

Ministry Beyond Bars

Special Insert on Faith-based Restorative Justice

Spirituality awakened in prison seeks to survive & flourish in the re-entry process: Home for Good in Oregon

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Introduction

What role, if any, does your theology and the theology of your faith community play in the criminal justice system of Oregon? Does your personal faith practice or praxis and the praxis of your faith community play any role in the criminal justice system of Oregon?

On any given day, there are over two million people—almost one in 100 adults—in a jail or prison in the United States. Oregon has 34,732 people in prison, on felony probation or parole. This figure does not even include the many thousands of people who are in our jails or on misdemeanor supervision. With a population of 3.6 million, Oregon has 13,410 people in prison, which compares to Ireland (a country with a similar crime rate to the United States) with a population of 4.1 million but only 3,199 people in prison. Oregon sends people to state prisons if their sentence is for more than a year and to local jails if their sentence is a year or less.

The United States has five percent of the world's population but 25 percent of the world's prisoners. This is not because of a huge increase in U.S. crime rates, but because of policy decisions in the 1970s to increase the use of incarceration; it's the result of the so-called "get tough on crime" approach. Figure 1, "Incarceration Rates in the United States" (on page 2), shows the incarceration rate in the United States from the 1920s

to today and shows the point at which our policies began to change with the resultant massive increase in the use of incarceration. The current forecast is for a 13 percent further increase in the prison population during a time when the U.S. population is expected to grow at a rate of only 4.5 percent. Over 95 percent of prisoners eventually return from prison to the community, so today the country is experiencing a huge amount of "re-entry"—over 650,000 people a year. Prisons and jails cost states more than \$24.9 billion a year. Oregonians pay \$650 million a year to run just their prisons system.

But what has theology or faith got to do with all of this? Can your faith community contribute anything to overcome, heal or transform the enormous cost in money, human suffering and social destabilization that stems from crime and the response of society to crime? We think your communities and theological traditions have a crucial role to contribute. Later in this article we will outline something about that role, but first we would like to tell you about the role of faith behind the prison walls.



Native American volunteer Darryl Butler prepares the fire for Native American volunteer Trish Jordan and the women prisoners who will participate in a sacred sweat lodge ceremony.

Rekindling the fire: Jail house religion

The Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) operates 13 prisons around the state (see Figure 2), soon-to-be 14 with the opening of a new 1,900-bed prison in Madras in July.

Within the state prison system, the Religious Services Division consists of a staff of 23 chaplains, six other professional staff and 1,500 dedicated volunteers from a wide variety of faith traditions. Together, we seek to help the men and women in prison to awaken, deepen, express and practice their spirituality as part of a redemptive and rehabilitative journey during incarceration and upon release.

Through the Victim

Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) program, Religious Services reaches over 30,000 Oregonians with information about the incarceration and release process of the people who have offended against them. This team of religious staff and volunteers seeks to increase the level of hope and meaning in the lives of all inmates by conducting general, sickness and bereavement counseling, and a full range of religious services for all of the faith traditions represented in the prison population. These faiths include Protestant (many different denominations), Seventh Day Adventist,

