jesus Christ as a source of compassion and mercy. But they must do so through their solidarity with the poor and the downtrodden as the story of the Word made flesh. "We must confess that our faith begins and ends in places of exclusion and struggle. Our sojourn into a violent and hurting world is shaped by the memory of the Christ who was born in a stable because there was no room for him at the inn."¹⁴⁰

At this point in our discussion of the horizontal responsibilities of the Church, it is critical that we not lose sight of the vertical. According to Robert Webber, "a Christianity which has lost its vertical dimension has lost its salt, and is not only insipid in itself, but useless to the world."¹⁴¹ And that is exactly what Donald Bloesch says has happened with the Church, especially the Church in the consumer cultures. "Much of modern religion has turned the soul inward rather than directing it outward to the crying needs of society. Modern evangelicalism has

¹³⁸ Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 136.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 168.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 210

¹⁴¹ Webber, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity*, 163.

shamefully adapted to the therapeutic society, which makes personal fulfillment the be all and end all of human existence,” he lamented.”¹⁴² No matter how well-intended, and no matter how much social benefit we may bring to the community, without the vertical dimension to our efforts, without rooting our social action in genuine worship, we labor in vain. What must be maintained, therefore, is a sense of the sacred; that is, a time and attitude of genuine worship focused solely on the experience of God. N.T. Wright states that when the church takes sacred space seriously, then it will go straight from worshipping in the sanctuary to binding the wounds of the broken persons in our community. “When the Church engages in authentic worship of God as God, the whole world is now God’s holy land and we will not rest as long as that land is spoiled and defaced. This is not an extra to the church’s mission. It is central.”¹⁴³ For that reason evangelicals such as John Wesley could sound the call for social holiness by bringing the Word of God to bear upon every aspect of human life, or John Calvin could see the world as a theater of the glory of God, the arena in which we are called to work out our salvation in fear and trembling.¹⁴⁴ This will happen only when we see ourselves, not as mere social activists, nor even Christian social activists, but as emissaries of the high and holy God, entrusted with the gospel of reconciliation and redemption, sent into the world as the literal healing hands and feet of Christ. This is what the prophet Isaiah envisioned when he said, “Cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”¹⁴⁵ And this can only be done, according to Jonathan Wilson, when the Church first engages enthusiastically in

¹⁴² Donald Bloesch. “*Whatever Happened to God?*” *Christianity Today*. February 5, 2001, Vol. 45, No. 2, Page 54.

¹⁴³ Wright, 265.

¹⁴⁴ Bloesch, *Whatever Happened to God*.

¹⁴⁵ Isaiah 1:17.

worship.¹⁴⁶ It is this connection between worship and compassion that underscores the foundational premise of our faith that following Christ is done by serving others.¹⁴⁷

Conclusion

As stated at the outset of our discussion, every culture in the world holds up some standard of hospitality as a basis for civilized behavior. While most Americans define hospitality as mere social etiquette when entertaining friends for dinner, or even greeting visitors at church, as has been shown, the actual meaning of the term, especially for the Church, the people of God, is much different, much stronger, and even much more radical. In fact, Godly hospitality, or as the Bible defines it, “loving the stranger,” is the foundation on which our faith is built. So much so that it was this understanding of “loving the stranger” that gave Dr. Martin Luther King the courage to face hatred, violence and even death threats on a near-daily basis throughout the civil rights movement, but yet never give into the temptation to respond in kind to his abusers. Instead he loved those who hated him, “not because we like them, nor because their ways appeal to us, nor even because they possess some type of divine spark. We love every man because God loves him.”¹⁴⁸ That was because Dr. King, and the thousands of others who marched, were jailed, were beaten, and even who died at the hands of those who hated them, believed with all their being that the mission of the Church was not just racial equality, or economic justice, or even peace among humanity. But rather that the vision of St. Paul for the Church would be lived out in the

¹⁴⁶ Jonathan R. Wilson. *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World*. (Eugene, Ore.: WIPF & Stock Publishers, 1997), 33.

¹⁴⁷ Arthur Simon. *How Much is Enough? Hungering for God in an Affluent Culture*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 41.

¹⁴⁸ Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 179.

community: “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.”¹⁴⁹

That verse is best exemplified in a story that Kate Braestrup tells of her first encounter with the sort of hospitality that God expects – requires – of his Church. She had just been notified that her husband Drew, who was a Maine State Trooper, had been killed while on duty. Amidst the shock, pain and horror of that call, trying to get her mind to accept the awful reality that the one who was her strength, the center of her life, was now gone and that she was suddenly left alone to raise four young children alone.

Perhaps forty minutes after I heard the news of Drew’s death, I was sitting in the living room with my friend Monica when the doorbell rang. The sergeant was on the telephone, so Monica sprang to answer it. A young man stood on the front steps, clad in a spiffy dark suit, his hair neatly combed, exuding a scent of soap and virtue. Holding out a pamphlet, he beamed at Monica. ‘Have you heard the Good News?’ For a long second, Monica glared at him, not sure whether to punch him or laugh hysterically. She compromised by slamming the door. A few minutes later the doorbell rang again. This time, I answered it. It was my neighbor, an elderly woman I had exchanged no more than a dozen words with in the ten years I’d lived in Thomaston. She had potholders on her hands, which held a pan of brownies still hot from the oven, and tears were rolling down her cheeks. ‘I just heard,’ she said.

“That pan of brownies was, it later turned out, the leading edge of a tsunami of food that came to my children and me, a wave that did not recede for many months after Drew’s death. I didn’t know my family and I would be fed three meals a day for weeks and weeks. I did not anticipate the neighborhood men would come and drywall the playroom, build bookshelves, mow the lawn, get the oil changed in my car. I did not know that my house would be cleaned and the laundry done, that I would have embraces and listening ears, that I would not be abandoned to do the labor of mourning alone. All I know was that my neighbor was standing on the front step with her brownies and her tears: she *was* the Good News.”¹⁵⁰

This neighbor with the pan of brownies and tears in her eyes was the Body of Christ to a broken woman. She didn’t discuss doctrines. She didn’t invite her to church. She just loved her the way Christ loved her and she cried with her the way Christ cried with her in her time of

¹⁴⁹Galatians 3:10, NIV.

¹⁵⁰ Kate Braestrup. *Here If You Need Me*. (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007), 53.

despair. This, I believe, is precisely what James had in mind when he said: “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”¹⁵¹ Hospitality, loving the stranger, is not a church growth program. It is not a plan for evangelism. It is not even about the stranger we are loving. But rather the act of hospitality itself is an offering of obedience to God, an offering of remembrance and of thanksgiving for our salvation. It is the horizontal response to our vertical relationship with God. It is our response to St. John’s command for the Church, “If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”¹⁵²

It is this understanding of vertical faith lived out horizontally, particularly among the “least of these,” parolees, and even sexual offenders - the social outcasts and pariahs in the community, that the Darke County *Citizen Circle* project is based. If the faith of the mentors is to grow, as this project seeks to determine, it will be as a direct result of the practice of radical biblical hospitality.

¹⁵¹ James 2:14-16, NIV.

¹⁵² 1 John 4:20, NIV.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: MINISTERIAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE ISSUES AND RESOURCES TO ADDRESS IN RESEARCH

Introduction

“Mary,¹⁵³ 29, was referred to us by Wayne Hospital. She is bi-polar and schizophrenic and taking a whole battery of medicines. Apparently she has caused a lot of trouble for her family, mental health case workers, been in jail for her behaviors and ‘burned a lot of bridges’ as her case worker said, and now she has few options left. She is trying to get into the county home, but her history may prevent that. She was fine for us last night, but her history shows she could easily erupt into an incident.”¹⁵⁴

“I was given Frank’s¹⁵⁵ name by his parole officer while he was still in prison. He did 12 years for assaulting his wife. Worst of all, he used a gun, so the parole officer is very concerned with his potential for danger. He attended the *Citizen Circle* once, but didn’t seem very interested in being part of the group. Then in May we got a call he was back in jail on a new charge of violence against a woman he was dating.”¹⁵⁶

“The parole officer referred Herman,¹⁵⁷ 56, to us. He has been in Allen Correctional Institution for seven years. He took a bus from Lima to Dayton this morning to meet his sister and brother-in-law who then brought him to us. He has had little contact with this family and was released with no support and little hope that he will make it on the outside. In fact, he was

¹⁵³ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

¹⁵⁴ Good Samaritan Home, Greenville, Ohio, resident case management notes, May 23, 2007.

¹⁵⁵ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, June 22, 2006.

¹⁵⁷ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality

literally shaking with fear when he arrived today. Realistically, there is no way he will find work, much less get an apartment in the 14 days allowed in the homeless shelter. I am not sure he will even be able to make a real effort to find a job. Although we have never done this with our shelter residents before, we took him a plate of food for dinner because we thought he might not even know how to cook for himself after seven years in prison.”¹⁵⁸

Problems in Reentry

Dr. Reggie Wilkinson, the former director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, once said that most inmates coming from prison want to make it on the outside, but they just don't know how.¹⁵⁹ That fact is evident with all the parolees that Good Samaritan Home helps when they are returning home to Darke County, Ohio, from prison - and those cited here are not isolated incidents, but rather typical of all those coming from prison. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that nearly 95 percent of the 2.2 million inmates now in prison will eventually be released to return to their communities – 800,000 in 2006, a fourfold increase from 1988 – with those numbers expected to increase every year as many more inmates complete long prison terms.¹⁶⁰ More telling, according to Princeton University sociologist Devah Pager, there are currently more than 12 millions ex-felons in the United States, representing roughly nine percent of the male working-age population.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Good Samaritan Home, Greenville, Ohio, resident case management notes, January 13, 2007.

¹⁵⁹ Reggie Wilkinson. Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Reentry Conference. Defiance, Ohio, March 10, 2004.

¹⁶⁰ Jennifer Yahner and, Christy Vishner and Amy Solomon. “*Returning Home on Parole: Former Prisoners’ Experience on Parole in Illinois, Ohio and Texas.*” http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411744_returning_home.pdf, (accessed July 30, 2008), 1.

¹⁶¹ Devah Pager. *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 2.

Most of those leaving prison today will be poorly educated, lack vocational skills, and struggle with substance abuse, physical disabilities, or mental illness. Few of these problems will have been addressed in prison. To make matters worse, most of them will be given a bus ticket and told to report to the parole officer in their home community on the next business day. Although given from \$25 to \$200 in gate money, where to live, how to get a job, or even how to pay for food is generally left up to the offender. The notion is that an inmate can “make it if they want to make it.”¹⁶² In effect, inmates go from a secure housing unit, sometimes even an isolation unit where they are locked down 23 hours a day, and right onto the street at the end of their sentence and expected to become “normal” citizens.¹⁶³

It was for this very reason that the parole system was initiated, to help transition parolees from prison to home. During this time, the parole officers were intended to assist the offenders in addressing personal problems and searching for employment and a place to live. That was because parole officers were viewed as paternalistic figures who mixed authority with help. They provided direct services, such as counseling, and also knew the community and brokered services, such as job training, for needy offenders.¹⁶⁴

However, that is no longer the case today. Parole officer Theresea Fedrick, for example, began her career 12 years ago with 35 parolees to manage in New York City. She used to drive them to job interviews and treatment programs. She would also refer them to an in-house employment counselor and a psychologist. But those jobs have been cut, and now she has 75

¹⁶² Joan Petersilia. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 81.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 88.

cases. “The only time we pick people up now is to take them to Rikers (Island Jail),” she said.¹⁶⁵ To make matters worse, New York City’s situation is not untypical. The average caseload of parole officers across the nation grew from 45 to 70 – more than twice the recommended supervision load.¹⁶⁶

This reduction in the services offered parolees was the direct result of the “get-tough-on-crime” laws of the 1970s when the national attitude toward prison shifted from rehabilitation to punishment. In his State of the Union address in 1970, President Richard Nixon boldly declared a new kind of war: “We must declare and win the war against the criminal elements which increasingly threaten our cities, our homes and our lives.” This marked the beginning of an era of politicization of criminal justice and the steady growth of ever more punitive approaches to crime control. “Tough-on-crime” policies grew increasingly popular thereafter.¹⁶⁷ As a result, the prison system, and ultimately the parole system, was overwhelmed by the ever-increasing numbers. In 1980, there were 220,000 individuals supervised by parole agencies across the country. By 2000 it had increased to 725,000,¹⁶⁸ and by 2006 there were 800,000 men and women on parole, an all-time high.¹⁶⁹ This disproportionate growth in inmates and ultimately parolees over the past two decades reflects a decision by the public and politicians to become more punitive, sentencing more offenders to incarceration and for longer terms, according to Alfred Blumstein, a criminologist at Carnegie Mellon University. “As a society, we became

¹⁶⁵ Amanda Ripley. “*Living on the Outside.*” Time. January 12, 2002.

¹⁶⁶ Devah Pager, *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*, 23.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 9.

¹⁶⁸ Jeremy Travis, and Sarah Lawrence. “*Beyond the Prison Gates: The State of Parole in America.*” http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310583_Beyond_prison_gates.pdf, (accessed July 14, 2008), 1.

¹⁶⁹ Jennifer Yahner, and Christy Vishner and Amy Solomon. “*Returning Home on Parole: Former Prisoners’ Experience on Parole in Illinois, Ohio and Texas,*” 1.

much more punitive and passed all kinds of laws like mandatory minimums, three strikes and you're out and sending juveniles into adult prisons," Professor Blumstein said. "All this action occurred in the 1980's and 1990's when state budgets were growing and there was little concern for expenditures, but now states are faced with huge deficits and they are looking to prisons as a prime candidate to save money."¹⁷⁰

Another major shift concerned sentencing policies. Throughout the twentieth century, most all states followed a system of indeterminate sentencing. Here judges were given substantial leeway in determining the strength of sanction, depending on a range of factors pertaining to the individual and the offense. Rather than giving a fixed sentence, judges would provide a minimum and maximum sentence, with the actual amount of time served depending on the inmate's behavior while in prison. The intent was to provide incentives for inmates to follow rules and to demonstrate commitment to reform. Early parole was intended as the carrot to accompany the stick of incarceration. But with increasing skepticism about rehabilitation, however, the rationale behind indeterminate sentencing gave way to fixed – and longer – sentences.¹⁷¹ In the past, first-time or low-level offenders might have been placed on probation instead of prison, but new sentencing laws imposed stricter punishments for a broad range of offenses. The chances of receiving a prison sentence following arrest increased by more than 50 percent as a result of determinant sentencing laws. Likewise, the amount of prison time served increased substantially under the new guidelines, with the average length of sentences served

¹⁷⁰ Fox Butterfield. "With Longer Sentences, Cost of Fighting Crime Is Higher." New York Times. May 3, 2004, sec. A, p. 18.

¹⁷¹ Devah Pager, *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*, 16.

increasing by nearly 40 percent between the mid-1980s and the late-1990s. Crime did not become more serious over this period, but punishment surely did.¹⁷²

The combination of tougher prison sentences and state budget cuts that came when the boom time of the 1990s gave way to the economic realities of the post- 9/11 budget cuts, resulted in a parole system that now depends on a parole officer managing a nationwide average of 70 parolees on any given day.¹⁷³ In Darke County, Ohio, where Good Samaritan Home operates the *Citizen Circle* reentry support group, the single parole officer has 96 parolees in his charge.¹⁷⁴ More important, the practical considerations of such high parole caseloads combined with scarce resources have left parole officers with little time and few means to support parolees they are supervising.¹⁷⁵ The end result is that parole supervision shifted from providing service to parolees and more toward providing surveillance activities, such as drug testing, monitoring curfews and collecting restitution.¹⁷⁶ Too often the best that parole supervision can offer now is little more than one or two 15-minute face-to-face meetings with the parole officer each month, usually asking such mundane questions as “where are you living” or “are you working now?” But helping a parolee actually find housing or a job, for all intents and purposes, is no longer possible. So it is little surprise that 67 percent of parolees are rearrested within three years of release.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Pager, 17.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 23.

¹⁷⁴ Christopher Niekamp, Darke County Parole Officer for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. Interviewed August 8, 2008.

¹⁷⁵ Petersilia. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*, 77.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 88.

¹⁷⁷ Timothy Hughes, and Doris James Wilson. “*Reentry Trends in the United States.*” www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/reentry.pdf, (accessed July 12, 2004), 170.

These barriers that men and women face when returning home from prison are typical of all those that Good Samaritan Home deals with. However, given the high prevalence of substance abuse, mental illness, unemployment, and even homelessness among returning prisoners, it is important to explore the role of these factors in reentry in detail. To the extent that these issues present serious barriers to transitioning prisoners, they also present serious risks to the communities to which large numbers of prisoners return.

Substance Abuse

Let us consider first substance abuse. According to Jeremy Travis, with the Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank focused on re-entry issues, substance abuse among prisoners presents significant challenges to the reentry process. He noted that while most prisoners have a history of drug or alcohol abuse, only a small number of them receive treatment while incarcerated and especially when released. It is estimated that about 70 percent of persons in state prisons need treatment – but of the 29 men that Good Samaritan Home has mentored in the past 12 months, 83 percent have had substance abuse issues.¹⁷⁸ Since most are not treated in prison – nearly two-thirds of drug treatment in prison consist of inmate self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, when they leave prison they are at extremely high risk of relapse, and are likely to commit crimes again and again until they are caught and put back into prison, where the cycle begins all over again.¹⁷⁹

However, according to Travis, in the Urban Institute reentry study, “*From Prison to Home*,” treatment has actually been shown to reduce drug use and criminal activity, particularly when in-prison treatment is combined with treatment in the community. But it is important to

¹⁷⁸ Good Samaritan Home, Greenville, Ohio, resident case management records, (accessed August 9, 2008).

¹⁷⁹ Petersilia,97.

note that rate of relapse following release from prison is strikingly high in the absence of treatment.¹⁸⁰ For example, an estimated two-thirds of untreated heroin abusers resume their heroin/cocaine use and patterns of criminal behavior within three months of their release, but with in-prison treatment combined with aftercare, there was a 28 percent reduction in criminal recidivism and a 62 percent reduction in drug use.¹⁸¹ Travis goes on to state that research on substance abuse has found that “addiction is a brain disease.” Thus when an inmate with substance abuse issues returns to his old neighborhood and old friends that place him at high risk for relapse, in part because the familiar places and people may act as a trigger to his brain and heighten cravings. The end result is that substance abuse does affect crime in the community. Nearly six in ten prison inmates surveyed admitted they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs while committing their current offense. This combination is a strong predictor of recidivism, according to Travis.¹⁸² Helping to smooth this transition—primarily through connections to community-based treatment that ideally is available immediately upon release—could reduce the likelihood of recidivism and the resumption of drug use.¹⁸³ In fact, Travis states that a 1997 RAND study on the relationship between drug use and crime concluded that treatment rather than incarceration would reduce serious crime 15 times more effectively.¹⁸⁴

Perhaps former U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger described best the current state of rehabilitation in the criminal justice system. “We must accept the reality that to

¹⁸⁰ Travis, Jeremy, Amy Solomon and Michelle Waul. “*From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry.*” Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/from_prison_to_home.pdf, (accessed July 13 2008), 25.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 27.

¹⁸² Ibid, 29.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 27.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

confine offenders behind walls without trying to change them is an expensive folly with short-term benefits - winning battles while losing the war. It is wrong. It is expensive. It is stupid.”¹⁸⁵

Mental Illness

A second critical barrier to successful reentry from prison is mental illness. Following the widespread deinstitutionalization of mentally ill persons from state psychiatric hospitals in the 1960s and 1970s, today more of these individuals are now involved in the criminal justice system. According to Travis, 16 percent of state inmates report a mental condition or an overnight stay in a psychiatric hospital.¹⁸⁶ The extent of mental health disorders is also relatively high. While estimating the prevalence of mental illness among the inmate population is difficult, Travis goes to state that serious mental health disorders such as schizophrenia/psychosis, major depression, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder are more common among prisoners than the general population. “Rates of mental illness among incarcerated individuals are at least twice, and some estimates range as high as four times, as high as the rates in the overall U.S. population.” He estimates that between 8 and 16 percent of the prison population has at least one serious mental disorder and is in need of psychiatric services.¹⁸⁷ The situation is compounded by the fact that a significant number of inmates have dual diagnoses of mental health and substance abuse issues. More than one-third of mentally ill state inmates indicated a history of alcohol dependence.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Petersilia, 93.

¹⁸⁶ Jeremy Travis, and Amy Solomon and Michelle Waul. *From Prison to Home*, 27.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 29.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

While most individuals receive needed health care services in prison, access to mental health services is more limited, and follow-up in community-based care is lacking. For example, while parolees in Darke County, Ohio, have access to the county treatment center at no charge, they must wait for six months or more to see the only psychiatrist available for them if they are to get prescriptions for any drugs they may need - even if those drugs are critical for their mental stability. The problem, according to Darke County Mental Health officials, is funding. There are simply too many people in need in the county with too few staff to help them.¹⁸⁹ The end result is that treatment is delayed, and for parolees, often delayed until it is too late and they reach an emotional crisis that could easily lead to some parole violation that would, in turn, lead to reincarceration.

Employment

A third critical barrier to successful reentry for parolees is employment. Most experts, as well as prisoners themselves, believe that finding a job is critical to successful reintegration. Research has empirically established a positive link between job stability and reduced criminal offending. In fact, the single most effective factor in reducing reoffending rates was employment. But the barriers to employment are many: low level of education, substance abuse or other mental health issues, residing in poor, inner city neighborhoods that have weak connections to stable employment opportunities and are often removed from centers of job growth, a lack of motivation for and attitudes of distrust and alienation from traditional work. Worst of all, ex-offenders are legally barred from a growing number of jobs, and they face an unwillingness of many employers to hire them for the jobs from which they are not legally barred.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ James Moore, Darke County, Ohio, Mental Health Director Dr. James Moore, Interview April 4, 2008.

¹⁹⁰ Petersilia. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*, 113.

Jeremy Travis states that studies have consistently shown that having a legitimate job lessens the chance of reoffending following release from prison. Yet even during the economic boom time of the 1990s, only 21 percent of the parolees surveyed had full-time jobs.¹⁹¹ Therefore, it is no surprise that in the current economic slump, with the Ohio unemployment rate at 7.3 percent,¹⁹² parolees in rural Darke County, where job options were limited in good times, are struggling to find employment.

There are several factors causing these low employment numbers. First, there is the stigma of having been in prison. Employers are much more reluctant to hire an ex-offender than any other group of disadvantaged workers. They fear legal liabilities that could potentially be created by hiring offenders, and they view their offender status as a signal of a lack of reliability and trustworthiness.¹⁹³ A survey of employers in five major cities across the country revealed that two-thirds of all employers indicated they would not knowingly hire an ex-offender and at least one-third checked the criminal histories of their most recently hired employees.¹⁹⁴ Of the five temporary service agencies – the primary source of jobs – in Darke County, Ohio, one will not hire anyone with a felony conviction, two others say none of their client companies will hire felons, a fourth states they hire some felons, but no sex offenders, and the last one will only hire non-violent offenders. The end result is that of the 29 parolees that Good Samaritan Home has mentored in the past 12 months; only four have gotten hired through any of the temporary service agencies.

¹⁹¹ Jeremy Travis, and Amy Solomon and Michelle Waul. *From Prison to Home*, 32.

¹⁹² William Hershey. "Unemployment rises in October." Dayton Daily News, November 22, 2008, A7.

¹⁹³ Joan Petersilia. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*, 117.

¹⁹⁴ Devah Pager, *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*, 34.

Often there are bureaucratic obstacles to employment. Ex-convicts often need assistance in applying for various forms of identification and other important documents, such as a driver's license, Social Security card and a birth certificate. These documents are vital for obtaining employment, but often the parolee needs one piece of identification in order to get another.¹⁹⁵

Legislation can be an impediment as well. At least six states (Alabama, Delaware, Iowa, Mississippi, Rhode Island, and South Carolina) permanently bar ex-offenders from public employment. Most states also impose restrictions on hiring ex-offenders for particular professions including law, real estate, medicine, nursing, physical therapy, and education.¹⁹⁶ Paradoxically, inmates can receive barber training while in prison, but cannot be licensed as a barber when released because of the state ban on professional licensing for felons.

