HEALING COMMUNITIES

A framework for congregations in their ministry to families affected by incarceration

A Report Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation

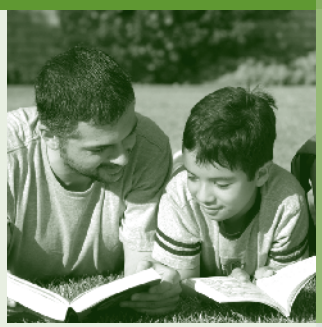
Stephanie Boddie, Robert Franklin, Harold Dean Trulear
December 2010

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for vulnerable children and families in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother.

This review was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.



Printed in Canada

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

In the past decade, both the public and private sectors have expressed concern over the growing rates of men and women returning to the community following incarceration. From the initial (2001) federal agenda for the White House Office on Faith Based and Community Initiatives, through the shifts in national faith-based organizations' priorities toward the formerly incarcerated, to the distressed, local communities receiving these men and women following their confinement, concern mounts over the supports needed to facilitate a successful re-entry into society. Successful re-entry can positively impact communities by producing productive citizens in family and community life, reducing recidivism and further crime, and developing the social capital necessary to become part of neighborhood stabilization and even transformation.

Prisoner re-entry is not a standalone issue. Because men, women and adolescents who are incarcerated are members of families, communities and other social networks, prisoner re-entry stands as a challenge that affects the entire community, as well as family stability. The Annie E. Casey Foundation began its work on prisoner re-entry as an issue contextualized by the realities of vulnerable families and communities that the Foundation engages within its day-to-day work. Casey's multi-sectoral approach to community engagement requires that portfolios reflect upon, develop knowledge for and engage their constituencies around issues such as prisoner re-entry, primarily because of the impact re-entry has on the communities individuals return to. Casey seeks to understand the relationship between a sector's strengths and assets, and the Foundation's goals. For Casey's Faith and Families portfolio, led by Chief Administrative Officer for the Executive Vice President Carole Thompson, this meant asking the questions: "What are the distinct contributions made by the faith community in the area of prisoner re-entry?" and "How can the Foundation partner with faith-based organizations in this work?"

Answering these questions became the central focus of a consultation held by the Foundation in September 2006 in Baltimore. Casey consultants Robert Franklin, Stephanie Boddie and Harold Dean Trulear developed and circulated a concept paper on the role of faith communities in the work of prisoner re-entry. For two days, the consultants led discussions with some 40 people representing congregations, faith-based organizations, theological and higher education, service providers, prison chaplaincy and Foundation staff. The discussions focused on:

- The faith community's response to prisoner re-entry
- The existing best and promising practices in this work and
- The appropriate relationship between service delivery to persons returning from incarceration and the faith community's historic role as a voice and advocate for those on the margins of society.

Prisoner re-entry is not a standalone issue. Because men, women and adolescents who are incarcerated are members of families, communities and other social networks, prisoner re-entry stands as a challenge that affects the entire community, as well as family stability.

The two-day discussion invoked spirited debate about the faith community and prisoner re-entry. Several individuals attending had themselves been incarcerated in the past. The consultation resulted in both affirmation of current efforts in various communities concerning prisoner re-entry, and frank concern that these efforts need to be spread and strengthened. More than one participant noted the challenges involved in motivating congregations around prisoner re-entry, from the "stigma and shame of incarceration" to, as one participant described it, a "matter-of-fact resignation of the reality of people coming home. It's like 'Okay, it's Thursday, that's garbage day; okay, it's Monday, that's the day the people come home from jail. It creates numbness in the neighborhood."[1]

Participants agreed on one thing: building relationships serves as the key to successful re-entry, and faith communities are repositories of relational capital. But the challenge is to mobilize the relational capital – both abilities and infrastructure – of the faith community around the specific individuals returning from incarceration. As well, the relational focus of such a ministry requires that the faith community both provide relationships that offer social support, and also work to promote, develop and strengthen familial and other networks of support for those returning from jail and prison. Indeed, the shift had begun from a model of working with individuals returning from incarceration, to family and community strengthening through the focus of energies on a particular population: individuals returning from incarceration and their families.

Participants agreed on one thing: building relationships serves as the key to successful re-entry, and faith communities are repositories of relational capital.

HEALING COMMUNITIES

Faith, Redemption and the Ministry of Reintegration

Faith communities can play a unique role in healing individuals, families and communities devastated by crime and cycles of incarceration. They can help build a community consensus around the challenges facing families with an incarcerated loved one, as well as the individuals returning home from incarceration. Faith institutions, including faith-based organizations, but particularly houses of worship, can serve as resources for transforming neighborhoods into places where family and social support are available to people affected by crime and incarceration.

For those who had been cast as outsiders even before incarceration, Healing Communities offer "integration" – integration into the body of the family, congregation, work force and neighborhood.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation refers to these places as "Healing Communities" – places where loving, healthy relationships of support exist, and values of forgiveness and reconciliation, together with commitment to redemption, can be shared. Houses of worship can serve as catalysts that facilitate the transformation of surrounding neighborhoods into Healing Communities. Faith communities give specific definition to the concept of community, using the term to refer to the strength of the networks of relationships within their houses of worship. These are places of hope, safe places and safety nets for those returning, as well as for their families, for the victims and for those seeking to support them, such as service providers, landlords and employers.

Because of the values of forgiveness and reconciliation, Healing Communities reject the stigma and shame associated with incarceration, and provide individuals and families with social networks to ensure their continued membership in the neighborhood, as well as restore those to the community who have left it. The individuals that come home to the neighborhood following prison are welcomed and belong to the family and social network. Rather than simply focusing on re-entry as the return of ex-offenders from prison, Healing Communities embrace the concept of "reintegration," so community acceptance becomes the norm. And for those who had been cast as outsiders even before incarceration, Healing Communities offer "integration" – integration into the body of the family, congregation, work force and neighborhood.