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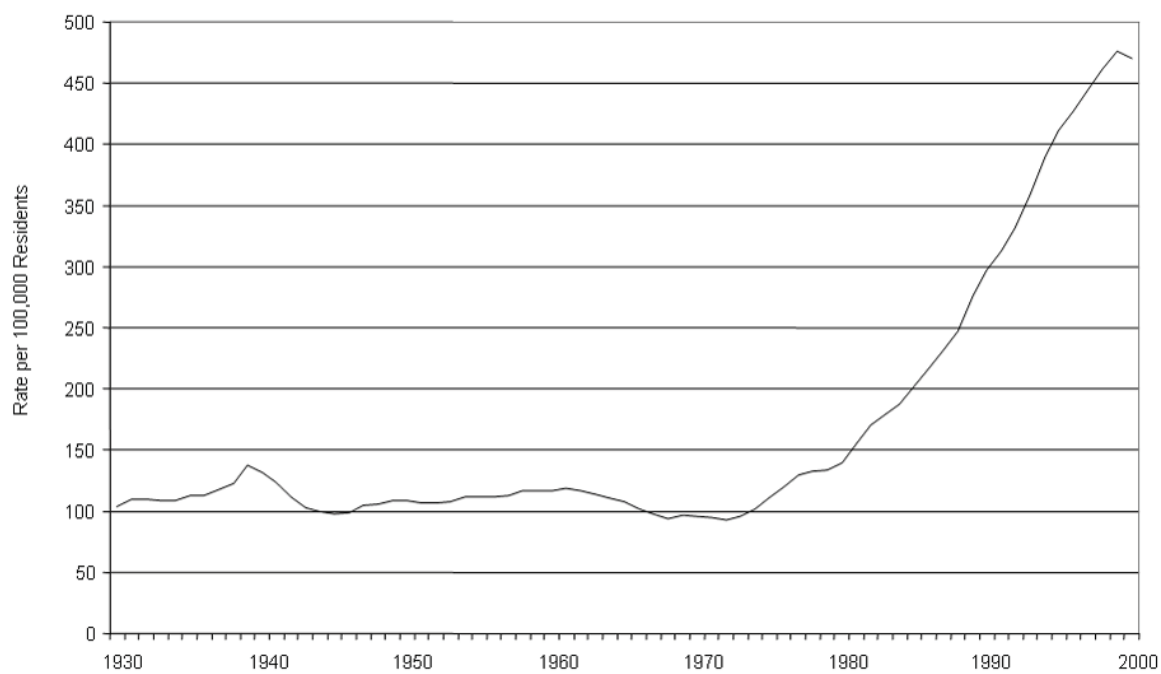
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Incarceration Rates in the United States



Sources: U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions on December 31*, annual, and *Correctional Populations in the United States*, annual. <http://www.census.gov/statab/hist/02HS0024.xls>