A final employment hurdle is time. Time out of the labor market interrupts the job experience and prevents parolees from building important employment skills. The Urban Institute reports that several studies looking at the impact of incarceration on future employment have concluded that as time spent in prison increases, the likelihood of participating in the legal economy decreases.¹⁹⁷ Chief Justice Earl Warren summed the employment situation for parolees, "Conviction of a felony imposes a status upon a person which not only makes him vulnerable to future sanctions though new civil disability statutes, but which also seriously affects his reputation and economic opportunities."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Petersilia, 115.

¹⁹⁶ Jeremy Travis, and Amy Solomon and Michelle Waul. *From Prison to Home*, 31.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Pager, 35.

Housing

The final barrier to successful reentry is housing. Housing is the lynchpin that holds the entire reintegration process together. Employment is often contingent upon a fixed living arrangement. And without a stable residence, continuity in substance abuse and mental health treatment is compromised. Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 12 percent of prisoners were homeless immediately before incarceration. It has also been reported that 30 to 50 percent of parolees in large cities are homeless.¹⁹⁹ Most leave prison without enough money for even a security deposit on an apartment. Even if they had sufficient funds for the deposit on an apartment, landlords typically require potential tenants to list employment and housing references and to disclose financial and criminal history information. For these reasons, offenders are often excluded from the private housing market. But public housing too many times is not an option either because federal housing policies often deny housing to those who have engaged in certain criminal activities.²⁰⁰ Housing is even more difficult for those convicted of sex offenses. Since 2003 most states banned all sex offenders from living within 1,000 feet of any school property. In Greenville, Ohio, where Good Samaritan Home is located, there are 13 “forbidden zones” for sex offenders, making virtually half the houses in the city off-limits. As restrictive as this is, it pales in comparison to the housing policy of some states such as Iowa where sex offenders are denied housing within a 2,000-foot radius of every school property, virtually banning sex offenders from living in any city in the state.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Petersilia, 121.

²⁰⁰ Jeremy Travis, and Amy Solomon and Michelle Waul. *“From Prison to Home*, 35.

²⁰¹ Iowa Legislative Services Agency. *“Legal Briefing on Iowa’s Sex Offender Registry Law.”* <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/Central/Guides/LBB/register.pdf>, (accessed August 9, 2008).

One option for ex-prisoners is to stay with family members following release. However, Travis states that is, too often, a short-term solution. One reason is that family members living in public housing may not welcome a returning prisoner home when doing so may put their own housing situation at risk. These familial relationships may also be so severely strained and tenuous that staying with family members or friends is not a viable option.²⁰² However, shelters with limited bed space are often reluctant to house offenders, especially sex offenders. Of the two shelters in Greenville, Ohio, one requires a background check by the police before accepting a homeless resident. Although Good Samaritan Home, which operates the other homeless shelter, will accept felons, both are located within 1,000 feet of a school and cannot house any homeless sex offenders. Travis states the period immediately following release, when a returning prisoner may be most tempted to fall back into old habits, is critical. Providing access to affordable housing options that will aid the transition back to the community, regardless of his or her offense, may be an important factor in relapse prevention.²⁰³ But given the restrictions of the private housing market, the policies of public housing, and the host of other issues facing parolees, it is not surprising that many people of them end up living on the streets. In fact, Travis states that as many as one quarter of all homeless individuals had served time in prison.²⁰⁴

Faced with a national price tag for corrections that exceeds \$50 billion per year, states are now being forced to re-evaluate the “get-tough-on-crime” policies in place since the 1970s. Longer sentences for all crimes, especially low-level drug offenses, reduced rehabilitation programming, and especially an understaffed and overworked parole system, all have resulted in a prison and parole population that has increased eight-fold. “We’ve got a broken corrections

²⁰² Jeremy Travis,,and Amy Solomon and Michelle Waul. “*From Prison to Home*, 35.

²⁰³ Ibid, 36.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

system,” Sen. Sam Brownback, Republican of Kansas, said. “Recidivism rates are too high and create too much of a financial burden on states without protecting public safety.”²⁰⁵ President George W. Bush was on point when he said, “America is the land of the second chance, and when the gates of prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life.” But we will need to change our attitude toward crime, and especially rehabilitation, before our communities can reincorporate the millions of ex-offenders who stand on the margins of society with no clear way into the mainstream.²⁰⁶

From the outset of the Good Samaritan Home ministry of biblical hospitality in 2001, the key question that we have asked ourselves is what is the greatest need in the community? Based on all the evidence, both nationally and locally, it is evident that there is a great need for mentoring support for those coming back from prison. It is also apparent that this need is not being addressed with the current social, political and judicial policies. If anything, that need has only been exacerbated by those policies.

Solutions for Reentry

The problem, according to Justice Solutions, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing governmental and societal responses to crime and its consequences, is that given the anonymity in which the correctional system has historically conducted rehabilitation and reentry, it is little wonder that the public’s perception is that the supervision of offenders “is solely that of the correctional agency’s responsibility.”²⁰⁷ In a 2002 study called, “The 3 R’s of Reentry,” it stated, “If we truly want to prevent crimes from taking

²⁰⁵ Fox Butterfield. “*Repaving the Long Road Out of Prison.*” New York Times. 4 May 2004, sec. A, p. 25.

²⁰⁶ Editorial. “*Creating the Next Crime Wave.*” New York Times. 13 March 2004, sec. A, p.16.

²⁰⁷ Justice Solutions. “*The Three “R’s” of Reentry.*” http://www.justicesolutions.org/art_pub_3_rs_of_reentry.htm, (accessed July 12, 2004).

place, we must enter into partnerships with communities, and particularly those living and working in proximity to the offender and who have a relationship with him/her. In this respect it is only through relationships external to the supervising agency that we can effect victim protection and community safety.”²⁰⁸ In other words, if we want to help parolees reenter the community, then the community must be involved with the parolee. According to Paul Quander, who is the director of Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency for the District of Columbia, “Community supervision plays a vital role in keeping our city safe. It is the bridge that offenders must cross to move from bad choices to a better life.”²⁰⁹ But Joan Petersilia, who is regarded as one of the foremost authorities on prison and reentry issues, cautions:

One of the critical lessons learned during the 1990s was that no one program, surveillance or rehabilitation alone, or any one agency - police without parole, parole without mental health, or any of these agencies outside the community - can reduce crime, or the fear of crime, on its own. Crime and criminality are complex, multifaceted problems, and real long-term solutions must come from the community and be actively participated in by the community and those that surround the offender.”²¹⁰

This new model for reentry is what she called “neighborhood parole,” and it focuses on strengthening the linkage with law enforcement and the community. It is an attempt to change offenders’ lives through more positive family and neighborhood interventions, rather than the negative threat of reincarceration.²¹¹ With this community support, the parole officer then can refocus his or her time on more positive interactions with the parolee, such as acting as a go-between in procuring jobs, social support and needed treatment.

²⁰⁸ Justice Solutions, “*The Three “R’s” of Reentry*.”

²⁰⁹ Melissa Ferrara. “*Coming Home: Groups Try to Ease Transition for Ex-offenders..*” (accessed July 12, 2004).

²¹⁰ Petersilia, 198.

²¹¹ Ibid, 199.

It was this sort of community support that was evident in an Urban Institute study of one Cleveland neighborhood reaction to reentry.

I want to tell you on my mom's street there is a gentleman who returned. He happened to be a sexual offender. Do you know what? My mother's street embraced him mainly because of our street club. His brother, who he came home to, was in the street club. He basically went to a street club meeting and he talked about it. His brother had been away 23 years, and he talked about his brother. He talked about bringing his brother home. Everybody just embraced him to come back into the community."²¹²

However, most residents felt that returning prisoners were not likely to succeed without ongoing guidance and support from the community.

I've had clients who have come home and they really wanted to do it, but they thought all of the obstacles in their way were insurmountable. You have to keep telling them. Some people just get frustrated and they stop. You have to be an encourager. When somebody is ready to stop, that is when you have to get behind them and let them know you can't stop"²¹³

In a reentry initiative study for the U.S. Department of Justice, Douglas Young concurs that the community is the key element for successful reentry of the nations burgeoning prison population. He notes that parole and probation officers know that "informal control agents" - family, friends, neighbors, clergy, service providers, employers business people, even victims of crime - are often more effective in both monitoring and responding to offenders. The reason is because community members are literally closer to the offender on a round-the-clock basis, and thus can observe and react more quickly to both positive and negative behavior. The community also has a greater familiarity and understanding of the offender, and thus can anticipate behavior

²¹² Lisa Brooks, and Christy Visher and Rebecca Naser. "*Community Residents' Perception of Prisoner Reentry in Selected Cleveland Neighborhoods.*" http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411296_prisoner_reentry_cleveland.pdf. (accessed August 19, 2008), 11.

²¹³ Lisa Brooks, and Christy Visher and Rebecca Naser. "*Community Residents' Perception of Prisoner Reentry in Selected Cleveland Neighborhoods,*" 13.

and respond appropriately by removing triggers to reoffending for that individual.²¹⁴ Not only that, but community members have a vested interest in the offender's success, even a sense of ownership and accountability, something that is not present among formal agents – law enforcement and parole officials - who are involved with the offender just because it is their job. Most important, when the community is involved in reentry, parolees come to understand that they have a place in the community, that they are accepted, that others in the community will provide support to facilitate their reintegration, and by the same token, that the community is harmed by his or her negative behavior and will not tolerate it.²¹⁵ The need for community support with reentry was confirmed by an Urban Institute study of parolees returning home to Cleveland following incarceration. Prior to release, most prisoners interviewed expressed the desire and willingness to change their criminal behaviors, but 64 percent said they would need help in dealing with their problems once released.²¹⁶

In Washington state, for example, as part of a nationwide Reentry Partnership Initiative program, community residents act as volunteer “guardians” on a case management team that spans the pre- and post-release phases of reentry. These guardians work closely with corrections officers who lead the case management teams. Their role can range from helping with housing arrangements or making inquiries with potential employers, to directly assisting the offender with rides to job sites or the local supermarket. Guardians also conduct informal monitoring of conditions around the parolee's residence and, in a very limited way, his or her compliance with some parole conditions. Another important guardian role is community education - making

²¹⁴ Douglas Young, and Faye S. Taxman and James M. Byrne. “*Engaging the Community in Offender Reentry.*” www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/grants196492.pdf, (November 5, 2004).

²¹⁵ Douglas Young, “*Engaging the Community in Offender Reentry.*”

²¹⁶ Christy Visher, and Shannon M.E. Courtney. “*Cleveland Prisoners' Experiences Returning Home.*” http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311359_cleveland_prisoners.pdf, (accessed August 19, 2008), 1.

presentations to community groups and programs about offender reintegration and Washington's risk-based "offender accountability" process.²¹⁷

Maryland has a similar RPI program, but one that uses social agencies from the community to act as case managers. These case managers, in turn, work closely with community advocates who help the parolees they are partnered with in carrying out their reentry plan. These community advocates also help the parole agent or community case manager ensure compliance with that plan. But unlike the guardians in the Washington state reentry program, Maryland's community advocates are not volunteers, but employees of the same social services agencies that also employ the community case managers.²¹⁸ So in that respect, Maryland has professionalized their volunteers.

Either way, it has produced positive results. An Urban Institute study of the Maryland community supervision program, for example, found a 38 percent reduction in parole violations and a 31 percent reduction in arrests for new crimes among those who participated in the program.²¹⁹

In these, and other similar Reentry Initiative programs, whether paid or volunteer agencies, Young concludes that the key is some sort of hands-on community involvement with the parolees. "These agencies are invested in their communities. They have connections and they have credibility with neighborhood leaders and citizens that can't come from public or citywide agencies."²²⁰ That community commitment, in turn, creates a bond between all those involved in

²¹⁷ Douglas Young, "Engaging the Community in Offender Reentry."

²¹⁸ Young, "Engaging the Community in Offender Reentry."

²¹⁹ Faye S. Taxman., and Christina Yancey and Jeanne E. Bilanin. "Proactive Community Supervision in Maryland: Changing Offender Outcomes." http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411097_From_Prison_to_Work.pdf, (accessed August 19, 2008), 14.

²²⁰Ibid.

the reentry process. It is this bond that can be the critical element in determining whether the parolee makes it on the outside or not. So in that respect, these Reentry Partnership Initiatives are not just a program to help offenders with reentry, but more important, to help the community with reentry as well.²²¹ In fact, the Urban Institute study of Cleveland neighborhoods found that many people actually felt that an ex-offender who is successful and productive in the community can be a powerful role model. “One of the positive things about people returning is that they decided to commit their lives to making sure that the younger children don’t follow the same path, so they start volunteering in the community, and volunteering for different programs,” one neighborhood resident said.²²²

Petersilia concludes by saying that every known study that has been able to directly examine the relationship between a prisoner’s legitimate community ties and recidivism has found that feelings of being welcome at home and the strength of interpersonal ties outside prison help predict post-prison adjustment.

Parole and reentry of the future must focus on linking offenders with community institutions. Community partnerships not only help the offender connect with the community, but just as important, help the community connect with the offender. If an inmate does not have a naturally occurring family support system, then reentry courts, reentry partnerships and reintegration ceremonies can help serve this vital role.”²²³

Yet she cautions that timing is critical in reentry, that community support must come immediately upon release. These “informal social controls” - those interpersonal bonds that link ex-inmates to churches, law-abiding neighbors, families and communities, connections that are

²²¹ Faye S. Taxman., and Christina Yancey and Jeanne E. Bilanin. “*Proactive Community Supervision in Maryland: Changing Offender Outcomes.*” 14..

²²² Lisa Brooks, and Christy Visher and Rebecca Naser. “*Community Residents’ Perception of Prisoner Reentry in Selected Cleveland Neighborhoods,*” 14.

²²³ Petersilia, 246.

the strongest predictors of ultimate desistance from crime – must come during the first six months after release.²²⁴

Therefore, we can only conclude that successful reentry will not happen without the active participation, support and encouragement of the community.

The Church as community

However, to say that the “community” should connect with offenders is often too vague, too impersonal, and often lacks a focus for responsibility. Who, then, is the community? That is the question that Chicago law enforcement officials asked when 700 people died from gun violence in 1999. They concluded that the churches should be the first place to involve the community. “Using religious leaders to get the word out about violence seemed to be the natural thing to do,” Kathleen Kierman, director of the Chicago division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms said.²²⁵

It was the Church that addressed reentry in Texas. Emmett Solomon, a Southern Baptist minister who has been working with prisoners at a Huntsville, Texas, prison since 1956, is at the forefront of a revolutionary approach to prison ministry that is simultaneously working on two distinct levels. Methodologically, this prison ministry is transitioning from traditional evangelistic prison ministry to more holistic approaches that focus on discipleship and relationships, both within the prison walls and after the prisoners are freed. “In the past, Christians have been good at going into prisons, giving people the gospel, and leading them to Christ,” says Dave Haidle, interim coordinator of the Institute for Prison Ministry at the Billy

²²⁴ Petersilia, 19.

²²⁵ Mary Cagney. “*Pastors Work With Police to End Gun Violence.*” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 44 (September 4, 2000), 34.

Graham School of Evangelism. “But when these people were released, it was as if they dropped off the face of the earth, and often we’d see them back in prison again.”²²⁶ Now, however, that attitude toward reentry support seems to be changing, at least in some churches, and a more biblical understanding of hospitality has evolved. Richard Bundy, who is the director of the Billy Graham Center’s Institute for Prison Ministry agreed. “Because of the gospel, there is a lot of love and hope in the Church. The Church has a lot to offer to poor, desperate people whose lives are so dark they try to escape with drugs.”²²⁷

It was this understanding of biblical hospitality with parolees that led Virginia Hutto to start Women’s Criminal Justice Network Ministry in Gatesville, Texas. Here she matches female inmates with church mentors across the state. These individual relationships not only allow the women to ground their beliefs in biblical truth, but also teach them to value relationships with other Christians. That will make them more likely to continue in their faith and join a church as a reentry support system after they leave prison. The Network is also helping local churches develop programs for prisoners moving back into their communities. Buckner Baptist Church in Dallas, for example, sponsors a program that shelters women for the first six months following release from prison. During this time they can find work and begin to restore relationships with their children.²²⁸

Churches are especially qualified to spearhead community social action, according Ron Sider, who is the founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, a think-tank which seeks to develop biblical solutions to social and economic problems. He said churches are unique among all the

²²⁶ Steve Rabey. “*Redeeming the Prisoners: Prison Ministers Embrace “Restorative Justice” Methods.*” Christianity Today Vol. 43, No. 1 (March 1, 1999) 27.

²²⁷ Judy Veenker. “*Setting Captives Free.*” Christianity Today Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 10, 2000), 52.

²²⁸ Ibid.

social service agencies in the community because they offer special strengths that the secular community cannot.

Serving the poor is a central part of many congregations' self-defined mission; they have a semi-organized pool of volunteers; during the week they provide physical space; they can raise discretionary funds; they have a place and authority to assemble the community for discussion; they have the potential for political influence; they offer moral authority and evidence that people can leave behind destructive behavior; they provide a sense of family that can substitute for dysfunctional family life; and they have links to a larger community that can offer jobs, resources and political influence. Finally, they are present - almost everywhere."²²⁹

This "community of believers," as Sider calls it, can offer the parolee reentering the neighborhood a network of caring friends who provide emotional, spiritual and material support. As a result, many Christian agencies believe that an integrated, holistic approach that embraces the best of the medical and social sciences, but also seeks to nurture people in a right relationship with God, yields more effective social services. According to Sider, that fact was evident in a Northwestern University study in which graduates of Teen Challenge, a faith-based drug rehabilitation program, had an 85 percent success rate in contrast with another study's finding of a 28 percent rate for secular programs.²³⁰

The reason that the Church can be such an effective reentry tool is because it offers the one critical element for successful reentry – moral support. "You must address the topic of morality," Rev. Winston Cato noted. "Values are very, very important; If they don't have them, it will be reflected in their decisions."²³¹ Nora Rosa is a prime example of the need for moral structure in reentry. Even though she had received quite a lot of state assistance, when her parole

²²⁹ Ronald J. Sider. "Revisiting Mt. Carmel Through Charitable Choice." *Christianity Today* Vol 45 (June 11, 2001) 84.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Heather MacDonald. "How to Straighten Out Ex-Cons." *City Journal*. www.city-journal.org/html/13-2-how-to-straighten.html, (accessed November 5, 2004).

was revoked for a drug violation, she admitted, “I need structure. I need help.”²³² Edwin Floran is another example. He had logged five drug treatment stints while under correctional supervision for theft and narcotics sales. “But I always wound up going back to the same neighborhood and hanging out with the wrong crowd. I didn’t think of the consequences when I came back.”²³³

It is not the lack of available programs that is their problem, according to Heather MacDonald. To the contrary, she notes that many of the addicts spoken with acknowledged refusing help offered them in prison. “The overwhelming consensus among ex-offenders is that the most important factor determining whether someone goes straight is not the availability of programs, but self-discipline.”²³⁴ Pepe Velazquez, an ex-addict who now heads the Doe Fund, agreed, “It boils down to the individual, I don’t care what anyone tells you. If you don’t start rehabilitating yourself in prison, you won’t last outside.”²³⁵ In fact, MacDonald states that the overriding impediment to the continued employment of ex-offenders, and therefore successful reentry from prison, was not their prison record, but their drug use – their moral self-control. As a result, all those questioned reported losing jobs again and again because of drug-induced absenteeism and irresponsibility. That is why teaching a work ethic is critical for long-term job placement. “Corporations are looking for someone who shows up every day and keeps his mouth shut,” Russi said. “But with the offender population, shortcuts are their problem, structure is their problem. Being someplace at 9 a.m. every day, it’s not what they want to think about.”²³⁶ In

²³² MacDonald.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

other words, there must be a new value system. And this is where community support – especially Church support - is most important, and most effective. One Cleveland resident said it best:

“You know as soon as a person gets out of the penitentiary they give them a parole officer. Why can’t they give them a support group? Somebody that you could go to, people that had been there, knowing what they did and how they are doing. A lot of people are afraid to pick you up and take you to look for a job. A lot of people are afraid to tell somebody that they can’t read or write.”²³⁷

Thus MacDonald concludes that current criminological thinking is right about one thing: aftercare is essential to keeping ex-offenders out of trouble. In a perfect world, a universal and strictly enforced work requirement is the most effective reentry tool. But in the real world of reentry today, having a mentor, especially a mentor from the Church, for each parolee is the next best thing. “The fear of disappointing a mentor can be an enormous motivator,” she said.²³⁸ Or in the words of one ex-offender, “My mentor used to come in the middle of the night if I needed a ride to a job interview. I couldn’t let him down.”²³⁹

To make it on the outside, to overcome all the barriers facing them following incarceration, parolees need the support of the community. But it is the Church community that is the best means to offer that support. Not only does the Church represent a large percentage of the community, but more important, the Church is more inclined to help than any other group because this helping a parolee make it on the outside is seen as a spiritual mission rather than a social or political program.

²³⁷ Lisa Brooks, and Christy Visher and Rebecca Naser. “*Community Residents’ Perception of Prisoner Reentry in Selected Cleveland Neighborhoods*,” 21.

²³⁸ MacDonald.

²³⁹ Ibid.

Mentoring as a Solution in Reentry

If mentoring is a key reentry tool, the question that must be asked at this point is what is mentoring? The word “mentor” dates back to Homer; in the *Odyssey*, Mentor was the advisor and guardian of Odysseus’ son Telemachus. Broadly speaking, mentoring, then, is one person’s attempt to guide another.²⁴⁰ More specifically, Gordon Shea defines mentoring as a significant, long-term, beneficial effect on a person’s life or conduct, generally as a result of personal, one-on-one contact. A mentor, therefore, is one who offers knowledge, insight, perspective or wisdom that is especially useful to the other person.²⁴¹ Unlike therapy, or some other reentry support system, mentoring is not only for the professional. It can be done by anyone, at any time, in almost any place. It can be carried out informally as an element of friendship, or formally as a part of a highly structured employee orientation program.²⁴² Basically, mentors are helpers. Their styles may range from that of a persistent encourager who helps someone build self-confidence to that of a stern taskmaster who teaches a stubborn student to appreciate excellence in performance.²⁴³ Mentoring, then, is not a program, but a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and protégé, or partner, for a specific purpose, and often for a specific time. Thus, effective mentoring has no set formula, but rather it is a living relationship between two people that, like all relationships, progresses in fits and starts.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ Larry Ambrose. *A Mentor’s Companion*. (Chicago: Perrone-Ambrose, 1998), 1.

²⁴¹ Gordon F. Shea. *Mentoring: How to Develop Successful Mentor Behaviors*. (Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Learning, 2002), 8.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴⁴ Fred Smith. “*Mentoring that Matters: Reviving an Ancient Teaching Method That Adds Life to Ministry.*” *Leadership Journal* Vol. 20 (Winter 1999) 94.

With this in mind, the question that now must be addressed is what precisely does a mentor do? Generally speaking, the primary role of a mentor is to be there for his/her partner, to listen, to comfort, and basically to be a friend.²⁴⁵ Gordon Shea asserts that his research has shown that most people suffer from what he called “generalized low self-esteem.” By that he means they have negative feelings about aspects of themselves or attributes they possess. A mentor’s primary role, therefore, is to provide genuine confidence-building insights and experiences.²⁴⁶

But to do that a mentor must first listen, because genuine listening is probably the most powerful activity of a mentor. It means providing an ear without taking on the other person’s problems, giving advice or joining them in the complaining game. Respectful listening means allowing the partner to talk without interruption and accepting what is being said as genuine. Simply put, a mentor’s role is to help another person unload his/her troubles.²⁴⁷ But Shea cautions that it is critical to listen to more than the words being spoken, but also to listen to the underlying feelings. “Unfortunately, the emphasis our society places on facts often diminishes our capacity to recognize other people’s feelings and perhaps even our own. Yet feelings are important because they motivate our actions - and an inability to detect feelings can cause us to miss the most important part of the message someone is sending.”²⁴⁸ The problem, according to Larry Ambrose, is that mentors too often try to solve problems. That, he warns,

²⁴⁵ Shea, 31.

