

Young or old, male or female – just about everyone gets a kick out of playing, watching, or cheering on a favorite sports team. Launching a sports outreach ministry in a prison can be a great way for churches and volunteers to participate in something fun, energizing, and relevant to all ages. Sharing a laugh and rooting on a team can open the doors for deeper fellowship and present an opportunity to share Christ's love.

Of course, each facility varies between what sports can be offered; and, permission needs to be obtained in order to bring sports equipment into a prison. State and federal facilities may allow outside teams to come monthly or every other month to play sports with inmates. In county jails and juvenile facilities, volunteers may be allowed to come more often.

In general, a dozen or more volunteers may participate. Some may play the sport that has been chosen while others may take on the role of referees, coaches, scorekeepers, or cheering spectators. Usually, prisons do not have established sports teams; instead, these events are more informal and casual. The goal should be to bring enough volunteers to play team sports and plenty of extra people to visit with inmates who come to watch.

Basically, the idea behind a sports outreach ministry is to attract large numbers of inmates who may not attend a typical worship service or Bible study, but may be interested in sports. An afternoon of friendly competition allows prisoners to relax and get to know the volunteers. Then everyone is invited to participate in a closing devotional or worship service where God's love and mercy is extended to all.

## Here are some tips on planning your event:

- Check with the facility's chaplain or other personnel such as the activities or program director about bringing in a team of volunteers to play sports and determine which sports would be allowed.
- Consider bringing around 10-12 volunteers or more.
- Basketball and volleyball can often be played indoors and/or on outdoor courts. Soccer might be a possibility outdoors.
- Softball or baseball may be possible at minimum security units, but some facilities may consider bats as weapons.
- Consider a series of games or a short tournament.
- If appropriate, provide an award certificate to those who participate.
- Plan to end the event with a worship service, a time of sharing, or devotional. Choose a dynamic speaker who communicates well with non-Christians.
- Cover your whole event in prayer from start to finish.

Does your church already have a sports team? If so, pray about expanding your outreach and bringing your team inside a prison to play with a group of inmates. Who knows? A team in prison who plays together may wind up *praying* together.

**For more information:**

- Call 800-251-7411 to contact your local PF staff and find out about potential sports ministry opportunities in your area.
- Visit the website of CHARM Ministries ([www.charmprisonministry.org](http://www.charmprisonministry.org)), one of PF's partners.