Figure 1

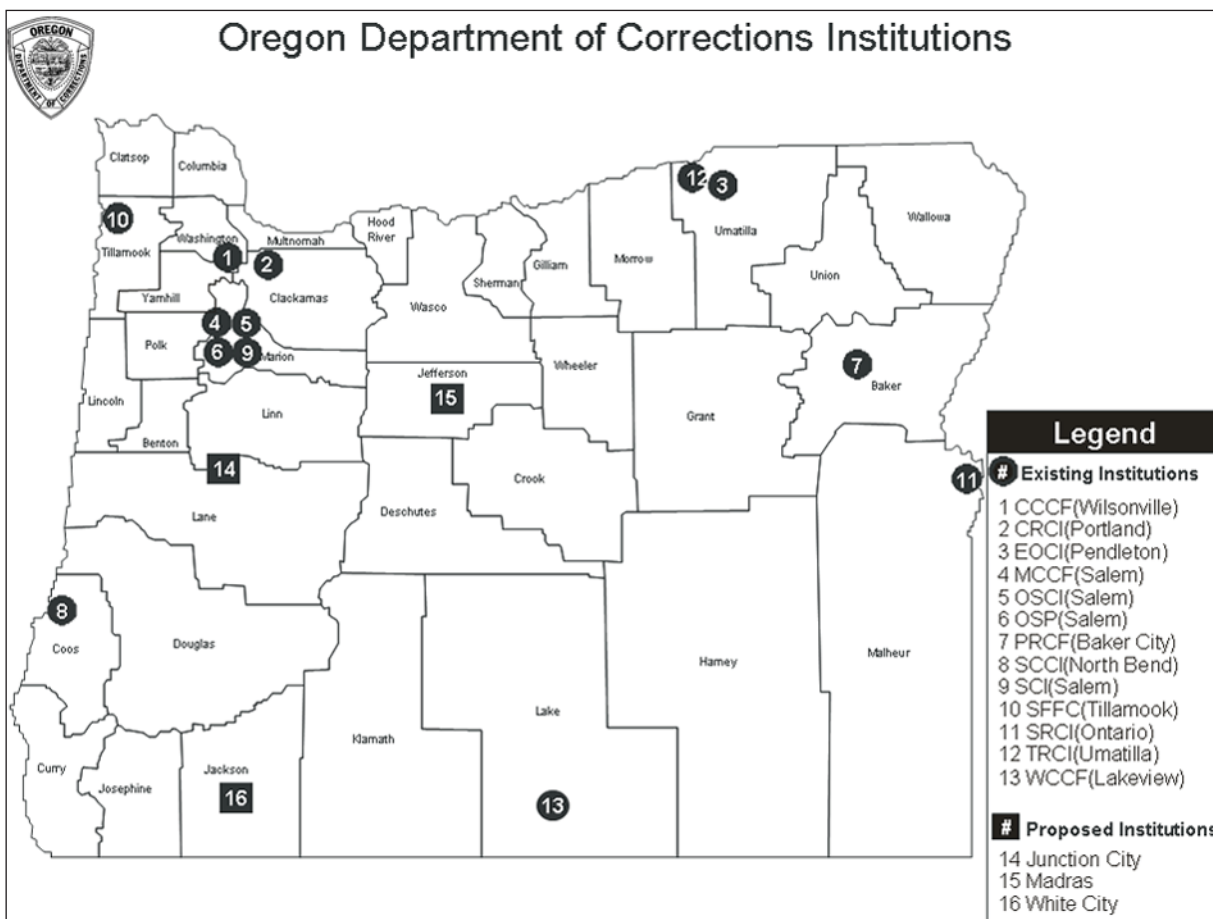


Figure 2

Each dot represents a returning offender in the year 2002.