²⁴⁶ Shea, 33.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 46.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. 47.

shifts the focus from the person to the problem. “Here, you are mentoring the problem instead of the person.”²⁴⁹

However, to say that a mentor must be a listener does not mean he/she offers no direction in the relationship. A good starting point is with investigative questions that seek information, objective data and facts. These are the ones people most commonly ask when trying to gather information about a subject, such as who, what, when, why and where. While these questions are a limited and a preliminary part of the mentor’s information gathering process, they do benefit the mentor and are therefore necessary.²⁵⁰

Nevertheless, a good listener can direct a conversation, and even a mentoring relationship, by asking what Ambrose calls “high gain” questions. These might include, but are not limited to, questions such as:

- 1) Tell me more about...?
- 2) Okay, when was another time when...?
- 3) I’d be interested in knowing your reasons for...
- 4) How’d you get to that conclusion?
- 5) What led you there?
- 6) What was the best thing that happened?
- 7) How do you feel about this?
- 8) What have you learned?²⁵¹

A third option is discovery questions that yield more informative responses. These are questions that prod the protégé into exploring possible conclusions. These might include:

- 1) What have you learned from this experience?
- 2) What does it tell you about your approach?
- 3) What’s the best thing that could happen?
- 4) What is the worst thing that could happen?
- 5) What are your alternatives?
- 6) How do you fit into this problem?²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Ambrose, 9.

²⁵⁰ Larry Ambrose, 10

²⁵¹ Ibid.

A fourth type is empowering questions that push for action. They inquire directly into what your protégé is ready to do, what he wants from an action, what his plans are, what he is ready to commit to. These questions will help a mentor turn the corner from information and awareness to action and results. These include:

- 1) What outcomes are you after?
- 2) What do you have to do to make this happen?
- 3) What is your first step?
- 4) What resources do you have?
- 5) What resources do you need?²⁵³

However, when mentoring someone who has just arrived from prison, and who might regard questions as threatening, a more informal list of questions that can be used, especially in a reentry group setting when mentors and partners are just getting acquainted, is often more effective. These questions are more general, and less threatening, especially for parolees who have spent years, if not their entire lives, avoiding answering any personal questions. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction recommends what it calls “strength discovery” questions such as:

- 1) What do you like to watch on television?
- 2) What are your favorite movies? Which celebrities do you like and why?
- 3) What are the best things about each of your children?
- 4) What do you do for fun?
- 5) What makes you smile about your family at least once a day?²⁵⁴

Although the purpose of these questions is not so much information gathering, but trust building, they actually do provide a great deal of personal information about the parolee. More important, they enable the mentoring group to identify positive characteristics, such as interests,

²⁵² Ambrose, 12.

²⁵³ Ibid, 13.

²⁵⁴ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, *Citizen Circle Manual*.
<http://www.drc.state.oh.us/web/citizen/CitizenCircleManual.pdf>, (accessed August 28, 2008), 40.

family concerns, goals and even dreams. Most important, they are asked in a positive, non-threatening manner that can be very disarming to a man or woman who has just arrived home from prison.

Regardless of what questions are asked, the key for effective mentoring is to avoid, at all costs, the temptation to take over, to give advice, to tell the person what to do, at least what you would do in a similar circumstance. A mentor's role is to help his/her partner grow and develop their own problem-solving abilities. A protégé needs to be pushed to examine the issues and the motives behind those issues. Because the stated problem is not always the real problem, a mentor must take care not to be seduced into coaching only the problem.²⁵⁵

Thus, a mentor's role is not to "fix" people, to give them solutions to their problems, but to encourage and support them so they can fix their own problems. Ronald,²⁵⁶ for example, needed help managing his money when he first got out of prison. No matter how hard he tried, he was always out of money before his next payday. So while his mentor's initial task was to work out a realistic budget for him, his real task was for Ronald to learn how to establish a budget himself, and most important, to learn how to live within that budget. And it is that ongoing learning process that requires an ongoing relationship of respect and trust that is found when genuine mentoring occurs. In other words, people who are struggling to overcome their problems do not care how much a mentor knows, but only how much a mentor cares.

The Church's role in mentoring

Mentoring, or disciple-making, has been a part of the Church's tradition from its inception. The word disciple means "to follow after," which implies the Hebraic concept of

²⁵⁵ Ambrose, 36.

²⁵⁶ All parolee names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

journey and walk. New disciples were to be modeled on the first disciples of Jesus, who walked along with Jesus. The Great Commission, in fact, demonstrates that Jesus did not introduce various programs for evangelism, discipleship and Christian formation. Instead, following in the tradition of Hebraic holiness, Jesus taught that becoming a disciple is a process that takes place in a continuous way in the community life of the Church.²⁵⁷ In fact, the word “disciple” is used 230 times in the Gospels and 28 times in Acts. It is the primary term used in the gospels to refer to Jesus’ followers and is a common referent for those known in the early church as believers. Furthermore, individual disciples are always seen in conjunction with the community of disciples, whether as Jesus’ intimate companions or as the Church.²⁵⁸ As Church historian Robert Webber states, “Becoming a disciple, just like becoming a fully mature human being, takes time, takes the involvement of committed people, and takes a process of growth and development that is intentional and well worked out.”²⁵⁹

Paul and Timothy, for example, would be a typical mentoring model at the beginning of the Church. This mentoring continued on through a spiritual lineage from the apostles to the bishops. However, the process of formation was not left to mere hope that the new converts would mature. Instead the Church’s approach to new converts was to take them by the hand and walk them through an intentional, life-encompassing process of formation that assured they believed the faith handed down by the apostolic community, that they learned how to behave as Christians, and they became active participants in this new community to which they now

²⁵⁷ Robert E. Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-forming Community*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 22.

²⁵⁸ Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 42.

²⁵⁹ Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 43.

belonged.²⁶⁰ In fact, according to Chris Armstrong, spiritual direction was particularly critical before the formation of the canon, when the oral traditions that were passed down through bishops complemented the letters circulating in the church that eventually composed the New Testament.²⁶¹ Then later in the fifth century, John Cassian introduced an intentional process of mentoring into the monasteries. He put every novice under the care of an older monk and warned that great care should be taken in choosing spiritual directors. St. Benedict worked Cassian's concerns into his influential *Rule*, and by the end of the seventh century, spiritual direction was firmly associated with monasticism throughout the West.²⁶² It was this understanding of communal conversion that Webber states is at the heart of the early growth of the Church.

Conversion happens within community...Conversion is not merely embracing an intellectual idea; it is taking one's place within the body of people who confess Christ and seek to live out the kingdom of Jesus. Thus one does not merely know intellectually, but one knows holistically in community."²⁶³

Following Benedict, spiritual direction was limited to monasteries for the next four hundred years, until the emergence of the Dominican order of itinerant friars in 1216. Although the Dominicans emphasized teaching and preaching of Christian doctrine, these activities soon expanded into a regular program of caring for and counseling people, particularly in spiritual discernment and perfection. By this time, however, many who received this teaching were laymen in the secular community, not just religious monastics as has been the case prior to this.²⁶⁴ But whether mentoring occurred within religious orders or among the lay church

²⁶⁰ Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 24.

²⁶¹ Chris Armstrong, and Steven Gertz. "Christian History Corner: Got your 'Spiritual Director' Yet?" <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2003/may2.html>., (accessed 12 July 2004).

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 39.

²⁶⁴ Chris Armstrong, and Steven Gertz. "Christian History Corner: Got your 'Spiritual Director' Yet?".

members, Church historian Wayne Meeks notes that the critical element for the mentoring success in the Church was the common purpose in the Church - a creed that produced a shared understanding of its beliefs and practices, traditions that passed down the authority of those creeds, standards that defined what was expected of people, and finally a clearly defined mission that brought the individuals together and knit them into a cohesive community.²⁶⁵

With this historical overview in mind, the question that must now be addressed is specifically how did the Church actually practice mentoring? According to Webber, it was the daily living of the Church where mentoring was most effective. This was done through practical acts of biblical hospitality such as sharing their wealth, caring for the sick, poor and the homeless, a more humane attitude toward slavery, and their emphasis on sexual morality and stable marriages.²⁶⁶ It was this hospitality evangelism that sociologist Rodney Stark credits for the rise of Christianity.

Christianity arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in urban Greco-Roman world. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity offered a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity...And to cities faced with epidemics, fires and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.”²⁶⁷

However, Webber cautions that the conversions that resulted from the lived-faith of the Church were not individualistic. They were communal. As a result, relationships were not by-products of the conversion process, but integral to it. The new Christian was not asked to just

²⁶⁵ Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 59.

²⁶⁶ Robert E. Webber. *Journey to Jesus: The Worship, Evangelism and Nurture Mission of the Church*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 35.

²⁶⁷ Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 61.

“attend” church, but to enter into the congregation and live the life of the Church as the central community of his or her life.²⁶⁸ In other words, effective mentoring is more than just short-term help and support with a job or a place to live, but sharing community values that can last a lifetime.

In is this historic model for mentoring, what Webber calls an “ancient-future” model, that can be aptly applied to mentoring parolees today who are reentering their community. Like most people in what he calls “our postmodern world,” parolees are not interested in rational arguments for correct behavior in the community. They want to see correct behavior embodied and made real.²⁶⁹

The missional church evangelizes primarily by immersing the unchurched in the experience of community. According to recent studies, 79 percent of people who convert and enter into the church do so because of personal contact with a relative or friend. The alternative way of knowing truth in the postmodern world is to be convinced of truth through participation, not consumer appeals; through wholly lived display, not reasoned arguments.²⁷⁰

More important, second – and even third and fourth chances – at a new life is a foundational doctrine of the Church from its inception. The Apostle Paul openly described his ongoing struggle with sin in Romans 7 where he confesses, “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”²⁷¹ But he concludes with Romans 8 by assuring his followers that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”²⁷² Even though a parolee may struggle when reentering the community, and he or she may even fail, the Church has always

²⁶⁸ Webber, *Journey to Jesus*, 79.

²⁶⁹ Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 73.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 62.

²⁷¹ Romans 7:18 NIV.

²⁷² Romans 8:1 NIV.

recognized that it takes time to wean people from their amoral and narcissistic lives.²⁷³

Consequently, the Church as a genuine community of God's people, is the best context, not only for positive reentry support, but also for lifelong mentoring for parolees to learn how to become productive members of the community.

Conclusions

In the past three decades, because of “get-tough-on-crime” laws, the number of people incarcerated in prisons in the United States has increased eight-fold. However, the vast majority of inmates will one day be released with little more than a bus ticket and a few dollars in their pocket. While most of them want to make it on the outside, too often they have few skills, limited education and now a prison record. As a result, they are ill-equipped to reenter the community and become productive citizens. To make matters worse, parolees often have the added burden of dealing with substance abuse, mental illness, limited employment opportunities and even homelessness upon release. The end result is that three out of four parolees will likely be reincarcerated within three years of release, leaving the criminal justice system ill-equipped, underfunded and totally unprepared to transition those who are trying to turn around their lives following incarceration, but simply don't know how, and cannot do it without help and support.

Because of this, the criminal justice system is increasingly turning to the community for that help and support through reentry programs that partner parolees with local social service agencies and volunteers. However, it is the Church that can be the most effective help and support for parolees because they truly can be described as what Jesus called “the least of these brothers of mine,” and helping society's neediest people has been a foundational doctrine and practice of the Church since its inception. It has been through one-on-one mentoring, or

²⁷³ Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 91.

“disciple-making” that the Church has always accepted and restored broken people. Since the time of the apostles, these practical acts of biblical hospitality, or what has been called “lived-faith,” have been the primary means of evangelism for the Church, and the primary means of transformation for individuals and even whole communities; and this same lived-faith can transform parolees and the communities in which they are returning following incarceration.

CHAPTER 4 ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

Good Samaritan Home was started in 2001 as an 18-month residential mentoring home for men coming out of prison. The intent was to target men who had shown rehabilitation, and especially who had made a spiritual commitment to Christ, while incarcerated, but who had neither a place to go nor a support system when released. In effect, it was a residential discipleship ministry for parolees:

Since I entered the ministry it has really bothered me that most of the people I met were good church people. But I had little contact with the very ones who needed the gospel message the most. It's like building a hospital and ignoring all the sick people in the community. This spring I visited Marion Correction Institution and met several inmates who had genuinely been converted to Christ. But what will happen to them when they are released? Who will meet them at the gate? That's when Kathy and I decided to open our home to these brothers in Christ when they are released.²⁷⁴

However, having the best of intentions for ministry is no guarantee they will be understood and readily accepted by the community. In early 2002, when we announced our reentry ministry plans, a group of residents asked city council to block the program. "It's not a bad program," one neighbor said, "but I don't think it belongs in a residential neighborhood." Critics came back to council repeatedly, each time with more names on a petition intended to close down our program. By late April they claimed nearly 450 signatures. Dozens of letters attacking the ministry were printed in the newspapers. Declining property value was a common concern expressed, but their primary worry was safety. "I'm afraid they will come to our school and shoot us," one 10-year-old wrote to the newspaper, no doubt expressing fears she had heard

²⁷⁴ Good Samaritan Home *New Beginnings* newsletter, July, 2001.

from her parents and neighbors. But in May the Greenville Law Director advised the city council that our program was within zoning laws and therefore permitted to continue.²⁷⁵

The legal issues notwithstanding, a major concern that we had from the beginning was an innate shortcoming of our residential program. There simply were so many people on parole in the county that we could not help with our limited residential space. It seemed that every week we received a call or letter from someone either in prison or just released asking for help. But because we could only house three men – and no women - at a time in our reentry facility, we couldn't do much to help all the others we encountered. So for the next year we worked with Darke County Municipal Court Judge Jon Hein and Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) Deputy Director Ed Rhine to find a way to reach out beyond our house walls. We found that way with the *Citizen Circle*. This is a reentry mentoring program developed by the ODRC that pairs volunteer mentors with all the ex-felons living in the community. “It’s not some sort of warm, fuzzy program to welcome prisoners home. It’s really a crime-fighting tool,” ODRC director Reginald Wilkinson said.²⁷⁶ This program utilizes trained community volunteers to work with parolees and their families in an effort to help them link to support services so they can more successfully reintegrate into the community. Instead of working with just three homeless parolees at a time, Good Samaritan Home could now reach all the men and women on parole in the county. Since that time 74 community volunteers have been trained by Good Samaritan Home as mentors, who have, in turn, helped 56 parolees with reentry issues. Although several of the *Citizen Circle* mentors are what you would call “professionals” - parole officers, mental health counselors, pastors, health care workers, the majority of those

²⁷⁵ City of Greenville. City Council Minutes. May 7, 2008.

²⁷⁶ Good Samaritan Home *New Beginnings* newsletter, May, 2004.

involved are just ordinary folks. “I don’t have a lot of degrees. I’m just a good old boy,” Bob Reed said. “But if I can help someone to get their life straight, I’m willing to do that.”²⁷⁷ Rich Gustafson agreed. “It’s an opportunity to give back to the community, especially with those Jesus called ‘the least of these.’” But Gustafson said what impressed him most about the *Citizen Circle* program is that it is a group effort. Even talking with someone who has been in prison can be frightening for some people. But the mentoring that happens here is done as a group, “and that is a safer way to get involved,” he said.²⁷⁸

In December, 2005, the outreach of Good Samaritan Home was magnified greatly when Sara Andrews, the superintendent of the Ohio Adult Parole Authority, asked the GSH director John Graham to be a member of the statewide *Citizen Circle* steering committee. In 2005 when GSH started its *Citizen Circle*, there were just three such mentoring groups in Ohio. Now there are 29, and it is hoped that every one of Ohio’s 88 counties will have a group in place soon. Successful reentry is not about programs. It is about relationships. And because of that, it is the goal of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and Good Samaritan Home that every inmate coming back to the community will be connected with a mentor to help them overcome the sometimes overwhelming barriers to successful reentry.

Thus the theme of this paper, and ultimately the theme of the Good Samaritan Home ministry, can be summed up in a statement made in our newsletter in 2002. “I left the construction business to enter the ministry because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of

²⁷⁷ Good Samaritan Home *New Beginnings* newsletter, January, 2005.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 2005.

hurting people. While pastoring people in the church was rewarding, it doesn't compare with the pleasure of reaching out beyond the church walls and helping to heal broken people."²⁷⁹

Description of Ministry Setting

Darke County has a population of 53,000 people and is located in the west central section of Ohio, 25 miles northwest of Dayton. Although rural, Darke County is dependent on manufacturing, and auto parts manufacturing in particular, for 25 percent of the local employment. Because of the decline in the auto industry over the past decade, unemployment locally, even during the economic prosperity of 2007, peaked as high as 7.9 percent, much higher than the Ohio average of 5.6 percent in 2007²⁸⁰ - and significantly higher than the U.S. rate of 4.6 percent for that same period.²⁸¹ But with the severe economic downturn in late 2008, with Ohio's unemployment rate jumping to 7.3 percent, the job prospects were made far more difficult for rural communities such as Darke County.²⁸² This decline in manufacturing has meant that the most vulnerable employees – those with little education and training, were often forced out of the job market and sometimes even into homelessness, and in rural Darke County, there has been little help for them.

The end result is 11 percent of the population – and 40 percent of the single-parent families - live in poverty.²⁸³ Local housing statistics show that the waiting list for subsidized housing has increased by 50 percent in the past year, with the average wait for affordable

²⁷⁹ Good Samaritan Home *New Beginnings* newsletter, December, 2002.

²⁸⁰ Ohio Job & Family Service. *Civilian Labor Force Estimates for 2007*, <http://lmi.state.oh.us/laus/CLFE/AnnualAverages/2007CLFE.pdf>, (accessed September 8, 2008).

²⁸¹ United States Misery Index. <http://www.miseryindex.us/URbyyear.asp>., (accessed September 8, 2008).

²⁸² William Hershey. "Unemployment rises in October." Dayton Daily News, November 22, 2008, A7.

²⁸³ Ohio Department of Development, Ohio County Profiles. <http://www.development.ohio.gov/research/files/S0/Darke.pdf>, (accessed September 8, 2008).

housing now at 18 months, causing many families into homelessness.²⁸⁴ As a result, in 2007 the two shelters in Darke County housed 207 persons for 2,932 days.²⁸⁵ More critical, in just the past decade nearly 700 men and women from Darke County have done time in prison.²⁸⁶ Worse still, the number of those imprisoned has increased 230 percent annually during that same time period.²⁸⁷ Add to that another 90 people who are currently on active parole – and 376 more who are under county probation supervision,²⁸⁸ and the need for a reentry support program in Darke County is critical.

Action Research Project Description

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to measure the impact that participation in an Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) mentoring group program in Darke County for ex-felons called *Citizen Circle* will have on the faith development and social justice attitude of community volunteers.

Goals

The primary goal is to enhance the spiritual faith of volunteer mentors through their participation in the *Citizen Circle* program. A second goal is to enhance their understanding of

²⁸⁴ Melissa Sparks. Metropolitan Housing Director for Community Action Partnership of Darke County. Phone interview September 24, 2008.

²⁸⁵ Lauren Henry, Darke County United Way Director. Phone interview September 26, 2008.

²⁸⁶ There were 39 people sentenced to prison from Darke County in 1997, 39 in 1998, 45 in 1999, 53 in 2000, 55 in 2001, 69 in 2002, 63 in 2004, 69 in 2005, 81 in 2005, 96 in 2006, and 90 in 2007.

²⁸⁷ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. *DRC commitment Report*, <http://www.drc.state.oh.us/web/reports/reports12.asp>, (accessed September 9, 2008).

²⁸⁸ Garrison, Becky. Director, Darke County, Ohio, Common Pleas Court Probation Office. Phone interview September 16, 2008.

criminal justice issues, and in particular, their acceptance of those who have been incarcerated in prison. This will be measured by the following indicators:

- a. Performance: The *Citizen Circle* group meets once every month. A record of mentor attendance throughout the three-year test period will be tracked.²⁸⁹
- b. Faith attitude: Mentors will show an enhanced commitment toward spiritual issues. This will be measured by comparing their scores from a Religious Status Inventory taken at the beginning and end of the testing period.
- c. Social justice attitude: Mentors will show a greater understanding and acceptance for those parolees coming back into the community. This will be measured by comparing scores from two separate Crime and Rehabilitation Surveys, one measuring their attitude toward crime in general and the second measuring their attitude toward sex offenders in particular since this is often the most difficult class of parolees to accept. Surveys will be taken at the beginning and end of the test period.
- d. Personal reflections: Mentors will offer opinions and attitudes describing their own awareness of difficulties as well as growth in social and spiritual areas of development.

Statement of Research Method

The method used in research for this project was Action Research study of a small group of volunteer participants. Action research is a process in which participants examine their own teaching practices systematically and carefully, while using the techniques of research. It is based on the following assumptions:

²⁸⁹ Because the *Citizen Circle* group only meets one time per month, it was determined that a lengthy testing period was needed to allow for any measurable changes to occur in the mentors' faith and attitude toward criminal justice issues.

- Learning is most effective with problems the group has identified for themselves.
- Learning is enhanced when students are encouraged to examine and assess their own work and then consider ways of working differently.
- Collaboration improved learning.
- Working with others benefits the teacher as well.²⁹⁰

In other words, action research employs attitudes and skills of ministry, such as listening, observing, conversing, critically reflecting and storytelling.²⁹¹ And like other collaborative research, not only will all participants be actively involved in this project, but the intent is that the research will inform and ultimately change the existing practices of the participants. Thus the research is not theoretical, but practical, conducted in a real environment with real problems and real solutions for real people. According to Eileen Ferrance, “Action research is not about learning why we do certain things, but rather how we can do things better.”²⁹²

Qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, research is appropriate for several reasons. First, quantitative research is based on factual evidence to define progress. However, faith is not factual, and certainly not measurable.²⁹³ Second, ministry is neither objective nor dispassionate. In other words, a researcher who has faith will begin to assume a proactive research stance as a natural response to his/her faith.²⁹⁴ In fact, action research emphasizes the involvement of the researcher in the project. Thus the goal is not so much the acquisition of knowledge, but the development of all those involved in the project, including the researcher.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁰ Eileen Ferrance. “*Action Research*.” http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/themes_ed/act_research.pdf, (accessed September 10, 2008), 1.

²⁹¹ William R. Myers. *Research in Ministry* (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1997), 5.

²⁹² Ferrance, 2.

²⁹³ Meyers, x.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

²⁹⁵ Ferrance, “*Action Research*,” 8.

Ferrance suggests five steps in action research that were followed with this project. First, identify the problem area. The project focused on two: the barriers facing parolees when returning home from prison, and the Church's lack of involvement in community problems as a means to express its faith.

Second, gather data. This project gathered data through several means, such as group participation, questionnaires and essay questions regarding the project.

Third, interpret the data. This project compared pre- and post-project questionnaires. Subjective data, such as essay questions, was reviewed holistically and elements or themes were noted.

Fourth, evaluate the results. This project analyzed the data to determine if the faith of the participant was enhanced and they were now more accepting of those who had been incarcerated.

Fifth, act on the evidence. This project is intended as a plan of action that could be used as a recruiting tool for other *Citizen Circle* groups seeking to involve more local church members.²⁹⁶

Project Design

Citizen Circle background: In 2002 the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) issued a comprehensive report entitled "The Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction." According to the ODRC Director Reginald Wilkinson, this document, and the programs that have grown out of it, all focus on answering the single question: What is needed to prepare the offender for successful reentry? The answer to that question is built on the assumption that it is not possible for successful reentry for offenders

²⁹⁶ Ferrance, 11.

to occur without the involvement of the community.²⁹⁷ The Ohio Plan, Wilkinson said, can best be summed up with the slogan, “Reentry means going home to stay.”²⁹⁸ A direct result of the Ohio Plan was a major initiative called *Citizen Circle* that focuses on the ODRC and community collaboration in reentry.

