

Supporting Prison Chaplains

Those who attend to the spiritual well-being of others often need care themselves. Like Aaron and Hur who teamed together to hold up the tired arms of Moses, volunteers can help support chaplains as they facilitate various ministry programs in prison.

Of all the different personnel associated with the Department of Corrections (DOC), volunteers will interact mostly with the facility's chaplain. While wardens and officers are charged with maintaining safe conditions for the 2.3 million people behind bars in our nation, it is chaplains who facilitate programs for inmates' emotional and spiritual needs.

According to the Pew Research Center, nearly three-quarters (73%) of state chaplains consider religious-based programs in prison to be "absolutely critical" to an inmate's successful rehabilitation. And volunteers are critical to make those programs a reality.

Volunteers can help maintain their access and "good standing" by cultivating healthy relationships with the chaplain – often the primary "gate keeper" who allows groups to come into a facility.

Here are some practical ways to serve a chaplain:

- Offer to spend a morning or afternoon helping the chaplain with clerical work or preparations for an upcoming event for inmates.
- Invite the chaplain to attend your class or program then use the opportunity to publicly thank him or her for making all the helpful programs available to prisoners.
- Encourage inmates to pray for the chaplain and write notes of appreciation when the chaplain's office helps them in a special way.

Chaplains need ongoing prayer support. Pray that chaplains would:

- Be able to juggle their administrative duties (paper work), without losing a desire and heart to personally minister to inmates.
- Experience a daily sense of God's refreshment and renewal in their body, mind, and spirit.
- Be wise in their understanding of scripture and applying God's Word to others.
- Increasingly become men and women with a personal, vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Be open to working with local volunteers and allowing more programs in the prison.