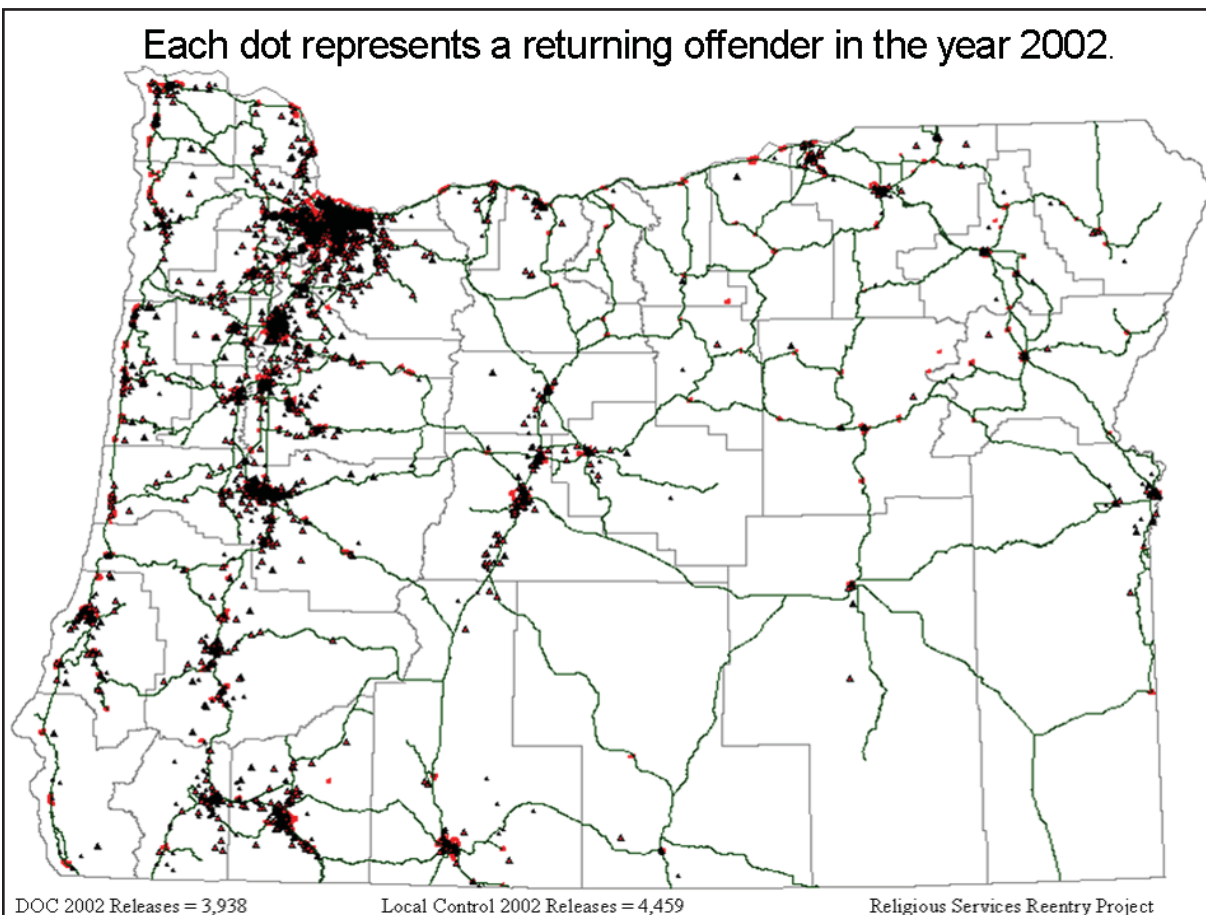


Figure 3

Rekindling the fire

Continued from page 1

Latter Day Saints, Catholic, Native American, Buddhist, Muslim, Earth-Based/Pagan, Jewish and Jehovah Witness.

Over a two-year period, 70 percent of the rolling male inmate population (12,980/18,513) and 96 percent of women (1,690/1,761) attended organized religious and spiritual services for a total of approximately 1,400,000 hours of engagement. Some of us call this “pew time,” and for the most part it is a wonderfully prosocial time that models and encourages people to live into their spirituality and the best of their values. Additionally, there are numerous one-on-one contacts that occur on a daily basis.

This level of religious and spiritual involvement in prison is higher than the average involvement of people in the community. The men and women in prison also report that their direct involvement in spirituality began, for the most part, after they were arrested and continues during their time in prison. Prior to their arrest their lives were often out of control and consisted of drugs and alcohol, work problems, lack of purpose, family conflict and little religious or spiritual involvement. Once people become stabilized, they begin to ask religious and spiritual questions and to seek answers.

A team of researchers who looked at this phenomenon in prisons around the United States found that the motivations of people in prison to engage with faith were very similar to the motivations of people who engage with faith in the general community. The researchers found there was no gain to being “religious” in prison because it had no effect on your sentencing, ability to make parole, etc. So, yes, some people in prison, just as in the community, talk but do not walk the walk. It seems that most people, however, are simply trying to find some meaning in their life and to engage with other people and the divine in a meaningful way. Ironically, many people rekindle the fire of their spirituality in the prison environment.

We are able to work with this huge level of spiritual awakening only because of the number of dedicated volunteers (over 2,000 - 1,500 of whom are religious volunteers) who donate over 300,000 hours of service each year to make this faith practice or praxis happen, the equivalent of about 144 full-time staff hours. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics uses \$17.19 per hour to estimate the value of volunteer work. This means the total in-kind contribution of our volunteers each year is about \$5 million. Because of its ability to work so successfully with volunteers (not only religious, but also education, drug and alcohol, and community volunteers), the religious services division plays a key role for the department in forming relationships and partnerships with the community in accordance with the vision statement of the ODOC, which says, “We create partnerships with Oregon communities to hold offenders accountable, engage victims and enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Oregon.”