Citizen Circle is just that, a group of volunteers from the community, who meet together with parolees – literally in a circle – to help and support them while they try to reenter the community following incarceration. But rather than focus on the past, what crimes they have committed, *Citizen Circle* is focused on the future, how they can overcome their past, and more important, how the group can help them overcome their past. However, the *Citizen Circle* is primarily interested in the practical aspects of reentry, such as finding a job, a permanent place to live, getting a driver’s license, and a myriad of other issues that can be overwhelming for someone just out of prison. To do that, *Citizen Circle* uses a “strength-based” approach in that it focuses on the positive aspects of the parolees, not their weaknesses, which too often they are all too focused on themselves. This positive approach to reentry, this acceptance by the community, can be so disarming, so overwhelming, that some parolees have literally cried when they realized that the group not only was there simply because they wanted to help them, but more important, they weren’t pointing fingers of condemnation at them, and that they genuinely wanted to see them succeed. Nonetheless, it is also important to note that the *Citizen Circle* conveys another

²⁹⁷ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. *The Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction.*, <http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/ReentryFinalPlan.pdf>, (accessed September 18, 2008).

²⁹⁸ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. *Citizen Circles: A Road Map to Successful Community Involvement*, <http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/Citizen/CitizenCircleManual.pdf>, (accessed September 18, 2008). Introduction.

important message to parolees – that acceptance back into the community comes with responsibility and accountability.²⁹⁹

Darke County project: This project used a Case Study Action Research small group process. Although the initial plan was to recruit up to 12 persons to participate in the Circle, that number eventually grew to as many as 28 mentors. In the beginning they were recruited through letters to community (Appendix 1) and church leaders (Appendix 2), as well as newspaper articles (Appendix 3) explaining the program and inviting the general public to participate. Although there were no requirements other than a willingness to be supportive rather than condemning, members were asked to fill out an application and were then approved by the group as a whole (Appendix 5). Parolees were referred to the *Citizen Circle* by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction parole officer for Darke County. However, each parolee filled out an application to participate in the *Citizen Circle* (Appendix 4), and they, too, were then approved by the group.

The original intent was to meet as a group for 12 weeks, but because the *Citizen Circle* only met once a month, it was soon realized that more mentoring meetings with the parolees were needed to have any measurable impact on the volunteers. Therefore, the project time was greatly expanded to 37 meetings over a three-year period.

During the first *Citizen Circle* meeting each mentor completed a Religious Status Inventory to measure their faith commitment (Appendix 6).³⁰⁰ Another survey designed by this researcher targeted their attitudes on crime and rehabilitation (Appendix 9), as well as a third survey targeting their attitudes specifically toward sex offenders (Appendix 11) was completed

²⁹⁹ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. *Citizen Circles: A Road Map to Successful Community Involvement*, 8.

³⁰⁰ Hill, Peter C. and Ralph W. Hood Jr., ed. *Measures of Religiosity*. (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1999), 192.

by each mentor. Then at the end of the three-year project period, all the mentors were again given the same three surveys to determine if there were any measurable changes in their faith attitude as well as their attitude toward criminal justice issues. At this time *Citizen Circle* members were also given a list of essay questions regarding their attitudes toward the program and its effect on their faith (Appendix 13).

Project Implementation

Choosing a resource

Because the focus of the project was the monthly *Citizen Circle* mentor group meeting with parolees, this researcher chose the *Citizen Circle* Training and Skills Development Manual provided by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction³⁰¹ as the primary technical resource. Of particular help in the early stages of the project were the forms found in Section 3.

These included practical helps for the mentors such as:

- Vision/Mission Worksheet
- Mission Worksheet
- Meeting Guide
- Management Ideas
- Member Satisfaction Survey
- Participant Satisfaction Survey
- Citizen Survey

Then throughout the project the parolee information forms from Section 4 were used to keep the meetings on track as well as keep record of each parolee's goals, progress and outcomes. These included:

- Authorization For Information
- Application
- Agreement

³⁰¹ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. *Citizen Circles: A Road Map to Successful Community Involvement*, <http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/Citizen/CitizenCircleManual.pdf>, (accessed September 18, 2008).

- Preparing For Meeting
- Life Map Activity
- Sample Questions
- Personal Vision Activity
- Life Domain Areas Planning
- Discovery Worksheet
- Plan For Success Review
- Progress Report
- Completion Report
- Reentry Application

While this resource was necessary to maintain the structural integrity of the *Citizen Circle* project, the primary philosophical resource was Ruby Payne’s definitive work on poverty, *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*,³⁰² and her companion book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*.³⁰³ These two books are unique and powerful tools designed specifically for social, health, and legal services professionals. Their intent is to address the questions, concerns, and mostly the barriers to understanding that service providers and businesses - whose daily work connects them with the lives of people in poverty – face every day. Payne includes case studies, detailed analysis, helpful charts and exercises, as well as specific solutions that were very helpful for *Citizen Circle* members to better understand and communicate with the parolees they were mentoring.

Recruiting participants

Initially *Citizen Circle* mentors were recruited through letters to community leaders (Appendix 1), as well as newspaper articles (Appendix 3) explaining the programs and inviting the general public to participate. Although there were no requirements other than a willingness to be supportive rather than condemning, members were asked to fill out an application and were

³⁰² Payne, Ruby, and Philip E. DeVol and Terie Dreussi Smith. *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*. (Highlands, TX. aha! Process, Inc., 2001).

³⁰³ Payne, Ruby. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. (Highlands, TX, aha! Process, Inc., 1996).

then approved by the group as a whole (Appendix 5). Parolees were referred to the *Citizen Circle* by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction parole officer for Darke County. Each parolee also filled out an application to participate in the *Citizen Circle* (Appendix 4), and they, too, were then approved by the group. However, it is important to note that of the 56 parolees who attended the *Citizen Circle* group, none were rejected because of their criminal history. All were welcome as long as they were willing to participate.

Composition of group

The Darke County *Citizen Circle* was attended by 74 community volunteers throughout the three-year project. Twenty-eight were active during much of the project, especially the latter stage. Of these 28 volunteers, 12 have been active since the beginning in 2005, attending an overall average of 74 percent of the *Citizen Circle* meetings throughout the project period. Therefore, it was this group that was surveyed at the beginning and end of the project. However, it should be noted that 19 current *Citizen Circle* mentors participated in the essay questions given at the end of the project.

The *Citizen Circle* group was predominantly male with 63 percent of the membership. The majority were also in their early retirement years, with 40 percent in their sixties and another 22 percent in their seventies. However, it is worth noting that two members were well into their eighties and one was even 90 years old and still quite active. The vast majority were from evangelical churches, comprising 70 percent of the group. However, another 24 percent were Catholic. Virtually all were very active in their churches, with 88 percent attending church at least weekly. Three out of every four members reported joining the Circle as a way to help other people. Although 60 percent were retired, they all had varied backgrounds, with 12 percent

having worked in construction, 12 percent in education, 24 percent in social work, 40 percent in business. Surprisingly only 12 percent were, or had been, in pastoral ministry.

Citizen Circle Sessions

Trainings

This entire project started almost by chance in 2004, when a prison chaplain happened to read in the local newspaper about Good Samaritan Home's intent to offer housing and discipleship to Christian men coming from prison, and he asked this researcher to participate in a community forum being held at Allen Correctional Institution to review the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Reentry initiative, *The Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction*. At this meeting the *Citizen Circle* program was discussed and it was then decided that this was something that Good Samaritan Home would like to participate in.

A few weeks later a public forum was held in Dayton, Ohio, in which the *Citizen Circle* program was discussed. Here ODRC director Reginald Wilkinson explained in detail the need for community support with reentry and invited those who would like to see a *Citizen Circle* in action to accompany his regional supervisor to Toledo the following week where a meeting was being held. This researcher attended that meeting, and the following month invited several Darke County people who also expressed interest in reentry issues to attend as well. This core group of people then attended several introductory sessions for another *Citizen Circle* group in nearby Miami County to better equip them to start their own group in Darke County. Finally in early 2005, the group developed the following mission statement: "The purpose of the Darke County *Citizen Circle* is to provide a positive atmosphere which fosters support, guidance and encouragement for participants, and assists parolees in becoming productive members of our community." A vision statement was also developed: "To foster partnerships to enrich and

improve the community through developing productive citizens and solidifying community relationships.” With these completed, invitations for an informational meeting were sent to approximately 75 pastors in the community asking that they invite interested parishioners to a community meeting concerning the *Citizen Circle* program (Appendix 2). Approximately 50 persons came. At this meeting an overview of the *Citizen Circle* program was explained by ODRC officials and by this researcher, who would be the facilitator for the Darke County *Citizen Circle*. Those interested in learning more about the program were then invited to attend a training session conducted by ODRC officials. Approximately 24 people attended the all-day training session (Appendix 14). An outline for this training included:

Strength-based foundation: This lesson is the cornerstone of the strength-based approach recommended for use in *Citizen Circles*. This lesson is focused on seeing the positive aspects in the lives of the parolees.

Planning session: This session outlines a series of steps that can be followed to make the decisions necessary for implementing the circle process.

Mental models: This brief lesson gives insight into the way we see and interpret the world around us and the implications for work with *Citizen Circle* participants.

Building trust and rapport: This lesson teaches the basic importance of building trust. It gives simple ideas to keep in mind when building rapport with participants.

Planning for success: Planning for Success reveals a strategy for developing the Plan for Success with participants.

Motivating for growth: This lesson points out ways of interacting that get in the way of motivating others. It also presents several key strategies that can be adopted by the Circle to assist in motivating participants.

Crisis planning: This lesson points to the importance of being preventive in planning with participants.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. *Citizen Circles: A Road Map to Successful Community Involvement.*, <http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/Citizen/CitizenCircleManual.pdf>, (accessed 18 September 2008), 68.

However, the most memorable aspect of the training session, and the one that had the most impact on mentors trying to understand the pressure on parolees to fit back into the community was the “string exercise.” The purpose of this exercise was to assist mentors in reframing their perspectives of the parolee. This experiential snapshot can be used to clarify roles, identify conflict points, encourage cooperation, and provide a framework for discussion of effective collaboration. The following is an example of what the exercise looked like, and an example of what the average parolee experiences from family, friends, church and law enforcement, to name just a few. Each member in the training session was given a community role to play, and each was connected by a string to the parolee, “Suzette,” who was also played by community member. The trainer began the scene by saying:

Suzette’s mother notified her probation officer that Suzette, who is on parole, has been drinking beer with ‘friends’ at a local bar. Several of the friends are known drug users. During a routine drug screen, Suzette tested positive for marijuana. Suzette reports that she was riding in a car when a friend unexpectedly ‘lit up a joint’, and that she inhaled smoke while in the car. Suzette is unemployed, has two children and an ex-husband in prison. She lives with friends.³⁰⁵

The trainer then asked the group what persons they thought might be involved in Suzette’s life. As participants identified people, each group member was asked to address Suzette’s behavior. Each person was given a sign depicting his/her role – such as mother, brother, pastor, policeman, etc. - and a string. They held onto one end of the string and Suzette held the other end. When all members of the community were attached to Suzette, they all then told her at the same time how they felt about her behavior and what she needed to do to correct it.

³⁰⁵ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. *Citizen Circles: A Road Map to Successful Community Involvement*, 82.

Enough time was allowed to create a picture of the many demands pulling on Suzette. And then when the chaos settled and the group could begin to get a picture of Suzette's frustration, the trainer then asked the group to discuss what had just happened using guiding questions such as: "*What do you want from Suzette? What happens next?*" Suzette was also asked for her feelings about all the pressure on her. "*What are you going to do?*" "*How do you feel, Suzette?*"

All participants were then asked to discuss what had just happened by identifying the feelings, beliefs and attitudes expressed by everyone. They were asked to pay close attention to any underlying non-verbal messages and defense mechanisms that Suzette may have expressed. Also they were to look for alliances within the group that may have developed in responding to Suzette, to determine how decisions were made, and note if there were any common methods or goals used to motivate Suzette? In other words, who was able to influence her and why?

The group was then asked to discuss outcomes regarding Suzette's treatment by the community by answering questions such as what were the implications for developing an effective *Citizen Circle*? What components were necessary for collaboration?³⁰⁶

The end result of this training, and especially the string exercise, was a new understanding of the chaos that surrounds a parolee when various people in his or her life all try to tell them how to "get their life in order" now that they are out of prison. No matter how well-intentioned, and even no matter if what they say may well be correct, the end result is always confusion, frustration and ultimately withdrawal by the parolee. It was with this insight still fresh in the mind of all the new mentors that the first *Citizen Circle* meeting was held in June, 2005.

³⁰⁶ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. *Citizen Circles: A Road Map to Successful Community Involvement*, 82.

Citizen Circle Meetings

Site: The site where the *Citizen Circle* meeting was held is critical. For example, because the neighboring Miami County group met in the conference room of a mental health agency located miles out of town, that required parolees to find transportation to the meetings. However, most of those coming from prison have neither vehicle nor even a driver's license. More important, the Miami County site "felt" like a mental health clinic and, therefore, Circle participants viewed themselves as patients who were coming for treatment. Worse still, everyone in the group sat at conference tables that separated the mentors from the parolees, further adding to their feelings of being analyzed rather than being supported.

Therefore, in Darke County those barriers were eliminated from the beginning by holding the *Citizen Circle* meetings in a church because that was a welcoming place, and in town so parolees had ready access even if they didn't have transportation. Second, chairs were literally placed in a circle, with no one person at the head. Therefore, the impression was that everyone there was of equal importance. More important, it created a sense of intimacy, welcome and even safety, which are critical elements for parolees when they first arrive home from prison. Finally, the meeting time was set for noon so that lunch would be part of the program. Not only does food relax people, especially strangers, but it was also a way to involve other churches and other people in the *Citizen Circle* program by having other community churches provide and even serve the meals. This allowed those who supported the idea of parolee mentoring, but who were hesitant to have direct contact with parolees, to be involved from a safe distance.

Surveys: At the beginning of the first meeting, all mentors were given three surveys. The first was the Religious Status Inventory (Appendix 6) that measured their attitudes regarding eight areas of their faith, including:

1. Awareness of God
2. Acceptance of God's grace and steadfast love
3. Knowing God's leadership and direction
4. Being ethical
5. Being repentant and responsible
6. Involvement in organized religion
7. Experiencing fellowship
8. Affirming openness to faith

Second, the Crime and Rehabilitation Survey, designed by this researcher, measured their attitudes on crime and safety, especially in their own community, as well as their views on rehabilitation (Appendix 9). Finally, another similar survey, also designed by this researcher, measured their attitudes specifically toward sex offenders (Appendix 11).

Agenda: *Citizen Circle* is premised on what is called a “strength-based” model for mentoring. The Circle is not intended to be a place where pressure and expectations are added onto parolees. Instead everything about the Circle should communicate the message that this is a place of support and guidance for accomplishing the parolee's personal goals. The two primary questions, therefore, at the heart of all *Citizen Circle* meetings, and all mentoring relationships with parolees, are simply “What are your goals?” and “How can we help you reach those goals?” Addressing these questions begins from the outset with introductions. Parolees are used to defining themselves by their crime. Invariably when people learn they have done time in prison, they will always ask about their crime. Not in the *Citizen Circle*. In fact, the nature of the crime, and absolutely the details, are rarely part of the discussion, even with those who have attended the group for a long time. Instead the focus with the strength-based model is on what is right with the parolee. Rather than discuss their failures that led them to prison, the *Citizen Circle* members initially ask positive questions such as, “What do you like to watch on television?” “What are your favorite movies, books?” “Which celebrities do you like and why?” “What are

the best things about each of your children? Your parents?” “What do you do for fun?” (see Appendix 15) for a complete list of strength-based questions).³⁰⁷

While these questions were discussed by the group, one member wrote down a synopsis of the parolee’s answers on a large chart at one side of the circle. For example, if he mentioned wanting to spend time with his children to make up for his lost time in prison, that was written down as “concerned father” or “family man.” Or if he said he was willing to work two jobs to pay bills, that was transcribed as “responsible” or “hard worker.” Granted, this approach did tend to gloss over the realities of their situation, and it may even deny their obvious flaws, but the purpose of the *Citizen Circle*, at least at this initial stage of the relationship, is not current reality, but hoped-for reality; not what is, but what could be. Then at the end of the meeting, when all these positive traits, or strengths, had been written down on a 24-inch by 36-inch paper, it was given to the parolee as a symbol of all the good things the Circle members saw in him. This experience, although simple, can be overwhelming for many people who have never heard anything positive said about them. David,³⁰⁸ for example, whose self-image was so poor that he had “White trash” tattooed on his arm, cried when he was given his list of strengths. In fact, he was so moved by it, that he hung the sheet on the wall of his apartment so he could remind himself everyday that there was some good in him.

At the second meeting, however, the *Citizen Circle* members began a process of accountability with parolees by asking what goals they had for themselves. Invariably, nearly all would say they wanted a job and then a nice place to live. Although good goals, most had little idea how or even where to start looking for a job or a place to live. So the group tried to lead

³⁰⁷ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. *Citizen Circles: A Road Map to Successful Community Involvement*, 40.

³⁰⁸ All parolee names have been changed to protect their identity.

them to their goal step-by-step by asking positive, but leading, questions. For example, “What sort of work do you like?” Or “Have you registered at the temporary jobs services in town? Would you like me to give you their addresses.” The group also tried to help focus the job search. Applying for a job offered 20 miles from town, and without transportation, even if they were hired, it would be nearly impossible for them to maintain that job. But rather than telling them their idea was not good, the Circle members instead focused on suggestions for transportation. The intent was to never reject outright any idea, no matter how impossible it may seem, but rather to encourage the parolee in problem solving from a positive perspective.

Another example of this positive approach was James.³⁰⁹ He wanted to work as a truck driver, but did not have a commercial driver’s license, and always had an excuse for not getting it. After much discussion, it was learned that he was afraid of the test. So the group encouraged him to get the driver’s exam study book and practice just the first section, and that he shouldn’t even look at the rest of the questions. At the next meeting James reported that he had no trouble at all with that section. “It was easy,” he said, “but I heard the rest of the test is really hard.” So then the group suggested he try just the second section this time, and that he should not even look at the rest of the test. At the next meeting James reported that section two wasn’t nearly as hard as he thought. “But the rest of the book looks really hard,” he again complained. So again, the group congratulated him on how well he had done on section two, but cautioned him to only look at section three this time. Each month he studied just one section at a time, and by the end of six months he had finally mastered the entire book and passed his test for his commercial driver’s license.

³⁰⁹ All parolee names have been changed to protect their identity.

Sometimes, however, parolees weren't as committed to their goals as they said they were, and they would only come to the *Citizen Circle* meeting with excuses. But rather than criticize or condemn them, mentors were trained to again ask positive questions, such as "Have you thought about this....?" Or "What can we do to help you?" And even, "How about I go with you on an interview? We could have lunch while we're at it." With such a positive spin to their negative responses, it not only undermined their wall of defensiveness, but more important, it created a positive mindset for problem-solving for the group as well.

Although some *Citizen Circle* groups, such as Miami County, use an appointment approach with parolees, requiring that each come at a set time and then leave once their discussion is done, the Darke County group rejected that format as too impersonal. Instead, all of the parolees were asked to attend the entire two-hour meeting. Each was given 20 to 30 minutes of time by the group in which they were the center of attention. But rather than leave, they were asked to stay and join in the discussion with the other parolees there. Oftentimes they had more insight into the issues being discussed than any of the community members because they understood firsthand what the other parolees were going through. They also were able to see through any defenses or excuses that were being used by any of the parolees to justify their complaints. The key benefit of this approach is that it forces each parolee to focus on someone else, and not just on himself or herself. In other words, it requires they be part of the solution and no longer just part of the problem.

Sex offenders: One group of parolees that the *Citizen Circle* members were not prepared to deal with was sex offenders. Like most people in the community, their view of sex offenders was that of perverted persons, even pedophiles, who were beyond rehabilitation. However,

because of the social stigma, as well as the housing restrictions placed upon sex offenders, they are the ones in most need of the community support that the *Citizen Circle* is designed to offer.

Although many of the other Circle groups in Ohio do not accept sex offenders, it was decided by the Darke County group at the outset of the project to try to work with all parolees in need of support, regardless of their crime.

Independent Housing: The Darke County *Citizen Circle* shifted again in 2007 when Good Samaritan Home, contracted with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to offer temporary housing for parolees coming back to the community from prison, but who had no place to live when released. Independent Housing, as it is called, is an initiative launched by the ODRC in January 2004. This was done because of a change in the sentencing law in 1996 that required inmates to be released at a set date whether they had a housing plan or not. Although the intent was to require longer sentencing and therefore reduce crime, the unintended consequence was that many inmates, especially sex offenders, are released onto the streets with no place to go. Statistics show that as many as 10 percent of all parolees – and 50 percent of parolees in large urban areas – are homeless following release from prison.³¹⁰ In Ohio the Independent Housing program was developed to address that problem, and ultimately to reduce recidivism.

Independent Housing residents at Good Samaritan Home stay an average of 60 days, with a maximum of 90 days. Although that meant there would be an increased number of parolees for the Circle to mentor, it also meant there would be less involvement with them since they would only attend the *Citizen Circle* three times or less – far less time than the other parolees had done. It also meant that the majority of men the Circle mentored would be sex offenders. The end

³¹⁰ Petersilia, Joan. *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) ,121.

result was that of the 56 parolees who participated in the Circle, 22 were from the IH facility, and more important, 21 were sex offenders.

Surveys: After three years and 37 meetings, all of the Citizen Circle members were again given the same three surveys as at the beginning: the Religious Status Inventory that remeasured their attitudes regarding their faith (Appendix 6), the Crime and Rehabilitation Survey that remeasured their attitudes on crime and rehabilitation (Appendix 9) and a second similar survey that remeasured their attitudes specifically toward sex offenders (Appendix 11). In addition, Circle members were given a series of essay questions to discern their subjective feelings and attitude toward the issues surveyed objectively (Appendix 13). This survey included general questions regarding the major *Citizen Circle* themes that are the focus of this research project such as: “Has your attitude toward those who have committed crimes changed? How and why?” Or “Do you feel your faith has grown? How and why?” “What was the best / most difficult experience for you in Citizen Circle?” And “Has the way you share your faith in the community changed?” And finally, “I think Citizen Circle would be more effective if...”

Ministry Support Group

The Ministry Support Group was comprised of members of the Good Samaritan Home board. It is the role of the board to oversee all the programs of Good Samaritan Home. These include the Fitzpatrick House Homeless Shelter, the Ludlow Street Reentry House and the *Citizen Circle*. The board is comprised of members from all vocational areas of the community, including two pharmacists, a nurse, a pastor’s wife, three factory workers, a construction business manager, a farmer, a restaurant manager and an accountant. Five of the board members are retired, and all range in age from mid-forties to 90 years old. All members attend church, with four Catholics, two United Methodists, and three from the Church of the Brethren. Four

members had college degrees. The majority were involved in numerous community activities, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Hospice board, several charitable foundations, a community low-income service agency, and Kairos prison ministry. While this group was chosen as a representation of the community, none were chosen because of their education, training or vocational experience. The key requirement for the Good Samaritan Home board was simply that they have an attitude of compassion for the needy in the community and had a record of hands-on involvement in social justice issues of some sort.

The board, now serving as the ministry support group, had the purpose of:

- a. Connecting the academic studies of this researcher with the pragmatic work of parolee reentry in the community.
- b. Critiquing the work as the plans were implemented and outcomes were evaluated.
- c. Offering ongoing encouragement support and prayer for the difficulties that occur when dealing with parolees.
- d. Evaluating the success of this project.

However, it is important to state that the ministry support group did participate in the *Citizen Circle* group, and they did take part in the pre- and post-program questionnaires, along with all the other mentors. But it is also important to note that they were not involved in the evaluation of any of the raw data, and therefore, did not skew the outcome in any way.

The ministry support group met quarterly with this researcher in the early stages of the project. However, in the last year of the project, meetings were held monthly. Then during the data gathering stage, meetings were held weekly with select members of the group. Finally, the ministry support group chairman met nearly on a daily basis with this researcher at the end to the

project to review and critique the writing of the project paper, and most important, offer much-needed support and encouragement.

Limitations

There were some limitations inherent in this methodology and project design. First of all, the very nature of the persons being dealt with was, at best, unreliable. To effectively measure the impact of mentoring ex-felons, their regular participation was critical. Other *Citizen Circle* groups in Ohio have struggled, and some have disbanded, due to a lack of parolee involvement. Even if mentors were committed, they would only be as effective as the parolees allowed them to be.

