

Just ~~Just~~ FAITH Matters

Prison Reform: Church of the Second Chance



SAMPLE MATERIAL

The full Prison Reform document is a resource of JustFaith Ministries. It can be obtained from:

*JustFaith Ministries
P. O. Box 221348
Louisville, KY 40252
(502) 429-0865
www.justfaith.org
mary@justfaith.org; david@justfaith.org*

Just **MATTERS** *Just* FAITH

Prison Reform: Church of the Second Chance

General Comments for Facilitators

Welcome to the JustMatters module, Prison Reform: Church of the Second Chance! We are grateful for your willingness to facilitate this module. The topic of prison reform is not easy for most Americans to discuss, but the crisis in our nation's correctional system requires us to act now. Most likely, this module will challenge participants and their thinking about prisons and prisoners, punishment and reform. It will require that everyone make a strong commitment to the skills of dialogue and active listening.

You need not be an expert to lead this group; rather, you are a facilitator-learner. You will be learning along with the group, and, in so doing, you will experience the process of deepening your awareness of this issue together with the other participants. As with other JustFaith programs, this module is not intended to be an exhaustive, factual analysis of the issue; rather, it is more of an immersion into the issue from a faith based perspective.

This specific module is also an immersion into the issue from the "inside." JustFaith Ministries has worked quite closely with the module's developer, Jens Soering, who is himself an inmate. Mr. Soering has written several books, including *The Church of the Second Chance*, *The Way of the Prisoner*, *An Expensive Way To Make Bad People Worse*, and *The Convict Christ*.

This manual contains everything you, as facilitator, will need to coordinate the module. The Facilitator Timetable includes responsibilities and suggested timing for getting started and for overall coordination of the program. In addition, each session includes a preparatory Note for the facilitator and a list of the items needed for that session. The Notes to Facilitators were written primarily by the author, Jens Soering, and will provide information pertinent to the focus and flow of the session. These Notes should be read well in advance of each session as they will help facilitators prepare for each individual session. There also is a separate Note to Participants from JustFaith Ministries. All participants should receive a copy of this Note to Participants at the time of recruitment and/or as part of the introductory material. This Note to Participants is included in this sample of the module materials.

If you have questions about the module or would like the registration form, please contact the JustFaith Ministries office.



Prison Reform: Church of the Second Chance

Note to Participants - from JustFaith Ministries

This six week process – the Letter of Introduction, the prayers and the six sessions - faithfully reflects the words, the work and the passion of a convicted criminal whose view of our world from a prison cell offers us a unique perspective to prisoners and prison reform and to faith and prayer. The main author, Jens Soering, has undergone a deepening of his faith and a conversion to Catholicism while serving his sentence. You are invited to enter his heart, receive his challenging words, and listen to the Spirit that speaks through him from the cage of a Federal prison.

We ask you to enter his cell – his cage - with a willing heart. His writing and module material may challenge your present thinking, may anger you, may frighten you, may sadden you, and/or may open new doors of understanding for you. You need not agree with everything in his book or his module. No matter what your reaction is to anything you read or hear, however, it is critically important that you keep your head and your heart open to new ideas and the possibility of new truths. It is also critically important that you commit to listening carefully and fully to what others in your group have to say. It is only through genuine and open dialogue that we as a nation will improve the situation and conditions surrounding crime, prisons and prisoners in the United States.

It helps to remember that there is an interconnectivity between inmates and so many other social justice topics. For example, a prisoner many have been homeless or upon release become homeless; inmates may have experienced poverty or will experience poverty upon release; an inmate may have come from a dysfunctional family. Upon release, inmates will, most certainly, experience wage discrimination and even predatory lending given that they are considered a high loan risk. There is also a growing population of inmates who are undocumented immigrants or from immigrant families. Given these conditions and situations, prisoners, too, are part of the web of social injustice!

Prayers

As with the rest of the module, Mr. Soering wrote the opening and closing prayers. We have done some framing of his prayers and have done our best to remain faithful to his original words and intentions. Symbols and rituals have been added to broaden the experience of prayer and invite your participation.

Each time you gather for prayer, you are encouraged to keep Jens and the millions of incarcerated people in our world in your prayer. You may wish to copy and share some of the prayers for further reflection. Perhaps you can use them to help you keep the unseen millions of prisoners in the forefront in your homes, your places of work and, most importantly, in your places of worship.

As you move through and beyond the module, you are invited to return to this key question as a way to open new doors and new pathways: *What have I heard, received or shared that has set me free?*

In closing ...

As Jens has said, “Crime has identifiable causes: poverty, lack of education, alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illness, and, in some cases, anti-social behavior. For felons who fall in the later category, penitentiaries are indeed necessary and useful institutions. But many of the ignorant, drunk and crazy people currently being warehoused behind bars could become productive citizens – with a little help. These men, women and juveniles are not and never were an ‘enemy’ to be ‘defeated,’ but fellow Americans who need help finding a useful and legal role in society.” We cannot and must not “continue to frame the issue of crime control in terms of a ‘war on crime’.”

We hope your experience is informational, formational, and transformational. We also hope you will assist us with the module by taking time to complete the evaluation you will receive during Session One.

St. Dismas, the good thief and patron saint of prisoners; pray for us!

Session Outline and Notes

Welcome (5 Minutes)

Begin the session with a brief welcome, saying something such as this: Welcome to the Prison Reform: Church of the Second Chance study and discussion group! This is a very important topic, and one that is not necessarily easy to discuss. However, many people believe that we have a crisis in our nation's correctional system and that it requires urgent action. We will all need to make a strong commitment to opening our heads and hearts and to listening carefully and fully to the author of our book as well as to one another.

Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

See Session One-Attachments A (cut up) and B.

Introductions (40 minutes)

It is important that participants take a little time to know something about one another. The facilitator is to choose **one** of the three questions below for the purpose of these introductions. *Note:* The size of the group will determine how much time each participant will get to introduce him/herself – e.g., if there are twelve people in the group, there will only be about three minutes for each participant to speak.

The facilitator should state the question, tell the group how much time each person will get to respond to the question, and go first in order to model the idea of sharing a *brief* response.

Choose **one** of these questions for the group:

1. Why did you choose to participate in this module?
2. How has the prison system impacted your life?
3. When you hear the word prison/prisoner, what comes to mind?

Group Dialogue Guidelines (5 Minutes)

Distribute the “Group Guidelines”, Session One-Attachment D, and give participants a couple of minutes to read the guidelines. Then ask the participants if they can all agree to use these guidelines for discussion and dialogue throughout the program. If not, take a few minutes to modify them to fit the group's needs.

Discussion of Reading Assignments (40 minutes)

Discuss the two reading assignments. Begin with the questions you selected from those at the end of the introduction to the main text.

By the end of the discussion, the facilitator should gently and unobtrusively guide participants to three insights:

- The personal and spiritual importance of the issue of prison reform: in some sense, none of us is free so long as one member of the body of Christ remains unfree;
- The urgency of the issue: the prison crisis is severe and projected to worsen;
- The reasonable prospect of change: the primary opponents of reform are law and order conservatives, most of whom are Christians and, therefore, at least potentially open to religious arguments.

Break (15 minutes)

Facilitator should have a few refreshments and a beverage or two available. Facilitator might also want to have a sign up sheet for others to bring refreshments for the next five sessions.

Business and Announcements (30 minutes)

The Business and Announcements component of this Introductory Session is likely to be lengthy and involved. Facilitators need to be sure to keep track of time for this segment.

1. Distribute one copy of the main text.
2. Distribute the booklet on the Catholic perspective on crime and criminal justice.
3. Remind participants that they also have a Journal Reflection as preparation for Session Two. Encourage participants to make full use of this page by spending quiet time doing their own, individual reflecting. (The journal reflection pages are in the Reading Assignments document.)
4. Review options for the guest speaker/“bordercrossing” session. As you prepared for Session One, it was noted that one additional session devoted to a guest speaker or a “bordercrossing” could be added. Take 10-15 minutes to consider this option seriously by reviewing together the document sent with the Letter of Introduction and the session by session outline listed in the Letter. If all agree that this is an option, discuss who the speaker might be and/or what the “bordercrossing”/immersion experience could be and decide when in the syllabus you want to add the extra session. Use the flipchart to record ideas. Note: Do not let this discussion wander. Keep it focused, and be sure to keep track of time!
5. Explain that the Prison Reform module includes two DVDs, one of which needs to be circulated among participants.
6. Distribute Participant Registration forms (see Session One-Attachment C) and ask each participant to complete one at this time. Collect these forms and send them to the JustFaith office next week.
7. Distribute the Participant Evaluations (Session One-Attachment E). Ask everyone to complete their evaluation session by session rather than waiting until the end of the module to complete the whole thing.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

See Session One-Attachment G.

Timing of this Session

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Minutes</i>
Welcome	5 minutes
Opening Prayer	10 minutes
Introductions	40 minutes
Group Dialogue Guidelines	5 minutes
Discussion of Readings	40 minutes
Break	15 minutes
Business and Announcements	30 minutes
Closing prayer	5 minutes
Total	150

Note to Facilitators - from Jens Soering

Session Two may seem rather “bare bones,” especially compared with later sessions. However, this is intentional, for the following two reasons.

First, the discussion among participants will be especially intense because of the strong emotions evoked by the subject matter. The death penalty is always controversial, of course, and the Appendix of the main text will displease both sides of the debate: while progressives may resist the notion that Christ never repudiated capital punishment, conservatives may be unhappy to hear that the death penalty cannot in practice be implemented. The facilitator should point out the conclusion reached in paragraph 2267 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, though the reasoning differs from that proposed in the Appendix. The remaining question is whether the two lines of argument are mutually exclusive or mutually supportive.

More importantly, the discussion among participants will be intense because we have all become to some degree “infected” by the “poisonous idea” that justice requires balancing one instance of suffering (the crime) with another instance of suffering (prison or execution). The facilitator may wish to point out that the “medicinal” concept is included in the *Catechism*, in the last sentence of paragraph 2266 (see Session Two-Attachment B), though the reasoning differs from that proposed in the Appendix. God has no issue with “punishment proportionate to the offense”! Are we willing to *hear* that?

The second reason why this session is rather “bare bones” is that the Prison Reform module is designed to become gradually more challenging, session by session. Session 4 will include a discussion of media images of criminals and prisoners, brought to the meeting by all participants. In Session 5, everyone will review his or her own financial involvement in the prison-industrial complex through stock ownership in companies that profit from caging human beings. Session 6 will include a discussion of how participants plan to continue the work begun in this Prison Reform module.

In this session, much of the “work” to be done by the group is not thematic but personal. Participants will examine their own views of justice and punishment *and* learn to challenge and be challenged by others in a respectful manner. For this purpose, a “bare bones” format is best.