The research on whether or not this kind of faith involvement and praxis in prison contributes to a reduction in recidivism (new criminal activity) is new, and while aspects of the research are very encouraging the research is still inconclusive. Some studies have found a link between spiritual practice and reduced recidivism, but other studies have found no such link. The findings are stronger for a link between religious involvement in prison and reduced rule infraction violations in prison. One very interesting study, however, of a faith-based reentry program in Canada called Circles of Support and Accountability—for people who had a very high risk of committing new crimes—found a remarkable reduction in recidivism (70% reduction of sex crimes, 53% violent crimes and 31% all crimes) for the people who were involved in the program compared to people not involved.

Reentry: Home for Good in Oregon

We mentioned already that over 95 percent of people who are incarcerated are eventually released, having served their sentences, and return to their communities. The term most often used to describe this process is reentry. All of Oregon's communities receive people from prisons and jails, but many receive large numbers of people that are disproportionate to the relative population size of their community. Every year, over 8,000 people are released from prison and jails in Oregon and return to their communities. The map in Figure 3 (on page 2) shows the relative density of the releasing populations for different parts of the state.

In a large sense, the community is the client for HGO, not the releasing offenders. We believe that if we can first build community capacity to understand and address reentry correctly that releasing offenders will have a much greater potential for success.

In 2001, for example, 1,220 people who lived in Multnomah County zip codes were sentenced to state prisons and 1,333 were sentenced to local jails (a total of 2,553). During the same year, 1,075 people were released from state prisons and 1,382 people were released from local jails (a total of 2,457) back to Multnomah County zip codes. In 2001, 352 people were sentenced to jail or prison from Deschutes County, and 258 were returned to Deschutes County during the same year. Where does your faith community fit into this picture? What, if anything, is your congregation called to do in response to this situation?

For many years now the Department of Corrections has been working on its response to this situation. Several years ago we designated seven of our prisons as "reentry" prisons. We selected these prisons as reentry prisons because they were nearest to the places most people would be releasing to, and because they could house short-term prisoners who were due to be released within six months.

This gave us a six-month window of opportunity to help people begin to reconnect to their families and communities, and to establish a working relationship with their parole officers in their county of release prior to their actual release. We are establishing reentry programs that we can deliver in these reentry prisons during the six months prior to release that will prepare people to successfully navigate the reentry process.

Most of the people (75 percent) who fall back into crime upon release do so within the first year of their release. The first six months of release is the most crucial time of all. If people can successfully negotiate the first six months, and then the first year, they are much more likely to remain free from crime.

The transition time from prison to community is crucial, and the religious services staff in the department felt that we could play a uniquely important role in this transition time. We were eager to come up with a faith-based response to this growing phenomenon of reentry that would build on our praxis inside the prisons.

We knew that we had already successfully created a structure that allowed for all kinds of faith traditions to flourish and work with the men and women inside our prisons. We did not have, however, a similar structure in place that could help these faith traditions and releasing men and women

carry forward the fire that they had rekindled in prison out into the community. Nor was there any structure that would help communities, churches, synagogues, tribes, mosques, meeting houses, circles or temples understand and work with the issues of reentry in a faithful way not only to help those releasing, but perhaps more importantly, to help their own communities work successfully with this phenomenon.

Our response to this lack of a facilitating structure has been to create the Home for Good in Oregon (HGO) structure, and we are calling HGO a Corrections, Community and Faith Based Reentry Partnership.

HGO is a county-based statewide partnership between the Oregon Department of Corrections, local Community Corrections Agencies and citizens, communities and faith-based groups in each of Oregon's 36 counties. This HGO structure allows people releasing to receive community and faith-based support. HGO also allows citizens and faith groups to build up their communities by getting support, training and skills to work with the reentry phenomenon in their midst.

The HGO structure has developed into a network of the nine full-time prison chaplains who work in the reentry prisons and 45 ODOC-trained volunteer community chaplains who train and support churches, synagogues, mosques, etc., and hundreds of community and faith-based volunteers to play a role in making reentry a successful process both for people releasing and communities receiving.