The serious nature of the program was also a limitation. Many *Citizen Circle* members had no previous contact with ex-felons, so they were more vulnerable to exploitation. On the other hand, some mentors and congregations with strong evangelistic leanings tended to exploit ex-felons by seeing them as projects or potential members only.

Another obvious shortcoming with the *Citizen Circle* program was numbers. Mentoring works best in an intimate group, where everyone can feel safe enough to move beyond superficial conversations. This is especially true with parolees who have built emotional barriers to protect themselves while in prison. Walking into a group of strangers and admitting their needs can be a difficult, if not impossible expectation for them. Added to that was the success of the Darke County *Citizen Circle*, which has the largest number of community members of any of the 28 other Circles in the state of Ohio. Throughout the project period of three years, each of the 37 meetings was attended by an average of 18 mentors. Five parolees also attended each meeting on average, as well as one to two parole officials. Although it was important to give each parolee time to share, that was often difficult because many of them had so much they

wanted to talk about that they often dominated the conversation. Thus it was a constant struggle to keep the meetings moving so that each parolee had sufficient time to share. One option was to divide the group in half, as the Toledo *Citizen Circle* often did. However, that would have limited the connection that all the members felt for one another, so that was discussed but never done.

Time was also a limiting factor. Meeting just once a month, even for two hours, was simply not enough time for mentors and parolees to even begin to develop any sort of meaningful relationships. At the very least, the group should meet weekly. However, that would be difficult for many of the members and could easily have resulted in a lessening of their commitment to the Circle. One way to address both shortcomings was to connect parolees with individual mentors who could meet together between meetings. Not only would this allow for greater commitment from both, but it would allow unlimited time to address all the personal issues that parolees face when reentering the community. However, it is critical that these partnerships be monitored by the *Citizen Circle* facilitator to prevent any exploitative relationships from developing. In other words, the mentors need to be mentored to protect all involved.

Finally, the personal involvement of the facilitator could skew the project should he become too active a participant in the individual mentoring relationship.

With these limitations in mind, perhaps the best summation of the Darke County *Citizen Circle* project was offered by one of the members. “Having a son who is an ex-con, there’s a strong motivation to reach out to others with the same background, knowing full well that some respond positively, some don’t or won’t or can’t. Having been personally forgiven and accepted by an awesome God, it is a responsibility that all Christians should be doing – reaching out to the

lost; not cramming the Gospel down anyone's throat, but winning the trust and right to present it and to encourage those persons who have made huge mistakes and broken the law. There is forgiveness and restoration for all. Forgiveness is hard, hard work, but it does restore all – even the person who does the forgiving.”³¹¹

³¹¹ Darke County *Citizen Circle* member. Email correspondence, May 18, 2008.

CHAPTER 5 EVALUATION, CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Findings

Accomplishments of the stated goals were evaluated through analysis of both the objective and subjective tools used to measure them. This has been done by tracking the commitment of the *Citizen Circle* mentors through their attendance record throughout the three-year project. It was also done by comparing the pre- and post-project surveys of the participants that included the Religious Status Inventory, the Crime / Rehabilitation survey and the Sex Offender survey. In addition to the objective assessments, subjective data such as self-assessment essay questions regarding the observations and suggestions of participants in the group were evaluated.

Evaluation

Because the project lasted much longer than originally intended – three years instead of three months, and because of the difficulty in maintaining the commitment of the participants throughout that project, there was legitimate concern that the pre- and post-surveys would be compromised. However, a more pressing issue, especially in the latter stage of the project when so much time and effort had been invested, was the nagging question, “What if no one was changed by the Circle?” Fortunately that was not the case. Based on all the data, both objective and subjective, it is apparent that the *Citizen Circle* reentry support group had great impact on all the mentors involved. Therefore, it is the intent of this paper to demonstrate in detail how the faith and attitudes of the participants were positively impacted by their involvement in this program. Not only that, but it is posited that that this project can be a model for all churches who want to grow the faith and broaden the impact of their members in the community.

As stated, the purpose of this project was to measure the impact that participation in an Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) mentoring group program in Darke County for ex-felons called *Citizen Circle* would have on the faith development and social justice attitude of community volunteers. The primary goal of this project was to enhance the spiritual faith of volunteer mentors through their participation in the project. A second goal, but no less important, was to enhance their understanding of criminal justice issues, and in particular, their acceptance of those who have been incarcerated in prison; and more specifically, to enable them to be willing to help those convicted of sex offenses because in the current political and social climate, they are social pariahs, not unlike the lepers of Jesus' day. Therefore, for the participants to see the vilest of offenders as loved by God would be a defining measure of the maturity of their faith.

Objective A: Performance

The *Citizen Circle* group met once every month for three years. A record of mentor attendance was tracked throughout the project. During that time the group met with parolees 37 times in which a total of 74 mentors, including this researcher, attended. Of the 73 community volunteers, 53 attended just 10 or fewer Circle meetings, with 31 attending just once, and all were regarded as visitors. However, having such a large number of visitors did not negatively impact the project. In fact, the opposite was true. Because members regarded the Circle as an outreach tool, even a form of evangelism to "convert" community churches to see reentry support as a necessary mission of the Church, having visitors at each meeting was viewed as a sign of acceptance of the program by the community. All that said, the average number of mentors who attended each *Citizen Circle* meeting ranged from 16 in 2005 to 21 persons in 2008.

However, it is important to note that nine of the regular Darke County mentors did not participate in the surveys, either because they started attending after the project began or quit attending before it ended. Therefore, the 12 remaining mentors were those who had shown ongoing commitment throughout the entire project, and were most impacted by the project.

Of these 12 project participants, nine attended at least 21 of the Circle meetings. The remaining three mentors attended between 12 and 21 meetings. Although attending just 12 meetings was minimally acceptable, his absence was due to work commitments rather than indifference. Also he remained in contact with the Circle members even while absent, and therefore, his surveys were included in the project.

It should also be noted that having just 12 project participants out of a possible 74 persons was considered to be a success, especially when compared with other *Citizen Circle* groups throughout the state. Of all 29 *Citizen Circle* groups in the state, none had as many mentors consistently attend as did the Darke County group. In fact, the average *Citizen Circle* attendance statewide is, at best, just eight mentors per meeting.³¹² Not only that, but just 10 percent of all those Circles had a majority of community volunteers attend each meeting.³¹³ The vast majority of the other Circles were made up of either parole officers or social service workers. Only the Darke County group was attended consistently by such a large number of community people. Therefore, it can rightly be concluded that the Darke County *Citizen Circle* mentors demonstrated a high degree of commitment throughout the entire three-year project.

³¹² John Matthews. Reentry Administrator, Office of Policy and Offender Reentry, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. Email correspondence, 29 October, 2008.

³¹³ Morris Jenkins and Gordon Bazemore. *State of Ohio Citizen Circle Formative Evaluation*. Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 10.

Objective B: Faith Attitude

It was the intent of this project to demonstrate that mentors would show an enhanced commitment in their faith. This was measured by comparing their scores from a survey taken at the beginning and again at the end of the testing period, and these scores were then compared to show any growth in their faith. To measure this, Circle members were given the Religious Status Inventory (Appendix 6) at the first meeting. The Religious Status Inventory contains 160 items designed to study the way people think about their Christian faith and how it interacts with their lives. It was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from “not true of me” (1) to “true of me” (5). Scores were simply added together. Thus, total scores may range from a low of 160 to a high of 800, with higher scores indicating greater religious maturity.³¹⁴

According to N.H. Maloney, mature Christians are those who have identity, integrity and inspiration:

They “identify” in that their self-understanding is as children of God – created in Him and destined by Him to live according to a divine plan. They have “integrity” in that their daily life is lived in the awareness that they have been saved by God’s grace from the guilt of sin and that they can freely respond to God’s will in the present. They have “inspiration” in that they live with the sense that God is available to sustain, comfort, encourage and direct their lives on a daily basis.³¹⁵

At this point it is important to note that all 12 mentors scored high on the initial RSI survey in 2005, with the highest score at 715 and the lowest at 570. This means that according to Maloney’s definition, all were spiritually mature going into the project. The key question, however, is did they grow even more in their faith as a result of the project?

To determine that, the Religious Status Inventory measured the attitudes of the Circle members in eight areas of their faith, including:

³¹⁴N.H. Maloney. In Peter C. Hill and Ralph W. Hood, ed. *Measures of Religiosity*. (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1999), 192.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 193.

1. Awareness of God
2. Acceptance of God's grace and steadfast love
3. Knowing God's leadership and direction
4. Being ethical
5. Being repentant and responsible
6. Involvement in organized religion
7. Experiencing fellowship
8. Affirming openness to faith

Although scores at the end of the project were in the same range – from a low of 588 to a high of 713, the important point is that eight of the 12 project participants did, in fact, improve their scores. In other words, 67 percent showed an overall growth in their spiritual maturity as a direct result of their involvement in the *Citizen Circle* project (Appendix 7). However, most significant were the areas that showed that growth among the mentors. Because the focus of the *Citizen Circle* is acceptance, the inclination would be to expect the most growth in the relational areas of their faith, such as “experiencing fellowship” or “affirming openness in faith,” so it was not surprising that 58 percent reported increased spiritual maturity in those areas. Nonetheless, it was not expected that a clear majority of the project mentors – 75 percent - would show growth in area 3 – “Knowing God's leadership and direction” (Appendix 8).

That outcome was explained by one mentor who said that God's leadership was an integral part of the Circle experience for her. “I have more compassion to people in the community when I see them struggling. I am now more responsive to God's direction. Now it is an automatic response to help them, but in the past, I had to be asked to help people.”

Another mentor saw his participation in the Circle as an act of recommitment to God with each meeting, not unlike the communion service in his church. “The love feast is about humility and service to God, and washing another's feet is how we act out that humility and service. That's been part of the Brethren DNA from the beginning. So our motivation is to serve others.” The end result is that, even though he had been a pastor for 45 years, the Circle had

strengthened his faith in ways he had never anticipated. “*Citizen Circle* has challenged me to honestly face my own faith, beliefs and actions and make spiritual adjustments.”

This hunger for God’s leading was confirmed by another Circle mentor who said she believed God was leading people to a more personal faith, and to not be dependent on the organized church as the source of our faith. “We each need to know how to hear from God,” she said.

This hunger for personal spiritual direction, especially among mature Christians, was consistent with a study done by the Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Ill., in 2007. It found that “fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ” reported the church was not helping them grow spiritually. As a result, the Willow Creek staff concluded that the more mature that Christians become, the more they must take responsibility for their own spiritual growth.³¹⁶ This finding supports Robert Webber’s view, noted in chapter 3, that spiritual growth is the result of discipleship relationships rather than teaching alone. “Becoming a disciple, just like becoming a fully mature human being, takes time, takes the involvement of committed people, and takes a process of growth and development that is intentional and well worked out.”³¹⁷

Mark Galli affirms this view, stating that this need for spiritual direction has deep roots in the history of the faith, beginning with Jesus and his disciples and continuing through the apostles and teachers throughout the history of the Church. But because spiritual direction has been seen primarily as a Catholic practice, Protestants have instead emphasized the direct, unmediated nature of the individual’s relationship with Christ, and they have thus tended to be suspicious of the function of spiritual directors. However, he believes that is changing among

³¹⁶ Mark Galli, “*Am I growing yet?*” Christianity Today Library.com. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/octoberweb-only/143-43.0.html> (accessed November 20, 2008).

³¹⁷ Robert Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-forming Community*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 43.

Protestants, primarily those unsatisfied with what Christian psychologist Larry Crabb has called the "standard 'evangelical' means of spiritual growth": moral vigilance, church attendance, and busyness in a variety of programs, conferences, methods, and ministries.³¹⁸

The end result is that evangelicals in particular, as evidenced by the *Citizen Circle* mentors, are listening for God in ways that are different from their usual understanding of discipleship. "We are looking at many Christian disciplines, including prayer, silence and solitude, discernment, journaling, and others. ... Spiritual direction is one of these disciplines many evangelical Christians are learning about and exploring," Galli notes.³¹⁹

Because of their hunger for more spiritual commitment, and therefore, a more intimate relationship with God, the Circle mentors had, in effect, used the *Citizen Circle* project as a means for spiritual growth outside the limitations of the traditional, and often, self-centered programs of their own church. Not only that, but this researcher, as facilitator of the Circle, had become their spiritual director. While this researcher did lead the Circle meetings, the intent was never to "teach" the group, but rather to merely direct them as a conductor would an orchestra. That is precisely the role of the spiritual director, according to Larry Crabb. "The director's role is one of coming alongside, rather than dictating a program."³²⁰

With that said, perhaps the most unexpected, and yet the most important finding that came out of the Religious Status Inventory was that half of the mentors reported they had a greater understanding of "being repentant and responsible." When asked why that was, especially for those who were already mature in the faith, as their original Religious Status Inventory scores indicated, several mentors stated that working with those whose sin was so

³¹⁸ Robert Webber. *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-forming Community*, 43.

³¹⁹ Chris Armstrong and Steven Gertz. "Got your spiritual director yet?" Christian Today Library.com. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/aprilweb-only/4-28-51.0.html>. (Accessed November 20, 2008).

³²⁰ Ibid.

obvious had caused them to look at their own sin. “In order to grasp the gift of acceptance of God’s grace and steadfast love, one must first be sincere in being sorry for one’s sinful past and truly desire to change. Without this repentance, the person won’t be able to allow this knowledge to soak into his conscience and soul. Once he acknowledges God’s gift of grace and love, he can then follow God’s direction.” More to the point, another said, “Our hearts and minds need to be in order, repenting of our sins and weaknesses to the Lord. Do this first. Jesus’ remarks about the ‘log in our own eyes need to be dealt with first’ – forgiveness. Then we can, with a clean heart, see the needs of others through his eyes. The Lord’s forgiveness sets us free to then bless others in his name.”

According to Frederica Matthews-Green, this new appreciation for repentance is part of an emerging awareness of the ancient teachings of the Church. “It seems to be an Old Testament pattern. Anytime Israel suffered a military defeat, they responded with repentance. It didn’t replace other strategic responses, but was an indispensable companion.”³²¹ She adds that much of Jesus’ teachings centered on repentance as well. For example, in Luke 13:3 when the people told Jesus that Pilate had killed worshippers at the temple, he responded by telling them to repent or they would perish as well. “There seems to be a biblical pattern here: national suffering should bring about repentance,” she noted.³²² However, repentance and humility are not aspects of faith that most Americans are comfortable with. “We tend to skip over them in our rush to reassure ourselves that God loves us. He does, of course, but you don’t really know how much he loves

³²¹ Frederica Matthews-Green. “*Judgment Day*.” Christianity Today Library.com, September 1, 2001, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/7753> (accessed October 29, 2008).

³²² Frederica Matthews-Green. “*Judgment Day*.”

you until you dare to repent. Until you see how much God had to forgive in you, you can't really see the height of his love."³²³

No doubt, this is what one Darke County *Citizen Circle* member recognized when she said, "Seeing the 'least of these,' seeing the Circle participants with nothing, not even the ability to make good decisions for themselves, made me think that by the grace of God this could be me...All of their struggles now made sense to me. The responsibility of treating this person and viewing this person as God views him became overwhelming for me."

To truly benefit from incarceration and parole, and especially the *Citizen Circle* reentry program, it was critical that parolees recognize the wrong they have done. But more than just saying "I did it," these Circle members instinctively recognized that for rehabilitation, and especially spiritual renewal to occur, there must also be repentance and responsibility for what they have done. "God desires 'I'm sorry' more than 'I did it,' contrition more than confession," Matthews-Green said.³²⁴ Although never overtly discussed during the three-year project, based on the Religious Status Inventory scores of the Circle members, it seems apparent they understood that genuine rehabilitation can only come through repentance. But on a more personal level, in working so closely with these "publicans and sinners," those whose need for repentance is so obvious, the Circle members also realized that all of us need repentance if we expect to fully experience God's love. It was as Matthews-Green put it, "Seeing our sin becomes, paradoxically, an opportunity for joy."³²⁵

³²³ Frederica Matthews-Green. "*Judgment Day*."

³²⁴ Frederica Mathews-Green. "*So I'm Sorry already: What do you say after you say, 'I'm sorry?'*" Christianity Today Library.com, April 6, 1998, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/1426>, (accessed October 29, 2008).

³²⁵ Matthews-Green, Frederica. "*Whatever Happened to Repentance?*" Christianity Today Library.com, February 4, 2002, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/8415>, (accessed October 29, 2008).

Objective C: Social Justice Attitude

It was also the intent of this project to prove that mentors would show a greater understanding and acceptance for those parolees coming back into the community as result of their participation in the *Citizen Circle* reentry support group. This was measured by taking their scores from a survey conducted at the beginning and again at the end of the testing period, and comparing them to show any change in their social justice attitude. To measure this, Circle members were given the Crime and Rehabilitation survey designed by this researcher (Appendix 9) that contained 26 questions intended to study the way people think about crime in general and crime in their community and how it affects them in particular. This survey was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from “not true of me” (1) to “true of me” (5). Scores were simply added together. Thus, total scores may range from a low of 26 to a high of 130, with higher scores indicating greater understanding of and compassion for parolees.

The survey measured general areas such as the perceived causes of crime, the possibility of rehabilitation, the responsibility for that rehabilitation and their willingness to be involved personally with rehabilitation. Scores on the pre-project survey ranged from a low of 63 to a high of 116. Post-project surveys ranged from 78 to 118. Of the 11 people who participated, five mentors, or 45 percent, showed an increase in their understanding of, and commitment to, rehabilitation issues (Appendix 10). It is also important to note that of the six persons whose scores did not increase, five of them had unusually high pre-survey scores – 100 or greater. Because their post-survey scores only dropped a few points, it seems to indicate that their unrealistic early enthusiasm mellowed somewhat because of their Circle involvement.

However, of more importance are the three questions that the vast majority of mentors felt to be very true of them at the end of the project. Seventy-three percent reported that faith is

shown best by helping hurting people, and 64 percent stated that not only should churches be involved in rehabilitating parolees, but that they felt personally responsible to help needy persons. Not only are these findings consistent with the results of the overall increase in spiritual maturity determined by the Religious Status Inventory survey, but more critical, they are also consistent with the biblical teaching on hospitality – “loving the stranger” - practiced by the Church throughout its history.

With that in mind, it is important to note at this point in our discussion of crime and rehabilitation, the one group of parolees that the *Citizen Circle* members were not prepared to deal with was sex offenders. Like most people in the community, their view of sex offenders was that of perverted persons, even pedophiles, who were beyond rehabilitation. So when the parole officer first approached this researcher with a sex offender referral, there was concern the group would not accept him. However, it was decided to introduce David³²⁶ first, and then tell the group afterward of his offense. David was 19 at the time of his offense, and like most parolees the group eventually dealt with, had come from an abusive family background. “I don’t know who my father was and I don’t even know where my mother lives now either,” he told the members at the first meeting with him. He went on to describe his struggles in school, dropping out at 16, his drug and alcohol use, his struggles to find work. But what most affected the group was his tattoo – “white trash.” That was how he viewed himself, and as a result, that was how he lived out his life. Although David had intended to just introduce himself, he felt so accepted by the Circle members that he was soon in tears as he detailed his troubled past. Finally, the parole officer asked David to leave the room while the group decided if they wanted to accept him into the Circle. “But you need to know that David is a sex offender,” he said. There was a long

³²⁶ All parolee names have been changed to protect their identity.

silence, and then one of the members, speaking for the group, said, “I may not like what he has done, but I think we can help David.” And that was the beginning of a major shift in the perception of and attitude toward sex offenders among the *Citizen Circle* members.

Therefore, to further measure the impact of the *Citizen Circle* program on the social justice attitude of the volunteer mentors, a third survey was given at the beginning and end of the project, but one that focused specifically on their attitude toward sex offenders. This was measured by comparing their scores from a 20-question survey, also designed by this researcher that was similar to the Crime / Rehabilitation survey, but focused more specifically on sexual crimes and offenders (Appendix 11). It was also measured on a 5-point scale ranging from “not true of me” (1) to “true of me” (5). Scores were simply added together. Thus, total scores may range from a low of 20 to a high of 100, with higher scores indicating greater understanding of and compassion even for sex offenders as loved by God.

Scores on the pre-project survey ranged from a low of 51 to a high of 76, and worth noting, none reflected the unusually high scores found in the Crime / Rehabilitation pre-survey. Post scores ranged from a low of 58 to a high of 93. Most important, however, was that of the eight persons who took both sexual offender surveys, all eight – 100 percent - recorded an increased score. It is also worth noting that their scores did not just increase, but were significantly higher, going up an average of 20 percent (Appendix 12). Therefore, based on the results of these surveys, it is evident that the Circle mentors were all impacted greatly in their understanding of and commitment to criminal justice issues.

Objective D: Personal Reflections

To further measure the attitudes of the *Citizen Circle* participants toward the project and how it has affected them, a series of 16 subjective questions were prepared by this researcher

(Appendix 13). Because no pre- and post-project comparisons were needed, these questions were given to the 19 persons who were actively involved throughout much of the project. The questions focused on any changes that had occurred in them and what caused those changes. The areas of discussion included their attitude toward those who had committed a crime, and specifically a sex offense, how they viewed their faith, and most important, how the Circle project affected their lives overall.

Of the 19 mentors questioned, 79 percent said that prior to their involvement in the project, they had known someone who had committed a crime, but the majority – 63 percent - were non-violent offenses, and more important, only 21 percent had ever known personally a sex offender. However, it is important to note that while more than half reported they considered themselves to be compassionate toward those who had committed crimes in their past, that number skyrocketed to 95 percent as a direct result of the Circle. The same thing was true when asked specifically about sex offenders. Nearly triple the number of mentors said they now felt compassion for them at the end of the project. When asked why their attitudes had changed, most credited getting to know them as real people with real needs and hurts. While some credited the knowledge they had gained about the root causes of crime, others said it was the realization of the overwhelming barriers facing parolees, especially sex offenders, that truly moved them. That awareness was best summed by one mentor, “Realizing that people cannot successfully make it without a support system that encourages. There has to be a way back, and I’m willing to be part of that solution.”

Concerning their faith, 72 percent believed they had grown stronger as a direct result of their participation in the Circle project. “It has helped me to live my faith by helping those who need to see the love of Christ lived out in me.” Another mentor’s response was more specific,

“Caring about those that society wants to by-pass, to go away. But God still loves them and we need to show his love in dealing with them.”

When asked how the *Citizen Circle* project had affected their lives, most stated they were now more understanding, more compassionate with people who had committed crimes, what one person described as “the forgotten persons in our society.” For others it offered them an outlet to actually get involved with hurting people, “to feel more useful.” But for some the benefits from the Circle were more personal, more spiritual. “I see many broken people that need people to help them. It opened my heart up more and made me even more compassionate.” And more to the point, “Citizen Circle has given me the desire to help all the people involved...to be a giving and true living example to all.” Thus, we can safely conclude that the subjective data from these essay questions confirms all the findings gathered from the three objective surveys.

Conclusions

Therefore, in light of these four objectives, it can be concluded that this ministry intervention was successful in accomplishing the stated goals of enhancing the faith and social justice attitude of the mentors involved for several reasons. First of all, in spite of obvious limitations such as the length of the project, and more important, the offensive nature of the crimes being dealt with, the mentors stuck with the project. They showed their faith by simply being there, meeting after meeting, year after year. Although some dropped out, the number of mentors actually increased by the end of the project as others began to hear of the ministry that was being done in the *Citizen Circle*. Second, the objective data clearly showed that the majority of the mentors displayed a measurable increase in the maturity of their faith, particularly in such critical areas as their humility before God, and as a result, his direction in their lives. Third, and more important, they were able to translate their spiritual development into action through the

positive changes in their social justice attitudes and actions, especially toward those who had committed such heinous crimes as those dealt with in the *Citizen Circle*. And finally, the subjective data confirmed the success of the project through the self-awareness of their own spiritual and social changes as expressed by the mentors. While it was not surprising that some, even many, of the mentors would feel more compassion toward offenders after meeting with them for such a lengthy project, what was surprising was the overwhelming number of mentors positively impacted by the project, and especially the extent to which they felt themselves to be changed.

