

Operational procedures and safety regulations vary from prison to prison. Here are some of the most important guidelines for prison ministry volunteers:

Prison Entry

Security starts in the parking lot the moment you enter prison grounds. Expect the following:

- Your vehicle is always subject to search. Do not bring alcohol, illegal drugs, guns, or weapons onto prison property.
- All volunteers must show a valid driver's license or picture ID and be cleared at the front desk or window before entering the prison.
- Bring as little as possible into the prison. Most prisons allow volunteers to bring in a Bible, pen, pre-approved notes/handouts for the class or program they are leading, and pre-approved CDs or DVDs with music or lesson content.
- Wallets, purses, brief cases, etc. are not allowed. Most prisons allow volunteers to carry their things in a clear plastic tote bag or zip-lock bag.
- Paper money is not allowed, but some prisons allow volunteers to bring in coins to buy a drink from the vending machine. It is best not to bring money inside the prison unless absolutely necessary.
- Many prisons have audio/visual equipment that volunteers can use, but it should be requested in advance.
- Volunteers cannot bring computers, sound equipment, musical instruments, or any type of electronic devices into prison without prior approval. Cell phones are never allowed under any circumstances.
- Never bring tobacco products, lighters, matches, or any type of medication into the prison.

Searches

- All volunteers go through a security check when they enter the prison. In most cases, it is the same type of security check that you would see at an airport.
- When going through security, volunteers are often asked to remove all jewelry, eyewear, belts, headgear, jackets, outerwear, and shoes. Avoid problems by emptying your pockets, removing excess jewelry, and removing headgear before leaving your vehicle. Wear shoes that are easy to get off/on.
- Do not take anything into or out of the prison without permission. Every person is subject to search at any time while on prison property.
- If a volunteer is found with contraband, he/she may be disallowed from entering the prison ever again. (Contraband is defined as any item not permitted into the prison or not on the clearance list.)

Dress Code

- Every prison has a strict dress code. Before you go to the prison be sure you are dressed appropriately; otherwise, you will not be allowed to enter.
- Prohibitive clothing/attire will be specifically listed in the prison's dress code. Call ahead to see what colors and styles you are allowed to wear. These are some typical dress code rules:
 - Volunteers must not wear clothing similar in color or style to prisoners' uniforms.
 - Tight or revealing clothing is not allowed. Don't wear sleeveless shirts/tops, bare midriffs, tank tops, short skirts or pants, low necklines, see-through fabrics, open-toed/open-heeled shoes, or flip flops.
 - Avoid metal in your attire as it will set off the metal detectors. A watch and/or wedding ring is allowed.
 - No clothing or attire with offensive slogans is ever allowed. Some prisons do not allow any clothing with any type of logo or slogan. Any attire that may be considered gang-related is not allowed.
 - Jackets or coats are allowed. Umbrellas are not. Dress appropriately if it is cold or raining because you may have to walk a long way.
- Avoid excessive makeup, heavy perfumes, or any type of clothing that draws undue attention. As volunteers, we are there to lift up Jesus Christ and we don't ever want to distract from that goal.

While You Are Inside

- Visitor restroom facilities are usually provided in the prison entry area. Ask a prison staff person about restrooms and water fountains that may be available near the area where you are going inside the prison.
- Volunteers are usually given identification tags, badges, or hand stamps so it is clear they are authorized visitors.
- Depending on the prison's security level, volunteers are normally escorted along corridors, through gates and buildings. Of course surveillance cameras and other highly-sophisticated technology monitor the prison grounds.
- Volunteers are allowed only in areas where their event or program is being held. Stay with your group and do not go anywhere else. Never run on prison grounds.

Attitude and Poise

- Be natural, be yourself. Take time to get to know the prisoners by listening and asking good questions. Prayerfully listen for opportunities to demonstrate God's grace and hope. Your attitude of humility and your genuine desire to serve are highly important.
- Remember it is God's harvest. Learn to walk alongside prisoners as they search for the truth in God's Word. Never push anyone to make a decision for Christ.
- Treat prisoners and staff with respect. Act as if you have just entered someone else's house. Remember that prison officers and staff spend a considerable amount of time at the facility, and prisoners live there, so it is their residence.
- Even if you disagree with prison personnel, always submit to their authority. By doing this, you set a good example for prisoners who are watching.

- Remember you are a guest at the facility and can be asked to leave at any time. For your safety, follow all the rules and do exactly as you are told. Be sure to thank officers and staff for their assistance.

NOTE: This list of guidelines does not cover all prison rules and regulations. Prison Fellowship volunteer training provides more in-depth instruction. Furthermore, your local PF staff can direct you regarding state-required volunteer training.