Learn more about "Home for Good"

You can find out more about Home for Good (HGO) by going to www.oregon.gov/DOC/TRANS/religious_services/rs_hgo_program.shtml. Figure 4 below shows how HGO is organized in eight regions throughout Oregon, and the table below gives you contact information for your HGO regional chaplain. You can contact your HGO regional chaplain to get a list of your local HGO volunteer community chaplains, coordinators and faith-based groups and to find out more about connecting to the HGO network and structure.

In a large sense, the community is the client for HGO, not the releasing offenders. We believe that if we can first build community capacity to understand and address reentry correctly that releasing offenders will have a much greater potential for success. In many ways HGO is not about creating more "programs," it is about building a network of educated, informed and supportive relationships between people in and out of prisons and jails, between churches, synagogues, tribes, mosques, etc., and between government agencies and workers such as the Department of Corrections and Community Corrections. HGO is about prosocial community, because prosocial community support is a central factor in reducing recidivism and increasing public safety.

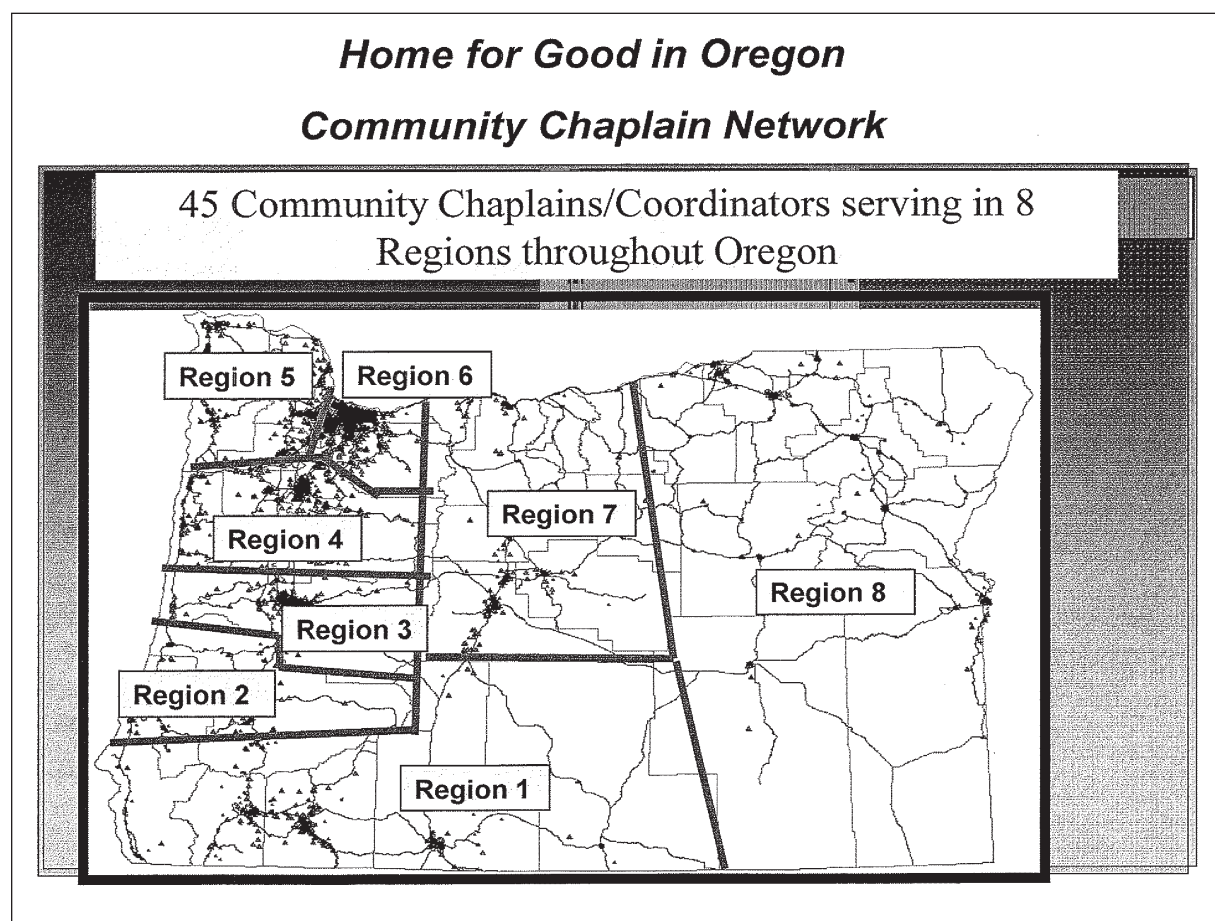


Figure 4

Region	Counties	HGO Regional Chaplain	E-mail	Phone
1	Klamath, Jackson, Lake, Curry, Josephine	Gene Haag	gjhaag@people.com	(541) 951-3200
2	Coos, Douglas	Ron Conway	Recon801@hotmail.com	(541) 266-0733
3	Lane	Tom English	English@rio.com	(541) 302-9477
4	Marion, Yamhill, Polk, Linn, Benton, Lincoln	Rhawn Krogh	rhawn@wou.edu.edu	(541) 760-2144
5	Wash, Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook	Paul Schramm	seschramm@juno.com	(541) 318-4048
6	Multnomah, Clackamas	Furlton Burns	furlton@comcast.net	(541) 891-5578
7/8	All others	Steve Welboun	scwelbourn@aol.com	(541) 389-5500

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A time to talk theology and practice faith

At the beginning of this article, we said that we believe there is a crucial role for theological thinking and for faith communities in the criminal justice system. We realize that faith-based initiatives are the subject of considerable public attention today, as well as heated debate.