Examination of Method

The project utilized a Pro-Active Research Method and a small group discipleship process. This method facilitated project goals regarding transformation of those involved in the group. The method, while successful required of the researcher a great deal of effort, attention to detail, constant awareness of the personal needs of all involved, including the parolees as well as the volunteer mentors. These demands were intensified by the serious, even legal, responsibilities regarding the project. Although it would have been more helpful for this project to have recorded observations of the meetings, as the leader of the group, the researcher was too closely involved, coaching, challenging, supporting and nurturing each member to do that. While the intense involvement of the researcher was necessary for the Circle, it was oftentimes an exhausting experience. It is the intent of the researcher to nurture other leaders within the Circle who can take on the role of facilitator. Not only would this lessen the burden on the researcher, but it would share the ownership of the Circle with more persons and ensure its continuance.

In order for the case study method to be effective, the leader must have a high level of credibility and trust from not just the mentors, but the parolees as well. This researcher was able

to do that because of the existing work in the community with parolees. The leader also must have strong leadership skills for several reasons. Not only did the size of the group require that, but the conversations of both the mentors and parolees had to constantly be channeled in the proper direction to maintain order and focus. Confidentiality was also a major trust issue, and strong leadership was required to maintain the trust that what was said in the Circle would stay in the Circle.

However, this strong leadership was also a drawback for the Circle. The researcher had to constantly encourage the other members to participate in the conversations with parolees. Oftentimes they would be reluctant to speak, but as the meetings progressed over the three-year project, more of the members began to express themselves more forcefully. Nevertheless, there are still none who can lead the Circle without the researcher present, and that puts the future of the Circle at risk if not addressed.

While the Pro-Active Research method served the researcher well, some changes are recommended. As stated, more leaders should be developed to facilitate the meetings. Also consideration should be given to dividing the group in half. This would allow for more personal time with each parolee and it would allow more freedom for mentors to speak, especially those who may be uncomfortable in large group settings. Most important, meeting more than once a month should be given serious consideration. The first three months are critical times for the parolees, and meeting just once a month with the Circle can seem like a lifetime for them.

Nonetheless, the evidence is clear that the *Citizen Circle* project clearly made profound changes in the faith and life of those involved.

Other Findings

Although the program was intended for parolees to attend three or four meetings, generally until they found a job, many of those the group mentored continued much longer. David,³²⁷ for example, kept coming for two years, primarily because he developed friendships in the Circle. He and Jim, who was 82 years old then, would often have lunch together. “I never met anyone as old as Jim,” David joked with the Circle when describing his time with Jim between Circle meetings. The Circle helped David find a job, something that can be very difficult for sex offenders because of the stigma associated with their crime. More important, they helped him with his family issues. He was living with his girlfriend and their son, and because he had come from such an abusive background, he had few parenting skills himself.

However, it is important to note that several in the group struggled with the immorality of David’s situation. They were concerned they might be condoning a sinful relationship because he was living with his girlfriend while unmarried. It was this area that, in some ways, was the most difficult for the group. On the one hand, all their religious training had instilled in them the need to condemn sin. At the very least, they felt compelled to encourage parolees like David to attend church. Yet in getting to know David, they were able to focus more on his needs rather than his sins; and in time they realized they could have more spiritual impact on David and all those they were mentoring, by simply accepting them where they were and demonstrating the love of God for them by trying to help them with their physical needs.

That does not mean there were no failures with the Circle. James³²⁸ too, was a sex offender, a convicted rapist who had spent 12 years in prison. James was extremely bright, but he

³²⁷ All parolee names have been changed to protect their identity.

³²⁸ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

used his intelligence as a barrier to keep people from seeing his true feelings that he kept well-hidden behind a mask of anger and contempt for all those he felt had let him down. For the first several months the group mostly let James talk on about himself. One thing they quickly learned was that most parolees have never had someone actually listen to them, so talking about themselves is a critical first step in successful reentry. On the surface what the Circle offered parolees like James may be help with a job or an apartment, but the real benefit they offered was acceptance, and that was best shown through listening. In time James felt safe enough to talk about his family, about being adopted, about his anger, and even his crime. “When you’re under stress, you might yell at someone or kick the cat. I do drugs, and that’s when I get into trouble,” he admitted. Although the natural reaction of the group was to say, “Don’t do it,” they didn’t say that. They just listened while he ranted and railed on about the injustices in his life. In time, surrounded by so much acceptance and love, his anger lessened. He even started attending church with one of the Circle members who was helping him find a job. Finally after two years in the group, he was released from parole. Unfortunately, he stopped attending the Circle and within six months was arrested for another rape. He pled guilty and was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

James’ failure hit the group hard on several levels. First of all, there was a professional sense of loss. The group had invested so much time and energy into James that they felt somehow responsible for his failure. “Did I do enough to encourage him?” “Would this not have happened if I had followed up with him?” However, the parole officer assured them they cannot guarantee every offender they work with will make it. Some simply will continue to make wrong choices. “That is the nature of free will,” he noted. But he went on to add that their efforts likely postponed James’ failure, and in that respect they were successful. The Circle gave him extra

time to make right choices. Unfortunately he chose to do wrong. While they understood rationally that James' failure was not their fault, guilt is the unfortunate by-product of compassion and it took a year for many group members to accept the limitations of their efforts.

Unfortunately, a second and more critical result of James' failure was the sense of violation, especially among the women in the group. "I don't know if I want to be a part of this anymore. I put so much faith in him, and I wanted him to make it so much that I don't know if I can handle another loss like this," Jane³²⁹ admitted to the group following James' arrest.

Kathy³³⁰ best described the feelings of most of the women. "I'll never be able to trust another parolee again," she said in anger. "He was on my porch many times. He was even in my home. That could have been me!"

But in time, with help and support from the others in the group, Jane, Kathy and all the other mentors were able to work through their fear and anger. None left the group, but all felt somehow more vulnerable, albeit wiser because of the incident. And that is the summary of the results of this project; that faith is nurtured best in the soil of compassionate wisdom, and that requires risk, disappointment, failure, but most of all endurance. In other words, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."³³¹

Final Thoughts

In this three-year project, as many as 19 members of the *Citizen Circle*, an Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction reentry support group, were trained, supported, nurtured and encouraged to grow their faith and broaden their understanding and acceptance of

³²⁹ All mentor names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Hebrews 11:1

the issues that parolees face when reentering the community following incarceration. While all considered themselves to be relatively mature in their faith, few had any experience with parolees, and none really understood the seemingly insurmountable barriers they faced. Nonetheless, as a result of this project, every one of the mentors was positively impacted in both their faith and compassion for those considered to be the vilest of offenders in our culture.

The success of the *Citizen Circle* project, and the new-found understanding of biblical and historic understanding of hospitality, was evident in Vanessa's reaction to the idea of helping parolees, especially sex offenders. She said at first it was difficult for her to participate in the Circle. "I am licensed by the Diocese to train volunteers in sexual misconduct and abuse prevention. I worked for the Denver Rape Assistance and Awareness Program because of friends and cousins who had been victims," she admitted. "Walking into the world of re-entry ministry, which includes sex offenders, is a lot like the disciples walking into Tyre and Sidon. I am in the territory of the enemy."³³² She went on to tell her congregation Matt's story and his impact on her faith:

Matt³³³ was convicted of a sexual offense sixteen years ago. He served fifteen years in prison. Upon being granted parole, both of his daughters, his sister, a former pastor, and a longtime friend applied to allow Matt to live with them. They reside in five communities in four different states. Each one was rejected because Matt's status as a sexual offender made it illegal for him to live in their neighborhoods. Finally, he applied to Good Samaritan Home and was accepted into the Independent Housing shelter.

During his time there he put together his finances, established a relationship with our Parole Officer and connected with a local church. Matt found an apartment, but after a few months was asked to leave, not because he was late on rent or caused problems, not because he had violated zoning restrictions, but because his landlords were afraid he would tarnish the complex. Matt worked as a legal clerk inside prison, has a bachelor's degree and good computer skills, but cannot find work because potential employers won't hire someone with his offender status.

³³² Vanessa Clark. St. Paul's Episcopal Church sermon, Greenville, Ohio. August 17, 2008.

³³³ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

Matt has an ugly ‘jacket’ – that is, his criminal record shows an ugly crime. And that jacket has marked him a pariah in our society. He is less than human, a filthy thing whose presence dirties everything around him. When I began attending Citizen Circle that is how I viewed Matt and all others with his jacket. Over months of praying that Jesus would guide me and our church in supporting this ministry to pariahs, I noticed Matt was patient. He was patient with the landlords, moving out voluntarily rather than forcing them to honor the lease. He was patient with the justice system although a new law threatened to extend the sentence he had already served.

I also noticed Matt was gentle with the other participants in the group. He offered to help them fill out legal paperwork for housing, employment, child support payments and even court appearances.

I noticed Matt was faithful, reflecting on his life through the Bible and Jesus’ call. When he strayed from a Church home, he found himself in prison and was compelled to reconnect with his former pastor. Not only is he faithful on Sunday mornings in his church here, but is helping to teach Bible study once a week.

Matt does not shout and draw attention to himself. His criminal jacket does that for him. And he must wear that jacket to every apartment application, every job interview, every meeting with a government official from the sheriff to a social security administrator for at least ten more years. He meets fear and loathing every day. Since last fall he has responded with patience, gentleness and faith. Faith that God has placed him where he can be blessed by Christ and may bless others, if allowed. I know Matt has blessed me and I pray St. Paul’s continues our support of Good Samaritan Home so that others who deserve another chance may be blessed through us.³³⁴

It was this realization of the real meaning of biblical hospitality for Vanessa and all the other mentors who participated throughout the three-year project that became the hallmark of the Darke County *Citizen Circle* and the embodiment of the success of this project.³³⁵

³³⁴ Vanessa Clark. Ibid.

³³⁵ A detailed explanation of the full ministry preparation and overall spiritual consequences for this project can be found in Appendix 16.

Appendix 1

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
Adult Parole Authority
137 W. North St.
Lima, OH 45801

January 28, 2005

Dear Community neighbor,

There are 43,000 men and women currently incarcerated in Ohio prisons, costing taxpayers – you and me – more than \$1.5 billion every year. Although there are literally hundreds of programs for these people while they are in prison, the missing element is support when they are released. That's why three of every four of them will likely end up back in prison.

In Darke County there are now 63 people on parole. Realistically 40 of them will one day be rearrested at great financial and emotional cost to the community. In fact, the Darke County commissioners spend \$5.4 million every year – that's 45 percent of the county's general fund budget - just for the courts and sheriff's department. With your help we want to do something about this problem.

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction is committed to work with leaders in the community in mentoring these parolees living now in Darke County through what is called a **"Citizen Circle."** This is a group of people from all areas of the county – the court, law enforcement, business, clergy, health professionals, educators – people just like you and me, who will come together once a month as a group – and here is the key – meet with Darke County parolees who have made a commitment to fit back into the community, but who need a little help and support. All the studies show that with your help and the help of others like you, they will succeed.

Would you like to learn more about this? We need to hear from you because your input is very important. **A Citizen Circle informational meeting will be held Tuesday, February 22, from 2-3:30 P.M. at the Greenville Church of the Brethren, 421 Central Ave., Greenville.** Sheila Clark, who is in charge of all the Citizen Circle groups in this area for the Adult Parole Authority, and Craig Miller, who is the parole officer for Darke County, will be there to explain the program and to answer any questions that you may have.

If you have any questions concerning this meeting, please contact John Graham, who is the facilitator for the Darke County Citizen Circle, at 937.547.6337. And please mark your calendar for this very important community meeting.

Sincerely,
John Graham
Good Samaritan Home Director

Craig Miller
APA Parole Officer for Darke County

Appendix 2

May 21, 2005

Dear Pastor,

If you have been getting our newsletters these past couple years, then you already know about our mentoring ministry with men coming out of prison. If you haven't, then in a nutshell, we started a residential mentoring program in Greenville that helps Christian men coming out of prison. But because we could only house three men at a time, we couldn't even begin to help all the ex-offenders in our community. In Darke County there are 56 men and women on parole and in Miami County there are 132 people – and if you include the county court probationers, these numbers triple.

The worst news is that as many as three out of four of these people will likely return to prison without support from the community.

That is why I have committed to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction initiative called Citizen Circle. This is a NON-RESIDENTIAL mentoring program that is being started in Miami and Darke counties that will help ALL the ex-felons in our neighborhood stay out of prison and become productive members of the community through community accountability and support.

As a pastor I know you understand that people can change. We call that GRACE. But I also know you understand that changing broken lives takes more than a trip to the altar. It takes the ongoing support of the Church.

I strongly believe that the Citizen Circle is a way that your church can make a positive impact on the ones in our community who most need help because this sort of discipleship is what the Church does best.

I would like you – and any members of your church who are interested in outreach, such as your Outreach or Missions committee people – to attend our community information meeting on June 15 at Tipp City United Methodist Church, 8 W. Main St. We will have one session from 2 – 4 p.m. and a repeat session at 6 - 8 p.m. If possible I would encourage you to come to the early session because Reginald Wilkinson, the Director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction will be there.

Although this program was initiated by the ODRC, it is not a state program. In fact, it will be run solely by community volunteers such as you and me. If you have any questions, please call me at 937.547.6337. And please mark June 15 on your calendar so you and your church members can learn more about a great opportunity to mend broken lives.

John Graham
Good Samaritan Home

Appendix 3

“Slice of Life” Column

by John Graham

(Greenville Daily Advocate, Piqua Daily Call, Sidney Daily News, Tipp City Herald)

June 6, 2005

Three years ago Kathy and I decided that we wanted to make a difference in our community by helping ex-felons. In a nutshell, we opened our home to Christian men coming out of prison so we could mentor them back into the community.

But because we could only house three men at a time, we couldn't even begin to help all the ex-offenders in our area. In Darke County where we live there are 63 men and women on parole right now and in neighboring Miami County where we used to live there are 132 people on parole. And then if you include the county court probationers, these numbers triple.

And these numbers are repeated all over the state. That is why the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) spends \$1.6 billion every year incarcerating the 45,000 plus inmates throughout the state. That is also why more than half our county tax money is spent on crime prevention - the sheriff's department and the courts.

The worse news is that as many as three out of four of these people will likely return to prison without support when released.

And worst of all, these numbers will skyrocket because children of inmates are six times more likely to one day be incarcerated themselves if they are not given support now.

That's the problem, now here's a possible solution. It's called *Citizen Circle*. This is an ODRC volunteer mentoring program that I believe can genuinely make a difference.

This is a group of people from all areas of the county – the court, law enforcement, business, clergy, health professionals, educators – people just like you and me, who will come together once a month as a group – and here is the key – meet with the parolees who have made a commitment to fit back into the community, but who need a little help and support. All the studies show that with your help and the help of others like you, they will succeed.

Would you like to learn more about this? A Citizen Circle informational meeting will be held Tuesday, June 15, at 2-4 P.M. at the Tipp City United Methodist Church, 8 W. Main St., Tipp City. ODRC Director Dr. Reginald Wilkinson will be there to explain the program and how it can help our community. For those who can't make the afternoon session, it will be repeated at 6 p.m.

In church on Sunday we talk about changing broken lives, but it takes more than an emotional trip to the altar. It takes the ongoing support of the community - and especially the church community. If you want to put your faith into action, then come to the Citizen Circle meeting on June 15. Better yet, become a volunteer mentor and change a broken life.

Appendix 4

Darke County Citizen Circle Application

1. Describe one or two times in your life when you felt proud of something that you accomplished.

2. Tell us how you achieved this. Did someone or some event in your life help you achieve this?

3. What do you need to help you succeed in a personal goal right now?

4. What are you willing to contribute to achieve your goal?

5. As a member of the circle, what can you bring to the circle as a contribution to others?

6. What crimes were you convicted of that placed you in prison?

7. Do you have a history of alcohol and other drug use? Yes _____ No _____

8. When is the last time you drank alcohol or used drugs? Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Please Print Name _____

DARKE COUNTY Citizen Circle Agreement

I agree to:

1. Accept responsibility for my past criminal behavior.
2. Acknowledge the hurt my past behavior has caused others.
3. Participate in some form of community service.
4. Abide by all recommendations offered by the circle.

The circle agrees to:

1. Provide encouragement, guidance, and make recommendations as needed.
2. Assist in developing a plan for identifying your needs.
3. Look for resources that you need to accomplish your goals.
4. Meet regularly with you as needed.
5. Be a place of accountability for accomplishing your goals.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Circle Representative

Date

DARKE COUNTY CITIZEN CIRCLE AUTHORIZATION FOR INFORMATION SHARING

 Last

First

Middle

 Date of Birth

I voluntarily authorize CITIZEN CIRCLE members to exchange, give, receive, share or disclose information in their records, from whatever source derived, related to my participation.

I authorize the release of the identified confidential information to members of the CITIZEN CIRCLE. (Please check Yes and initial for all those that apply.)

- Yes _____ Adult Parole Authority
- Yes _____ Darke County Probation
- Yes _____ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections
- Yes _____ Local Law Enforcement
- Yes _____ Other

I understand the following:

1. The purpose of this information sharing is to improve communications between Circle members and me, so that proper suggested services and referrals can be given.
2. Only members of the Circle will use information disclosed. However, I understand that disclosure of information in Circle meetings can and will be used in monitoring compliance with sobriety and release conditions agreed to, or ordered by affiliate agencies or authorities. I further understand that affiliate agencies or authorities have the right to adjust services or provide sanctions in response to information disclosed at the Circle meetings.
3. I may revoke this Authorization at any time during the duration of this agreement.
4. Future crimes or threats to commit crime are not protected under this authorization.
5. Suspicion of child abuse or neglect is not protected.
6. This authorization will automatically expire on _____.

I authorize the release of the following information: (Please check Yes and initial for all those that apply).

- Yes _____ Substance Abuse diagnosis and treatment information
- Yes _____ Criminal History
- Yes _____ Physical and mental health history
- Yes _____ Educational, vocational, and employment records
- Yes _____ Attendance records, progress reports
- Yes _____ HIV and AIDS related diagnosis and treatment
- Yes _____ Other _____
- Yes _____ Other _____

I also understand that any disclosure is bound by Part 2 of Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations governing confidentiality of drug and alcohol abuse patient records. These rules prohibit any further disclosure of this information unless further disclosure is expressly permitted by my written consent or as otherwise permitted by 42 C.F.R., Part 2. A general authorization for the release of medical or other information is not sufficient for this purpose. The Federal rules restrict any use of information to criminally investigate or prosecute any alcohol or drug abuse client.

Executed this date: _____

Participant: _____

Circle Representative: _____

Appendix 5

**Darke County Citizen Circle
Member Application**

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Phone () _____ - _____ Age _____

Race / Ethnicity _____ Sex _____ Faith _____

E-Mail Address _____

Please Answer the following Questions

Do you know anyone that has been incarcerated?

- _____
- a. yes
 - b. no

Have you been a victim of crime? Yes / No

If “yes” to question #2, what happened to the perpetrator?

- a. sentenced to prison
- b. placed on probation
- c. time in county jail
- d. not prosecuted
- e. perpetrator not apprehended
- f. other, please specify _____

Were you satisfied with the disposition of the case Yes/No. If No why not.

Appendix 6

Religious Status Inventory

Not true of me

True of me

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

- _____ 1. I am always happy because God takes care of all my problems.
- _____ 2. I have read many books about my faith this past year.
- _____ 3. Making a decision is as simple as praying to God and waiting for an answer.
- _____ 4. I regularly attend church or a religious community.
- _____ 5. Religion is just one aspect of my life.
- _____ 6. I pray for help in my decisions rather than ask for specific answers.
- _____ 7. I have little desire to read a religious book.
- _____ 8. When someone asks me to forgive them, I am able to do so.
- _____ 9. Whatever problems I have, I bring on myself.
- _____ 10. I have been unable to find a group of Christian where I feel accepted.
- _____ 11. I contribute a lot of money to social causes.
- _____ 12. When I've done something wrong, I try to do something to correct the situation.
- _____ 13. Both prayer and personal action are needed to deal with difficult problems. One without the other is insufficient.
- _____ 14. Without my Christian faith I would be a much different person.
- _____ 15. I change my religious beliefs frequently.
- _____ 16. I usually find something else to do rather than go to church.
- _____ 17. When God forgives me, I feel like I'm "off the hook."
- _____ 18. I would be free of problems if life treated me better.

Not true of me True of me
 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

- _____ 19. There are a lot of different parts of my faith that I want to explore.
- _____ 20. God can use my anger in positive ways.
- _____ 21. I make most of my decisions based on the idea that I should do to others what I want them to do to me.
- _____ 22. I feel a desire to worship God throughout the week.
- _____ 23. Jesus Christ is Lord of my life.
- _____ 24. I am trying to help change many things that are unfair in the world.
- _____ 25. When I've wronged someone, it is useless to apologize to them.
- _____ 26. I know that God will bring good out of all my painful situations because he loves me.
- _____ 27. Being with non-Christians makes me feel uncomfortable.
- _____ 28. It is important to do what other people want you to do.
- _____ 29. God is more important to me than anything else in my life.
- _____ 30. I feel accepted and understood when I am with other Christians.
- _____ 31. I am conscious that my relationship to God affects how I relate to my family.
- _____ 32. I decide if something is right or wrong by what happens to me.
- _____ 33. I feel safe and secure knowing that God loves me.
- _____ 34. When I sin, I have a sense that God cares less about what happens to me.
- _____ 35. I consider myself very active in moral issues.
- _____ 36. I constantly give a large amount of my income to a church or religious organization.
- _____ 37. It is difficult for me to relate to Christians who believe different than I do.
- _____ 38. When making major decisions, I ask for help from my, friend and God.

Not true of me

True of me

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

- _____ 39. I trust that the future is in God's hands and that I will accept whatever he has for me.
- _____ 40. I need God's help in every minor decision I make.
- _____ 41. One reason I go to church is to feel important in my community.
- _____ 42. Denominational differences mean little to me.
- _____ 43. When I am with a group of Christians, I feel at home.
- _____ 44. I feel good about what I do because I know I am contributing to society.
- _____ 45. I have little desire to be involved in social action.
- _____ 46. Receiving God's forgiveness inspires me to worship and praise God.
- _____ 47. I feel comfortable receiving God's love and forgiveness.
- _____ 48. All I can do is take what comes in life.
- _____ 49. When I hurt someone, I feel so guilty that I find myself avoiding them.
- _____ 50. I fail to understand why things happen to me.
- _____ 51. It bothers me that God does so little to make my life better.
- _____ 52. I try to keep my religion separate from other aspects of my life.
- _____ 53. I lack direction from God in how to fulfill my roles with my work and family.
- _____ 54. If someone hurts me, it makes it hard for me to trust them again.
- _____ 55. I have a regular devotional time in order to grow in my faith.
- _____ 56. Some problems and sins are so complex that it is difficult to put blame on any one thing.
- _____ 57. I expect some hard times in the future but trust that God will help me through them.

Not true of me True of me
 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

- _____ 58. I have difficulty handling someone getting angry with me.
- _____ 59. I feel a common bond with other Christians.
- _____ 60. God is an impersonal force.
- _____ 61. I can do little to make my future better.
- _____ 62. I'm uneasy around people from different cultures or races.
- _____ 63. I am quick to ask for forgiveness when I have hurt someone.
- _____ 64. I constantly go to church or a religious community twice a week or more.
- _____ 65. My religious beliefs should be kept separate from what I do in my daily life.
- _____ 66. I can know God merely by interacting with people.
- _____ 67. I respect the beliefs that are different from mine.
- _____ 68. The causes of my problems include both myself and my surroundings.
- _____ 69. Prayer helps me feel closer to God.
- _____ 70. I am involved in my community as an expression of my faith.
- _____ 71. I continue to wish the best for someone who has hurt me.
- _____ 72. I volunteer quite often for church positions.
- _____ 73. Prayer is useless in helping make major decisions.
- _____ 74. I enjoy being around other people of different cultures or races.
- _____ 75. I think about what God would want for my life when I make any major decision.
- _____ 76. I have a great deal of problem with people who feel that our culture is better than others.
- _____ 77. I see Jesus mainly as the founder of Christianity.

