



*Loving our neighbors coming out of prison by equipping Christians  
to bridge the gap from prison to the local church*

## **Ministering to Prisoners' Families**

by Manny Mill

*Outline of an Address to the Congress on the Urban Family, June 1997  
Excerpts Rebroadcast on Focus on the Family, April 14, 2004*

- I. **The Problem:** How does a family hold together during an incarceration?
  - A. If the father is incarcerated, the family lacks its wage earner and leader.
  - B. If the mother is incarcerated, the family lacks its primary care giver.
  - C. If a son or daughter is incarcerated, parents are concerned/embarrassed, and they are often left with grandchildren to care for.
  - D. The family "serves time" as much as the incarcerated person.
  
- II. **How Big is the Problem?**
  - A. Over 1.8 million (2.2 million in 2004) are in prison in America, and the number is increasing!
  - B. Over 60% of those incarcerated have children.
  - C. Over 75% of those incarcerated are fatherless.
  - D. Over 97% of those incarcerated will serve their time and be released.
  - E. Over 82% of those released will return to prison.
  - F. Approximately 11% of those incarcerated are Christians.
  - G. Gangs are increasing at a rapid pace. Gangs are the pseudo family. In Chicago, there are over 140 gangs: The Gangsters Disciples alone has 30,000 members. Teenage crime has increased dramatically.
  
- III. **What are the Options?**
  - A. Immediate split—prisoner has no contact with family.
  - B. Contact is maintained, but with great obstacles:
    1. Visits are difficult, with no privacy, searches, etc.
    2. Visits are expensive—transportation, hotels, food.
    3. Phone calls are expensive—collect calls only.
    4. Letter writing is often awkward—poor writing and reading skills.
  - C. The longer the incarceration, the greater the likelihood that family contact will not be maintained. Only 15% of marriages survive.
  
- IV. **How Can the Church Help?**
  - A. Pray! Family ministry takes wisdom and balance. Family independence is always the goal. Many families are needy and there is a danger of developing dependency while meeting immediate needs.
  - B. Don't be a "Lone Ranger"—work in a small group.

- C. Provide practical support:
  - 1. Help in obtaining legal counsel.
  - 2. Support for the family (home repairs, car repairs, etc.).
  - 3. Child care, assistance with homework.
  - 4. Assistance with visiting (transportation, money, child care).
  - 5. Help families keep the incarcerated person involved in family life.
  - 6. Participate in Angel Tree, Prison Fellowship's Christmas gifts program for children.
  - 7. If the church or group is near a prison, consider opening a hospitality house.
- D. Provide emotional support:
  - 1. Become prayer partners for the prisoner and family members.
  - 2. Be good listeners, and be non-judgmental toward the family.
  - 3. Help deal with anger, bitterness, resentment, guilt, and depression.
- V. **What is the Ultimate Need?** We must be willing to break the cycle of crime by getting the job done. *"The Christian Life is NOT about HOW WE FEEL, but rather the Christian Life is about TRUTH, LOVE, AND GETTING THE JOB DONE."* (Manny Mill)
  - A. Family ministry is needed.
  - B. "Prevention" is needed more.
  - C. Approximately 82% of released prisoners will return to prison within two years.
- VI. **The Vision of Koinonia House®.**
  - A. Targeted at the Christian prisoner.
  - B. A bridge from the church on the inside to the church on the outside.
  - C. Based on the following Pillars:
    - 1. Affordable Housing (in a family-home-based setting)
    - 2. Biblical Discipleship.
    - 3. Active Involvement in a Local Church.
    - 4. Two Mentors (Spiritual and Financial).
    - 5. Suitable long-term employment.

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