As we said in another article, “Some people truly believe, others are skeptical and some are just curious about the potential power of faith-based programs to change lives. Still others are deeply concerned that such programs will lead to an unconstitutional blurring of church and state boundaries or to the establishment of religion, i.e., favoring religious people over nonreligious people or those of one faith over another. And while the debate rages on, 650,000 inmates are being released each year back to American communities.” (*Corrections Today*, October 2004, pp. 72-77)

We are aware that this topic of the role of faith in solving public health and safety issues is a complicated topic. We believe, however, that the same structure that has allowed us, as state employees with the Department of Corrections, to facilitate the broadest array of faith-based groups inside the prisons in a constitutional manner that does not blur the boundaries of church and state or result in the establishment of religion can be adapted to help people of faith, people who do not follow any faith, as well as diverse communities address reentry issues.

We would like to give you one small example

of how we think theological thinking and practice from just one particular faith tradition has an enormous amount to say to the reentry process. In similar ways, we believe every faith tradition has something important to say to the reentry process.

Has not society and the criminal justice system a great deal to learn from spiritual traditions that understand the importance of forgiveness, absolution, reconciliation and the possibility of redemption even in the midst of the great evil and suffering that we are all capable of causing in our world?

Our particular example comes from the Catholic tradition, which believes that there are four essential elements that must be present for the sacrament of reconciliation or penance to occur. First, there must be **contrition**, genuine sorrow. Second, the penitent must **confess**, publicly speak their offense to God and the community through a priest. Third, there must be **satisfaction**, some action or behavior on

the part of the penitent that says, “I am sorry and wish to restore relationship.” Fourth, there must be **absolution** from the community, in the name of the church community, and God the priest bestows absolution, “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

In terms of criminal behavior, society is fine with and expects to see the first three elements from this sacrament: 1) genuine sorrow, 2) a public confession and 3) actions to make satisfaction and reparation. Society, however, seems to be deeply conflicted about the fourth element: absolution.