Not true of me True of me
 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

- _____ 78. I feel forgiven by God when I sin.
- _____ 79. It bothers me when religious differences keep people from becoming friends.
- _____ 80. I would lose interest in my job if it paid less.
- _____ 81. In the midst of prayer I sometimes stop and just listen.
- _____ 82. Sometimes anger allows me to be productive in my actions.
- _____ 83. I rarely go to church or a religious community.
- _____ 84. I stand in awe and wonder of God my creator.
- _____ 85. To make Jesus relevant to my daily life seems to be taking religion too far.
- _____ 86. I continue to give money to the church during times when it is hard to pay bills.
- _____ 87. As a Christian everything is wonderful and will continue to be.
- _____ 88. I have close friendships with both Christians and non-Christians.
- _____ 89. God punishes sin.
- _____ 90. I am careful to do what is right for fear that I will be punished by God.
- _____ 91. I fail to see how my religious life relates to what I do every day.
- _____ 92. Often I wonder if God really forgives me.
- _____ 93. When problems are difficult, I recognize there is nothing I can do so I give it all to God.
- _____ 94. My faith affects every aspect of my life.
- _____ 95. My main reason for going to church is to make me feel better.
- _____ 96. When I think of God's love, I get a warm and tender feeling inside.
- _____ 97. I believe that God has a purpose for me in my job or what I do.

Not true of me True of me
 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

- ___ 98. I seldom take time to think about my relationship with God.
- ___ 99. My decisions are always founded on my faith.
- ___ 100. Pain makes me question God's role in my life.
- ___ 101. I have a hard time accepting God's forgiveness because I feel unworthy to receive it.
- ___ 102. It is hard to be open and honest with other Christians.
- ___ 103. I feel good about how God uses me in what I do.
- ___ 104. When I have wronged someone, my first thought is how that person might be feeling.
- ___ 105. I lack close relationships with any group of Christians.
- ___ 106. I rarely give money to the church.
- ___ 107. I expect to have both good times and bad times in my future.
- ___ 108. People from other cultures who become Christians will need to give up much of their cultural lifestyle.
- ___ 109. I try to serve God through my work.
- ___ 110. I have little desire to give money to the church.
- ___ 111. The church lacks a feeling of being like a family to me.
- ___ 112. I rarely consider what God would think about my actions.
- ___ 113. I enjoy my work because it makes me feel good about myself.
- ___ 114. When someone has wronged me, I give them the cold shoulder.
- ___ 115. What is right or wrong is sometimes unclear.
- ___ 116. I refuse to listen to someone who says things contrary to the Bible.
- ___ 117. I rely solely on my own resources to make major decisions in my life.

Not true of me True of me
 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

- _____ 118. People from other cultures or races are difficult to trust.
- _____ 119. Suffering seems to develop and refine my faith and character.
- _____ 120. I need friendships with both Christians and non-Christians to help me grow.
- _____ 121. God will still love me regardless of what I do.
- _____ 122. Without my faith in God I would be lacking much of my sense of what is right or wrong.
- _____ 123. I live my life without need of God's assistance.
- _____ 124. When I have hurt someone, I try to ask myself what I can do to make it right.
- _____ 125. My faith is renewed when I attend church.
- _____ 126. I seldom struggle with decisions of what is right or wrong.
- _____ 127. I avoid volunteering for church positions.
- _____ 128. I need to be more involved in church than just being a member.
- _____ 129. If you follow the Bible, you will know what is right and wrong in all situations.
- _____ 130. The main reason I worship God is that I feel I should.
- _____ 131. Involvement in a religious community seems unnecessary to me.
- _____ 132. I avoid churches that encourage a lot of involvement.
- _____ 133. I don't get angry.
- _____ 134. I try to keep a balance between what I can do for myself and what God can do for me.
- _____ 135. It is important for Christians to separate themselves from non-Christians.
- _____ 136. It would be hard to refrain from worshiping God.

Not true of me

True of me

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

- _____ 137. Both God's guidance and my capabilities are important for dealing with difficult situations.
- _____ 138. It is hard for me to understand how other people get so excited about God's love.
- _____ 139. My concern for others is based on my love for God.
- _____ 140. Knowing that God loves me gets me very excited.
- _____ 141. I am comfortable with other people believing different than I believe.
- _____ 142. I go to church mainly to worship God and fellowship with other Christians.
- _____ 143. If I've done something wrong, it is better to let it go than to bring it up again and apologize for it.
- _____ 144. Because God loves and forgives me, it makes me want to go out of my way to help someone else.
- _____ 145. I pray mainly when things are out of my control.
- _____ 146. I have little need to deal with moral issues because very few affect me.
- _____ 147. I like to just sit and enjoy and church service. I dislike being asked to participate in it.
- _____ 148. My religious beliefs are complex.
- _____ 149. I feel an absence of God's love in my life.
- _____ 150. I go to church because I want to grow as a Christian.
- _____ 151. I feel guilty when I fail to pray.
- _____ 152. Talking to people from different cultures helps me to have a broader view of life.
- _____ 153. Some people would say that faith is too simple.
- _____ 154. I am very active in church activities.

**Religious Status Inventory
Scoring for Each Dimension**

Dimension 1: Awareness of God

Items:	13	22	23	29	69	81	84	134	136	137	
Reverse:		40	60	66	77	85	93	123	130	145	151

Dimension 2: Acceptance of God's Grace and Steadfast Love

Items:	26	33	46	47	78	96	119	121	140	144	
Reverse:		1	17	34	50	89	92	100	101	138	149

Dimension 3: Knowing God's Leadership and Direction

Items:	6	31	38	39	57	70	75	103	107	109	
Reverse:		3	48	51	53	61	65	73	87	91	117

Dimension 4: Being Ethical

Items:	11	21	24	35	44	97	99	115	122	139	
Reverse:		28	32	45	80	90	112	113	126	129	146

Dimension 5: Being Repentant and Responsible

Items:	8	12	20	56	63	68	71	82	104	124	
Reverse:		9	18	25	49	54	58	114	133	143	156

Dimension 6: Involvement in Organized Religion

Items:	4	36	64	72	86	125	128	142	150	154	
Reverse:		16	41	83	95	106	110	127	131	132	147

Dimension 7: Experiencing Fellowship

Items:	30	42	43	59	74	76	79	88	120	152	
Reverse:		10	27	37	62	102	105	108	111	118	135

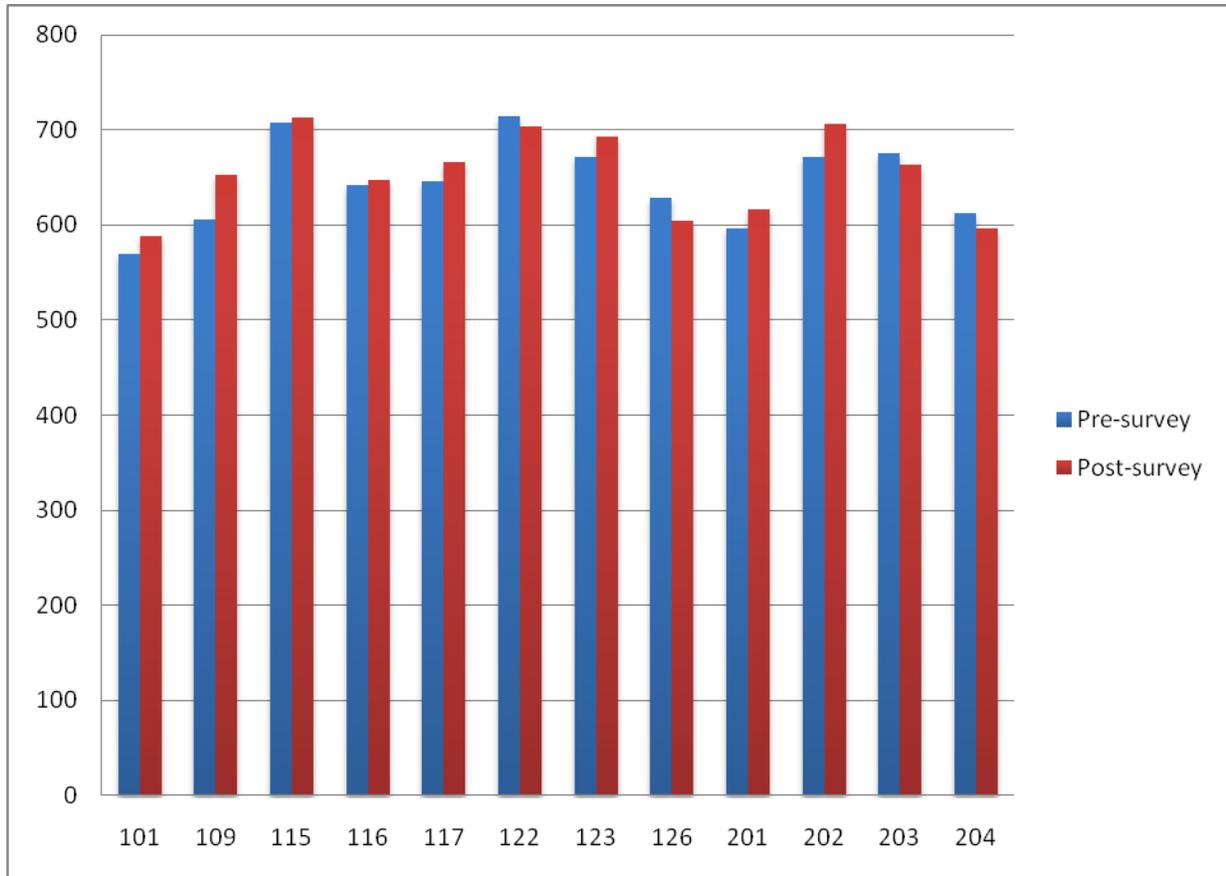
Dimension 8: Affirming Openness in Faith

Items:	2	14	19	55	67	94	141	148	157	160	
Reverse:		5	7	15	52	98	116	153	155	158	159

The range for each dimension is 20 to 100. A total score can be obtained by adding up all dimensions. The range for the total score is 160 to 800.

Appendix 7

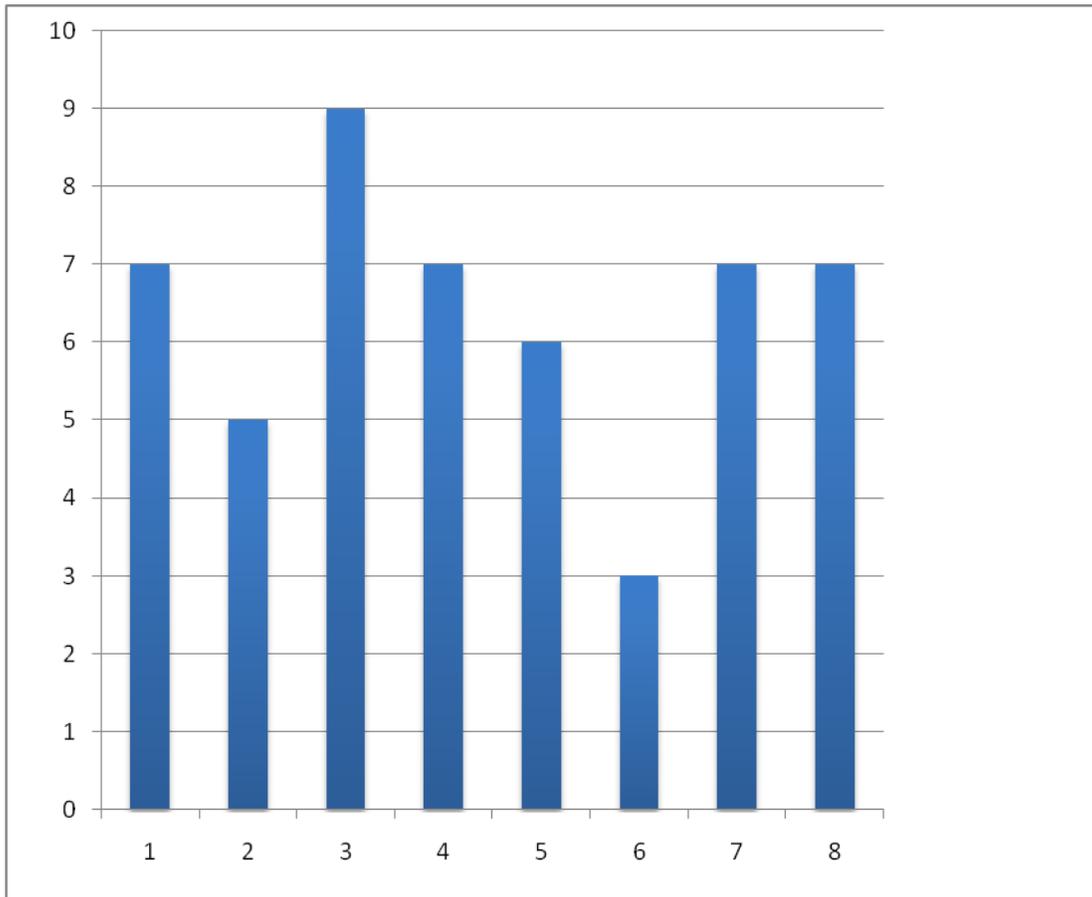
Religious Status Inventory Pre- and Post-survey Result



Appendix 8

Religious Status Inventory Survey Specific Areas of Faith Showing Growth

1. Awareness of God	58%
2. Acceptance of God's grace and steadfast love	42%
3. Knowing God's leadership and direction	75%
4. Being ethical	58%
5. Being repentant and responsible	50%
6. Involvement in organized religion	25%
7. Experiencing fellowship	58%
8. Affirming openness in faith	58%

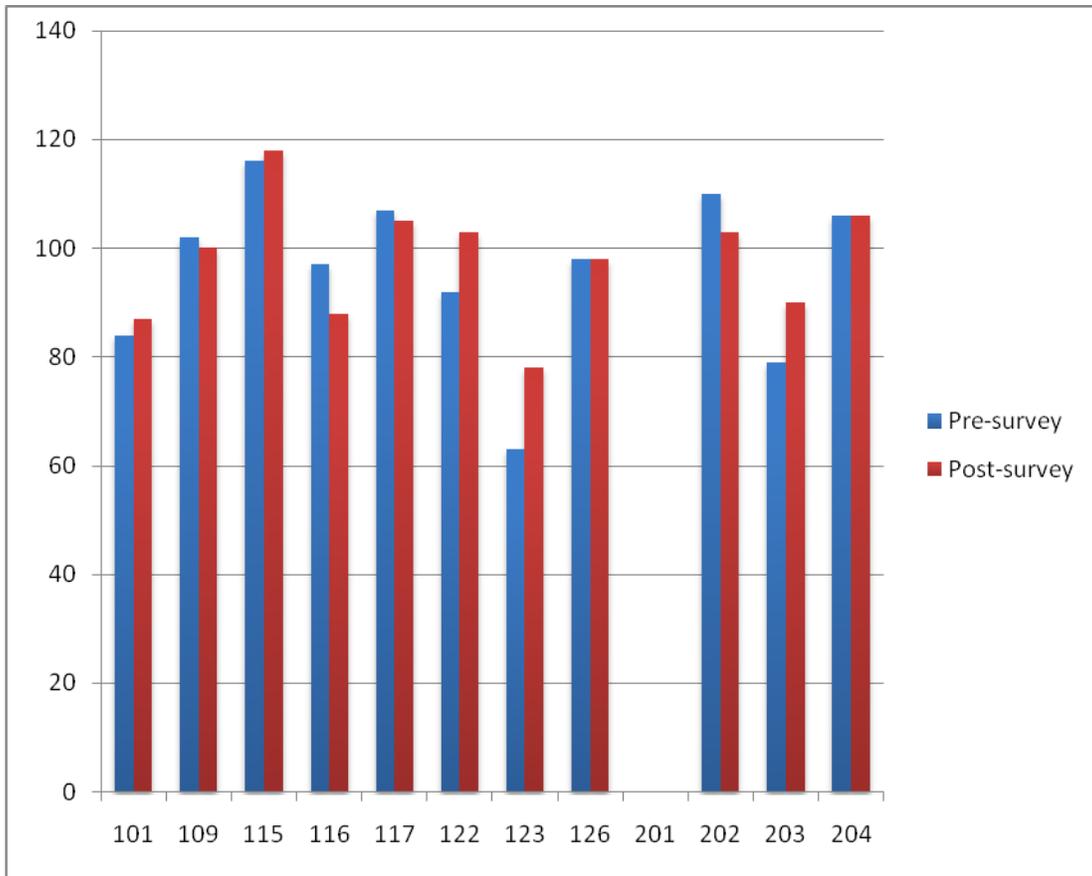


**Crime and Rehabilitation Attitude Survey
Scoring Sheet**

- _____ 1. Faith is shown best by helping hurting people.
- _____ 2. Felons have no one to blame but themselves. Reverse
- _____ 3. There are many causes for crime.
- _____ 4. I would let an ex-felon visit my home.
- _____ 5. More programs are needed to reduce crime.
- _____ 6. More punishment will solve crime problem. Reverse
- _____ 7. The community is responsible for rehabilitating criminals.
- _____ 8. More police are needed. Reverse
- _____ 9. Capital punishment is needed to deter crime. Reverse
- _____ 10. Crime is a problem in my community.
- _____ 11. There are parolees living in my neighborhood.
- _____ 12. Criminals can be rehabilitated.
- _____ 13. The government is responsible for rehabilitating criminals. Reverse
- _____ 14. I would be willing to help a parolee.
- _____ 15. Even the worst person can change.
- _____ 16. I am responsible to help needy persons.
- _____ 17. Ex-felons would be welcome in my church.
- _____ 18. Churches should be helping rehabilitate inmates while they are in prison.
- _____ 19. I have a responsibility to help ex-felons back into the community.
- _____ 20. Rehabilitation ex-felons is the job of professionals. Reverse
- _____ 21. The death penalty is necessary to prevent crime. Reverse
- _____ 22. Everyone in prison deserves to be there. Reverse
- _____ 23. Churches should be helping ex-felons fit back into community.
- _____ 24. I would be very apprehensive inviting an ex-felon into my home. Reverse
- _____ 25. Some felons can never change. Reverse
- _____ 26. My church is doing enough to help needy persons. Reverse

Appendix 10

Crime and Rehabilitation Survey Pre- and Post-survey Result



Appendix 11

Crime and Rehabilitation / sexual offenders

Not true of me

True of me

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

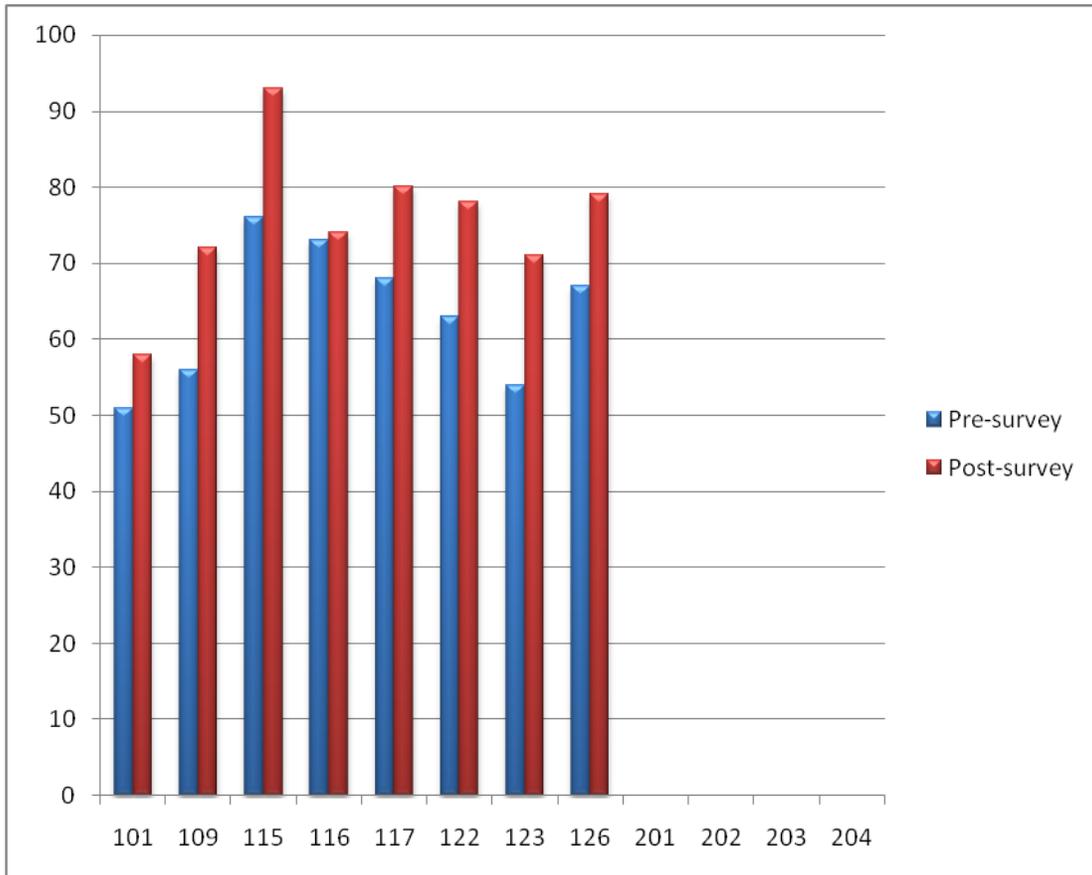
- _____ 1. Faith is shown best by helping hurting people.
- _____ 2. Sexual offenders cannot ever be trusted.
- _____ 3. All sexual offenders are a threat to children.
- _____ 4. I would let a sexual offender visit my home.
- _____ 5. More programs are needed to reduce sexual crimes.
- _____ 6. More punishment will solve sexual crime problem.
- _____ 7. Sexual offenders want to change their behavior.
- _____ 8. Greater punishment is needed to deter sexual crimes.
- _____ 9. Sexual offenders should be separated from the community forever.
- _____ 10. There are many sexual offenders living in my neighborhood.
- _____ 11. Sexual offenders can be rehabilitated.
- _____ 12. The government is responsible for rehabilitating sexual offenders.
- _____ 13. The community is responsible for rehabilitating sexual offenders.
- _____ 14. I would be willing to help a sexual offender.
- _____ 15. Even the worst person can change.
- _____ 16. I would be willing to mentor a sexual offender.
- _____ 17. My church would be willing to help a sexual offender.
- _____ 18. Sexual offenders would be welcome in my church.
- _____ 19. Churches should be helping rehabilitate inmates while they are in prison.
- _____ 20. Churches should be helping sexual offenders fit back into community.

**Crime and Rehabilitation / sexual offenders
Scoring Sheet**

- _____ 1. Faith is shown best by helping hurting people.
- _____ 2. Sexual offenders cannot ever be trusted. Reverse
- _____ 3. All sexual offenders are a threat to children. Reverse
- _____ 4. I would let a sexual offender visit my home.
- _____ 5. More programs are needed to reduce sexual crimes.
- _____ 6. More punishment will solve sexual crime problem. Reverse
- _____ 7. Sexual offenders want to change their behavior.
- _____ 8. Greater punishment is needed to deter sexual crimes. Reverse
- _____ 9. Sexual offenders should be separated from the community forever. Reverse
- _____ 10. There are many sexual offenders living in my neighborhood.
- _____ 11. Sexual offenders can be rehabilitated.
- _____ 12. The government is responsible for rehabilitating sexual offenders. Reverse
- _____ 13. The community is responsible for rehabilitating sexual offenders.
- _____ 14. I would be willing to help a sexual offender.
- _____ 15. Even the worst person can change.
- _____ 16. I would be willing to mentor a sexual offender.
- _____ 17. My church would be willing to help a sexual offender.
- _____ 18. Sexual offenders would be welcome in my church.
- _____ 19. Churches should be helping rehabilitate inmates while they are in prison.
- _____ 20. Churches should be helping sexual offenders fit back into community.

Appendix 12

Sex Offender Survey Pre- and Post-survey Result



Appendix 13

Who is participating in Citizen Circle?

Gender: M _____ F _____

Age: _____

Church Affiliation: _____ or None: _____

How often do you attend church?

Several times a week: _____ Once a week: _____ Sometimes: _____ Rarely: _____

Why did you start attending Citizen Circle? _____

How long have you been attending? _____

Do you currently work or are you retired? Working _____ Retired _____

What is / was your vocation? _____

My thoughts about the Citizen Circle reentry support program

Your answers are anonymous. There are no wrong answers. Be specific. Most important, be honest. If you need more space for an answer, use the back of the page

1. Before Citizen Circle, did you know anyone who had committed a crime? What sort of crime?

2. What was your attitude toward those who committed crimes?

3. What is your attitude now?

4. If your attitude has changed, what is the reason it has changed?

5. Before Citizen Circle, what was your attitude toward sex offenders?

6. What is your attitude now?

7. If your attitude has changed, what is the reason it has changed?

8. Before Citizen Circle, did you think your faith was strong?

9. Has Citizen Circle affected your faith in any way? How?

10. What was the best experience for you in Citizen Circle?

11. What was the most difficult experience for you in Citizen Circle?

12. Before Citizen Circle, how did you share your faith?

13. How do you share your faith in Citizen Circle?

14. Has the way you share your faith in the community changed?

Appendix 14

Citizen Circle Mentor Training Schedule

- 9 am: Welcome / Introductions
- 9:15 am: Strength-based foundation:
This lesson is the cornerstone of the strength-based approach recommended for use in *Citizen Circles*. This lesson is focused on seeing the positive aspects in the lives of the parolees.
- 10 am: Planning session:
This session outlines a series of steps that can be followed to make the decisions necessary for implementing the circle process.
- 11 am: Mental models:
This brief lesson gives insight into the way we see and interpret the world around us and the implications for work with *Citizen Circle* participants.
- 11:30 pm: Lunch / provided by Good Samaritan Home
Use this time to interact / ask the GSH and parole department trainers any questions you may have.
- 12:30 pm: Building trust and rapport:
This lesson teaches the basic importance of building trust. It gives simple ideas to keep in mind when building rapport with participants.
- 1:30 pm: Planning for success:
Planning for Success reveals a strategy for developing the Plan for Success with participants.
- 2:30 pm: Motivating for growth:
This lesson points out ways of interacting that get in the way of motivating others. It also presents several key strategies that can be adopted by the Circle to assist in motivating participants.
- 3:30 pm: Crisis planning:
This lesson points to the importance of being preventive in planning with participants

Appendix 15

Darke County Citizen Circle Strength Discovery Questions

1. What do you like to watch on television?
2. What are your favorite movies, books? Which celebrities do you like and why?
3. What are the best things about each of your children? Your parents?
4. What do you do for fun?
5. Who are your close friends and why are they special to you?
6. What kind of future do you hope to see for your children? Yourself?
7. What makes you mad?
8. What do you do to “blow off steam”?
9. How did you meet your spouse/significant other?
10. What is your neighborhood like? How long have you lived there?
11. What were you like as a kid? What do you want to do when you grew up?
12. What one thing do you do every week that you enjoy?
13. What was the best vacation you ever took? What made it the best?
14. How do you picture your life five years from now?
15. What makes you smile about your family at least once a day?
16. If you could accomplish one goal in your life in the next year, what would it be?

Appendix 16

Personal Observations

This thesis, and my spiritual journey from the pulpit to the street, began in 1997 with an article in *Christianity Today* by Gary Burge, titled, “*Are we Evangelicals missing God at church?*” I was nine years into my second career as a pastor and already feeling the spiritual dryness that too often happens with our program-focused ministries. One statement in Burge’s article grabbed my attention because it summed up, not just my present spiritual longing, but my life-long search to experience God more fully. It was one of his Wheaton College students who said,

I think that much of modern society has lost a sense of divine, holy space. This becomes obvious to me in our church architecture. The splendor and holiness of cathedrals which created the ultimate feeling of divine space has been replaced by gymnasiums and impermanent buildings. A sanctuary should be a place that is completely separate—that radiates the holiness of God. Plastic cups and folding chairs aren't enough. There has to be an environment that communicates God's holiness to my senses and to my spirit.³³⁶

Burge went on to state that in our zeal for growing our churches, and even for saving souls, we had lost a sense of holiness, not just in our worship, but in our lives. What was needed, he argued, was a more formal, even more liturgical, worship service if we want to make our faith more than a mere set of memorized doctrines. Worship, he said, was a community experience that involved not just our minds, but all our senses. However, I need to caution that coming from a staunchly evangelical tradition in which even a hint of liturgy was a sure sign of a lack of genuine faith, even reading Burge’s article put my soul at risk. But not only did I read it, I even dared attend a seminar on liturgical worship that Bob Webber was conducting the following year. Here Bob taught us the history and purpose of worship; but more important, he actually walked us through a worship service that the Church fathers may have conducted 1,900 years

³³⁶ Gary Burge, “*Are we Evangelicals Missing God at Church?*” *ChristianityToday*. *Library.com*, October 6, 1997, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1997/october6/7tb20a.html>, (November 6, 2008).

ago. Rather than being offended, or even frightened by the “Catholicity” of it, I found it surprisingly freeing. So much so that I enrolled in the worship studies program that Bob led at Northern Baptist Seminary in hopes of learning all I could about this new and strange thing I had just experienced.

Over time, as I studied more of the history, purpose and practice of worship, I noticed that much of the apostolic focus was on what happened after worship, what the Church did as a result of their worship - how they lived the divine encounter of Sunday worship on Monday through Saturday in their daily living - mattered. It was in the streets, among the “least of these,” those that most of society had cast off, that the Church most clearly lived those divine encounters. And it was here, among the outcasts in our community, that this project was formed and my ministry, my faith and my life were transformed.

Inspired by the faith of the apostolic fathers who were now part of my faith, and exhausted by the indifference of a recalcitrant congregation, in 2001 I left the formal ministry and bought an old house in a declining part of town with the intent of using it to put into practice the biblical hospitality I had seen in the apostolic church. My wife and I did that initially by opening our home to a man we knew who had lost his job and his house. He appeared in our yard one day looking for help, and even though we were still remodeling our house, when he said he was living on the street and broke down in front of us, we really had no choice but to take him in, ready or not. So for the next six months while Frank³³⁷ lived with us and helped us with our construction project, we helped him get back on his feet.

Then one day, Frank disappeared. “Wanderlust,” his family said. “He gets restless and has to move on. That’s just who he is.” No explanation, no thank you. Nothing but an empty

³³⁷ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

room one morning. At the time it really bothered us that he wasn't more appreciative for what we had done for him. But over time, as more and more street people passed through our lives, we quit looking for thanks. We quit looking for results, too. One thing we learned quickly with street people is that plans and goals for tomorrow are what middle class people do. In poverty it's about getting through today – survival. Tomorrow will be taken care of tomorrow.

So we bandaged our bruised faith and opened our home again, this time to a man getting out of prison who had no place to go. Like so many men in prison, he had experienced Christ, but had no support system to help him when released. So when the chaplain called and asked if Carl³³⁸ could come live with us, of course, we said yes. But again, the reality of living biblical hospitality was a lot harder than preaching about it. Taking a stranger into your home can be difficult enough, but add to that all the issues associated with prison life, and every day literally was a learning experience for us. There were good days and there were bad days. On our good days we learned that people really do want to put their old life behind. They really do want to live their new faith. Most of all, we learned we can be color blind in Christ. But on bad days we learned that the old life dies hard, that there's more than skin color than separates the races, and bi-polar disorder is tough to live with and impossible to understand. Nevertheless, in spite of it all, or rather, through it all, we learned in fits and starts how to make real Jesus' words, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Although there were days when we doubted our sanity, we never doubted our faith, and we never looked back.

However, the conflicts we faced with our practice of biblical hospitality were not just in our home. We had greater conflicts within the community. In fact, when the newspaper ran a

³³⁸ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

story about our ministry, 24 homes immediately went up for sale in the community and a group of neighbors took a petition with 450 signatures to city council demanding we be shut down.

The attitude of one neighbor typified what most of the community, including city hall, felt at the time. "We're not against giving people second chances," he said, ". . . but not here. Seems it could go somewhere else."³³⁹

Although never stated overtly, no doubt racial fears were a part of the criticism of our ministry. In fact, one city council member did admit, off the record of course, that many in the community thought that most of the people coming from prison were black, and as a result, we would be bringing mostly black people to our house.³⁴⁰ Although she may have intended to somehow lessen the racism of her comment, the attitude of the community was made quite clear when she warned that it wouldn't be a safe environment for black people because the city "couldn't guarantee their safety." Then almost as an afterthought, no doubt intended to drive home the gravity of our situation, she added that our safety couldn't be guaranteed either. Too often rural communities are slow to change because change can be frightening, and prejudice, even violence, can accompany fear. Of course, it didn't help that the television reporters often referred to our ministry as "a house packed with ex-cons" throughout much of the conflict with the neighbors.

Over the next several months the attacks on us became more virulent, and more personal. Some said I had misrepresented my credentials, that I had never finished seminary. Others said I was using public money for personal use. And some even said I had stolen money from my

³³⁹ Cathy Mong. "Prison Reform not a Welcome Neighbor." Dayton Daily News. Dayton, Ohio. March 24, 2002, 1A.

³⁴⁰ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections statistics show that not to be the case. Of the 29,069 committed to prison in Ohio in 2007, the majority - 51%, were white.

previous church. One city official described best the pressure on us in the midst of the ordeal, “Doesn’t it bother you that everyone in town hates you?”

In hindsight, it’s easy to gloss over the difficulty of that ordeal, to offer superficial religious platitudes that make it seem like it didn’t bother us, but it did – more than we could even admit to ourselves at the time. But we kept our eyes focused on our ministry, on all the Franks and Carls we met, and not the critics. We just tried to be “sure of what we hoped for and certain of what we did not see,” and in time, the city council finally ruled that we were allowed to continue, and to be fair to the neighbors, their criticisms all but disappeared as well with that ruling – at least on the surface.

“Can you help my son. He is homeless and I’m not able to help him?” “There is a boy at my house and he just needs a place to stay until he gets his feet on the ground.” “I heard you help people and we have no place to stay tonight and I’m afraid for my babies.” These were typical of the calls for temporary shelter that we were getting at that time on nearly a daily basis. Although we wanted to help them, we weren’t set up to take in people off the street. “What we need is more space,” I complained every time we had to turn someone away. So in another giant leap of faith we bought a second house directly across the street from where we were living, this one to be used as a shelter for all the homeless people who came to our door looking for help.

In the three years since we opened that shelter, we have housed 224 people for more than 3,000 days off the street. Ironically, even though this house was in the same neighborhood, even though a lot of our residents had done jail or even prison time, and even though we did not reject anyone who was homeless, regardless of their past, there were none of the complaints from the neighbors, no city council meetings threatening to shut us down, no reporters camped on our porch waiting to catch us in an off moment of candor. There seemed to be a perception – a

misperception it turned out – that homeless people are somehow safer than parolees. The truth is that the opposite is often the case. In the 1970s when the state began closing the majority of the mental health hospitals in a futile effort to “mainstream” their patients, too often all that did was put far too many people on the street who were totally unable to cope, and so they ended up in places like ours. Add in the drug culture that soon followed, and the end result was that our shelter simply replaced the hospitals that had closed four decades earlier, but without the structure, stability and safety found there. So rather than help the homeless get back on their feet, mostly what we do is maintain them until their crisis passes, so they can go back to doing whatever it was that got them into trouble in the first place.

So the question then, and one we have often asked ourselves, usually after some crisis when someone was too drunk and got belligerent or too high from huffing carburetor fluid, or most common, too delusional from yet another psychotic episode, those are the times we asked – on more than one occasion, I might add - why bother? Yet in spite of our frustrations, our setbacks, and all of what we thought to be our failures, we kept on because the one thing we have learned is that serving the poor is not always about results. It’s simply about serving. When we do that, then at least we are changed for the better.

As helpful as the *Citizen Circle* program was, it still did not address the dozens of requests that we received for housing assistance from those coming out of prison, especially sex offenders who face barriers at every turn. Even when we had room in our shelter, which was rare, it was off limits for them because we were within the 1,000-foot buffer zone surrounding all schools. So in 2007 in another giant leap of faith, we expanded our vision again with the purchase of a third house that was used to offer much-needed transitional housing for parolees, particularly sex offenders, all those who have nowhere to go and no one to help them when

released from prison. However, it did not take us long to realize that we were dealing with people who went to prison for a reason; and no matter how noble our intentions, we were in for a rough time with many of our residents. There was John³⁴¹ who lasted just nine days before he was caught stealing car radios and was sentenced to another three years in prison. Or Edward³⁴², who refused to look for a job or abide by the curfew. He had to leave the house and eventually was sent back to prison as well for a parole violation. Robert³⁴³ thought he could charge \$300 in calls to our phone line and barely avoided theft charges. The last I heard of him was that he got arrested in some strip bar in Toledo and was sitting in jail awaiting trial. And then there was James.³⁴⁴ I knew when he arrived in an irrational fit of anger that he was going to be an emotional drain for all of us. Although he was a very likable person – when he was able to get medication for his bi-polar disorder, mostly he was a thief with the emotional maturity of a 12-year old, and we spent most of our time talking him out of one crime after another. So even though he wanted to stay in town after he got off parole, we bought him a bus ticket back home to Tennessee because he was so unstable that we knew he would eventually cause us all sorts of problems. When the Greyhound finally pulled out of town, we all breathed a corporate sigh of relief.

On the other hand, there was Arturo. After serving 12 years for attempted rape, he was granted parole, but sat in prison for another 13 months because he had nowhere to go. Imagine trying to find a place to live when you are Hispanic in a white community, covered with gang tattoos and have a Tier III sex record. He embodied every prejudice the community could

³⁴¹ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

imagine. So our house was his only hope. Fortunately, he was able to stay with us long enough to get a job with a roofing contractor who had done time himself in the past and was willing to give him a second chance. He was also able to reconnect with his family and his church and eventually moved back home. I felt good about Arturo because I knew we made a difference in his life.

Michael³⁴⁵ is another reason why we work with sex offenders. Although we like to think that everyone gets a fair hearing in court, when you are poor, and especially for the mentally ill, justice is too often illusive. So he pled to a sex charge that he probably did not commit because he was facing 10 years in prison that he knew he could not handle. When they offered him a year, he took the deal, but he never really understood that now as a convicted sex offender, his sentence would never end, and so he has spent the last 10 years trying to scrape by, finding work where he could, sleeping where he could, and mostly just surviving. Now 66 years old and in failing health and battling schizophrenia, he vacillates between emotional highs where he is convinced that he is either Jesus Christ or James Bond, to emotional pits of suicidal depression. Michael had been living in his truck most of the last year until he ran out of money and had to sell it for food. Even though he receives a Social Security check every month, he often gives his money away to friends who see him as an easy mark. Fortunately he was able to stay with us for a couple months last year until he had enough time to get his medication stabilized and find an apartment. But soon he was off his meds and the cops were called when he locked himself in his room, convinced that Russian spies were waiting for him. Eventually he was evicted and back on the street when he came back to stay with us long enough to get stable again. Although we would like to see Michael make it on his own, realistically that won't ever happen. "I was so scared that

³⁴⁵ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

I was going to take a gun and shoot myself,” he admitted when asked how he was going to live on the street. That was why we could not put him out, even when his time in our program was completed. That is because programs don’t change people. People change people. So we bent the rules and let him stay on with us as long as he needed. To do otherwise would have been immoral and would have denied everything we said we believed. Helping sex offenders has never been a popular program, and we are careful never to defend and especially to minimize the crimes they have committed. But we defend with all our might their right to a second chance in life. We do it because these men are literally the “least of these” that Jesus said we must serve if we want to take our faith seriously.

As difficult as the shelter and reentry housing setbacks and failures were to deal with emotionally and spiritually, they paled in comparison to our disappointment with Russell.³⁴⁶ In 1988 Russell severely beat a man while robbing a Toledo gas station looking for drug money. He was captured soon after and sentenced to prison for 27 to 45 years. For all intents and purposes, his life, at least his life on the streets, had ended. But if there ever was somebody who was rehabilitated in prison, it was Russell. Shortly after being locked up, he had a spiritual experience that not only helped him overcome his drug addiction, but gave him a whole new attitude about life. Like most people, I am always skeptical of these so-called “jail house conversions.” But Russell lived his conversion every day for the next 20 years in prison. He completed three degrees, and more important, he was part of a big brother team that helped troubled kids incarcerated nearby at the Department of Youth Services facility. He said his whole goal now was to prevent others from making the same mistakes he had made. During his 20 years behind bars, Russell was living proof that the prison system can change people. So in early

³⁴⁶ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

2008, when the parole board agreed, Russell, now 52 years old, walked outside the walls of prison, a free man for the first time in two decades, and came home to start his new life with us.

We had been mentoring Russell for his last five years in prison. He was a spiritual leader among the inmates. He was the best of the best. He was the reason we got into this ministry in the first place. Yet what we soon learned was that, amidst all the madness of prison, faith can come easy, but on the outside, faced with all the choices – and temptations – that were impossible for the past 20 years, living that faith can often be a lot harder. It wasn't drugs, or any of the crimes that the other men who failed us committed. It was the loss of trust that hurt us the most. Too often we caught Russell lying about his life, where he went, who he was with, what he was doing. Sometimes he lied when he didn't have to lie. It seemed he lied without even thinking about it, like St. Augustine said about the pears, that he stole them just to steal. If he had just been another parolee, another resident, it wouldn't have hurt so much, but he lived in our home, he was our brother in the faith; he was being prepared for leadership in our ministry. That was why his betrayals were too much for us and eventually he had to move on. My guess is we expected too much of him. We looked too long at his faith and too little at his time in prison. And that's the irony of faith. It is this blindness to sin that allows us to welcome the sinner, to give them second, third and fourth chances. But it is also our blindness to sin that makes us so vulnerable when confronted by it. Russell is still a brother, like John Mark was still a brother to Paul after he was asked to leave the mission trip, but no longer trusted to be in ministry, at least at this point.³⁴⁷ But what keeps us awake at night is the fear that, unlike John Mark, Russell will make some critically flawed decision that will put him back in prison, and there is nothing we can do to stop him. That is the curse of free will.

³⁴⁷ Acts 15:36-41

However, in the midst of all these personal difficulties in our ministry, we again had to face more battles with the city, and this time our whole ministry was put at risk. In September, 2008, the city issued a cease and desist order for our reentry house, claiming it was a halfway house in violation of local zoning laws. Of course, we appealed that decision and requested a public hearing to defend our house. For us it was a matter of law; that our house did not fit the definition of a halfway house and that the courts had consistently ruled that similar programs could operate in residential areas. Most important, we believe that the city had already determined six years earlier that our program was legal. However, it became clear from the outset of the hearing that legality was not the issue, but only the community fear of our residents.

“Myself, my family and my neighbors have been living and feeling heightened fear and anxiety for months when we didn’t need to, all because of an illegally run halfway house that shouldn’t have been opened in the first place.”³⁴⁸

“I care very much about my students....I went past and sitting in front of the house was a convicted rapist. He was sitting in his white car eating. Beside him was another gentleman. On the corner was standing five kids. And there were little girls running around...I was so concerned I went around the block three times. I was late to school, but I wanted to make sure those kids got on the bus.”³⁴⁹

“You know you read in the newspaper all the time that one of the characteristics of the sexual predators is that they stalk individuals, looking for that right time and that right moment.

³⁴⁸ Greenville Board of Zoning Appeals meeting, Greenville, Ohio, 16 September 16, 2008.

³⁴⁹ Ibid

And that's the thing that scares me with having six of them all in one residence and basically being unsupervised. Who knows what it is that is going on with these gentlemen?"³⁵⁰

On and on for the next two hours the neighbors poured out their fear, loathing and hatred for our residents, for our program and for me. And it was not just the neighbors who attacked us, but city officials as well. "Eventually we're going to have one that's going to re-offend. I don't want it to be to my kids. I don't want it to be any of the neighborhood kids," one councilman demanded. "If this does not get stopped, I will do everything as a city council member to get either new legislation passed or a new ordinance passed so we can close this house down, and I am going after the other two houses!"

Even though the Ohio director for all the halfway houses in the state explained that our reentry facility did not meet the state definition of a halfway house, even though rulings by the Tenth District Court of Appeals of Ohio, the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, and even the United States Supreme Court on similar zoning issues were explained to the board, all they heard was the fear and hate of the neighbors.

"So whether we like it or not, if an individual residing in the neighborhood's perception is that they're unsafe, they're unsafe..So the perception is everything," the city zoning director said at the end of the meeting.³⁵¹

And with that, the gavel was slammed down and our appeal was denied by a unanimous vote. Seven years of planning, praying, recruiting and training volunteers. Seven years of remodeling three old houses in a declining neighborhood, with more than \$360,000 of our own money invested. Worse yet, 224 shelter residents, 35 reentry house residents and 56 parolees in

³⁵⁰ Greenville Board of Zoning Appeals meeting, Greenville, Ohio, 16 September 16, 2008..

³⁵¹ Ibid.

Citizen Circle, all were determined to be a waste of community time and effort and cast aside with one smack of the gavel. “Appeal denied.”

That night, lying sleepless in my bed, the words of Dr. ML King kept coming to my mind, the words of hope that he clung to in the darkest days of the civil rights movement.

However difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because “truth crushed to earth will rise again.” How long? Not long, because “no lie can live forever.” How long? Not long, because “you shall reap what you sow.” How long? Not long: “Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.” How long? Not long, because “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” How long? Not long, because “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; he has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword; His truth is marching on.”³⁵²

I had missed the civil rights movement. I had been too young to be involved. But I grew to spiritual maturity in its shadow, and I knew at this moment of my deepest despair, when all I could see in the darkest shadows of my mind was Michael and Norman and Christy³⁵³ and all the other homeless people who had come to us for help getting off the streets, and then I knew that my hour had come, that this was not the end of our ministry, but just the beginning of the next phase of it; that God had not abandoned us in the hour of our deepest need, but that He was here with us now. All we had to do was to trust him as we battled our way into the Promised Land.

And so the next morning we filed a lawsuit against the City of Greenville, alleging they denied us the legal use of our property, and that they had denied our residents their Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection. As of this writing we are just at the beginning of our legal

³⁵² King, ML. “*Our God is Marching on.*” <http://www.mlkonline.net/ourgod.html>, (accessed 17 September 17, 2008).

³⁵³ All resident names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

battle. Although it could last months, even years, and could cost us tens of thousands of dollars, we have no choice but to push on.

But our fight must be different. Although it will be fought superficially in the courts, the real battle will be in our neighborhood. We believe strongly that we are doing God's will, but there is more to God's will than winning court battles, or even doing ministry. Doing God's will is, at root, about loving our enemies. It's easy for me to love my residents who are so grateful for a place to sleep and food to eat. I can even love those residents who cheat us because, too often, they have been cheated by life. But what good is that? Jesus asked. So our real battle ahead is to love those who hate and revile us with such passion that at times, as it did during that zoning board meeting, it withers my soul to the point of exhaustion. So we choose not to hate them back. We choose not to live in fear and anger and reprisal. We choose to see even those who hate us as loved by God.

But how do we do that? Again as ML King said, we must first see the beam that is in our own eye before we condemn the splinter in our enemy's eye. The constant danger with this sort of moral conflict is self-righteousness, and that, I believe, is more dangerous than the fear and hate expressed by my neighbors. Second, we must see the good in our enemies. All of us wrestle with our demons. It is our job to focus on the better angels of their nature, just as we do our residents. And finally, we must never try to defeat our enemy. Our goal is win them.

So every day as our case works its way through the court system, every day when people walk by us without speaking, when they call us "perverts," or when they drive by and show us a symbol of derision and contempt, we do not respond in kind. We do that because the one lesson we have learned throughout this three-year project is that ministry is not a program, but an attitude.

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.³⁵⁴

That, I believe, is the real conclusion of this project. At root it is not about reentry or jobs or mentor spiritual growth. It is simply learning to love our enemies as God loves them. If we can do that in the midst of all the battles we have faced and will likely continue to face, then God will say of us too, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!”³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ Matthew 5:43-48

³⁵⁵ Matthew 25:23

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