People who have served time in prison—criminals—will tell you that they find it extremely difficult to gain real absolution or reconciliation from society no matter how much time they have served, how successful and productive they have become as citizens upon release, and how many years have passed since their criminal acts.

Fourteen states in the United States bar felons from voting for life. Most states have numerous restrictions connected to housing, benefits and work possibilities that are enormous barriers to the ability of people to find a way to be successful in life upon release.

Has not society and the criminal justice system a great deal to learn from spiritual traditions that understand the importance of forgiveness, absolution, reconciliation and the possibility of redemption even in the midst of the great evil and suffering that we are all capable of causing in our world?

What next?

Becoming a trained volunteer, community chaplain or community coordinator

To become part of the HGO network of faith-based individuals and organizations helping those returning to the community be successful, you can take the ODOC-approved community-based training to prepare yourself for service.

The training consist of completing five self-paced HGO training modules available on the internet at www.oregon.gov/DOC/TRANS/religious_services/rs_hgo_training.shtml. After studying the material, complete the short exams and return them to the ODOC per the instructions. Then, contact your Regional Community Chaplain to get the dates for trainer-lead training in your area. Following completion of this training and submission of an HGO volunteer application, you can work under the supervision of the Regional or Community Chaplains providing services to individuals following release from incarceration and their families. There are a wide range of services that volunteers provide including transportation, mentoring, family support, office assistance and praying for the clients and their volunteers.

Additional ways of getting involved include participating in the regular monthly video conference meeting, held at 11 sites throughout the state on the first Wednesday of each month, from 1 to 3 p.m. The video sites include Portland, Wilsonville, Salem, Eugene, Grants Pass, Medford, Lakeview, Coos Bay and Baker City. Additional sites can be added if you would like to participate. Contact the Regional Chaplains for more information.

The final way of being involved is just to offer a welcome to those returning to your community following incarceration. Being part of a pro-social network of people who accept and welcome returning inmates can make a great deal of difference in your community's safety and their success.

Host a reentry education & discussion seminar in your community

To further explore the possibilities and appropriate roles for faith and community-based people who wish to understand and address in some way this issue of reentry, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) and HGO are exploring the possibility of sponsoring education and discussion seminars throughout Oregon.

The seminars would explore practical ways of working from one's theological base and tradition with the challenges of reentry. These training seminars would be lead by people who are experienced and trained both in theology and in the science of corrections. Chaplains, theologians, spiritual leaders and professionals who are trained in evidence-based ways of reducing recidivism would examine themes in sacred texts that relate to crime, social norms, judgment, punishment, restoration, rehabilitation and redemption.

If your faith-group would like to host one of these discussions, please call your Regional Community Chaplain listed on page 3 or one of the DOC chaplains working on reentry listed below, or call the EMO office at (503) 221-1054.

Chaplain Tim Cayton, Central Administration
(503) 945-9087 or tim.s.cayton@doc.state.or.us

Chaplain Arnadene Welton-Bean, Coffee Creek prison
(503) 570-6604 or arnadene.l.bean@doc.state.or.us

Chaplain Leonard Blix, Columbia River prison
(503) 280-6646, ext. 248 or leonard.l.blix@doc.state.or.us

Chaplain Roger Haefer, South Fork prison
(541) 523-9560 or roger.l.haefer@doc.state.or.us

Chaplain Chris Von Lobedan, Shutter Creek prison
(541) 756-6666, ext. 264 or christopher.e.vonlobedan@doc.state.or.us

Chaplain Doug Farris, Oregon State prison
(503) 373-0147 or douglas.farris@doc.state.or.us

Chaplain Dick Roy, Santiam prison
(503) 378-2144, ext. 423 or richard.d.roy@doc.state.or.us

Chaplain Richard Torres, Warner Creek prison
(541) 947-8217 or richard.a.torres@doc.state.or.us

Chaplain Phil Holbrook, State Penitentiary
(503) 373-1350 or philip.e.holbrook@doc.state.or.us