American prisoners extract valuable resources from neighborhoods, families and victims, thus weakening the community infrastructure. To reverse the tide of mass incarceration and its impact on communities, a communal response and transformative culture that creates Healing Communities is needed.

The process of integration and reintegration requires a new community-based concept of those returning from incarceration. Rather than being defined by their pasts and thinking of these individuals as "ex-offenders" or "the formerly incarcerated," Healing Communities refer to them as "returning citizens," recognizing their citizenship and their belonging to the community itself.

This is no small undertaking. Building Healing Communities may not be all that is needed, but it is an important prerequisite for building the community will that is necessary to maintain a supportive network and advocate for services. In addressing the impact of the crisis of crime and incarceration on families and communities, most of the attention and research has focused on the need for programming and services. Access to housing, employment, education and health care is critical to breaking the cycle of crime and recidivism, and strengthening families and communities. While such services are essential, they are not the whole answer. We believe effective re-entry and reintegration is the key to saving the soul and the social capital of many neighborhoods affected by crime, incarceration and re-entry.

In addition to being stigmatized and shamed, individuals and families experiencing the many consequences of incarceration are often isolated and have no social support system they can draw on, especially in the informal context of everyday life in the neighborhood. The family members of a person arrested for a crime, incarcerated or coming home from prison are often shunned or scorned. Some family members have their own ambivalence about the person returning. Reaction to returning citizens in the neighborhood can range from antipathy to "numbness" – a sense that the return of the previously incarcerated person is simply a fact of life in many distressed communities, the consequences of which are both inevitable and unavoidable.[2]

We believe effective re-entry and reintegration is the key to saving the soul and the social capital of many neighborhoods affected by crime, incarceration and re-entry.

THE CHALLENGE

Mass Incarceration

The most recent figures on incarceration and re-entry press the need for an urgent and complete response. According to a 2008 Pew Center on the States report, more than 2.3 million Americans are in state and federal prisons. The United States incarcerates its citizens at a rate higher than any country in the world. For African Americans, the numbers reflect a more daunting situation, with one in 15 African American males over 18 years of age behind bars, compared to one out of 36 Latinos and one out of 106 white males.[3]

Statistics also paint a picture of the implications of mass incarceration on the lives of families. Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 1.1 million incarcerated persons are parents to an estimated 2.3 million children. In addition, more than 7 million children have a parent under some form of correctional supervision.[4] The Bureau's midyear report for 2008 indicated that 115,779 women were incarcerated in federal and state facilities, representing an 839% increase from 1977 figures.[5] This also includes the number of incarcerated mothers, which has more than doubled to 65,600 in 2007 from 29,500 in 1991. Simply put, approximately two-thirds of all women in federal and state prison are mothers of dependant children.

In addition, the United States Department of Justice states that approximately 650,000 men and women are released from state and federal prison annually. This number does not include those who come home from city and county jails. As noted above, many return to communities already in distress. While these communities suffer from historically limited resources, they are all home to a variety of houses of worship that can and do provide social and religious capital to support the re-entry process.

Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 1.1 million incarcerated persons are parents to an estimated 2.3 million children. In addition, more than 7 million children have a parent under some form of correctional supervision.

Crime and incarceration does not impact all neighborhoods equally, nor does the challenge of re-entry. Disproportionately, it is African Americans going to jail and prison, and returning to low-income neighborhoods that have limited resources to support their reintegration. In short, all of the social capital and economic goods that churches, community-based organizations, foundations and other community stakeholders have worked many years to create can be rapidly dismantled by mass incarceration, high recidivism rates and, ultimately, the failure to provide a more radical approach to re-entry ministry. Successful reintegration that breaks the cycle of crime, recidivism and intergenerational incarceration, and restores relationships, requires more than institutional responses of re-entry services.

The Response to Date

In response to these challenges, America's faith institutions, now numbering more than 400,000, have mobilized a new form and expression of their longstanding commitment to ministering to the needs of prisoners, namely, "prisoner re-entry" or "prison aftercare ministries." Recent studies suggest that congregations primarily provide prison visitation services (21-60%), as compared to re-entry services, such as programs for the families of persons returning from incarceration, halfway houses and other support services.[6]

Congregations (especially Christian and Muslim) and clergy on the leading edge of the re-entry field have understood something that recent research demonstrates – "high incarceration rates may disrupt a community's social network, affecting family formation, reducing informal control of children and income to families, and weakening ties among residents."[7] Many congregations and other faith-based organizations operate re-entry ministries that address the critical institutionally defined needs of men and women returning from incarceration. They partner with the labor sector to develop programs that assist returning persons secure employment. They have developed housing alternatives through their community development corporations and in partnership with other community and government agencies. They welcome individuals returning from incarceration to their educational programs and assist them to gain access to health care, especially substance abuse treatment and mental health services. These efforts all focus on access to services for the returning citizen in his or her quest for reintegration. They do not always address the need for families and neighborhoods to be transformed into places that receive the returning citizen and move them from re-entry to reintegration. What many call successful re-entry has not yet become reintegration – a process that involves not only re-entry into society's structures, but also finding a place in society's hearts, minds and communities.

Many congregations and other faith-based organizations operate re-entry ministries that address the critical institutionally defined needs of men and women returning from incarceration.

They do not always address the need for families and neighborhoods to be transformed into places that receive the returning citizen and move them from re-entry to reintegration.

A NEW RESPONSE

Building on Faith Value Resources and Re-Entry Ministries

In view of a long track record of strained and even failed criminal justice and rehabilitation practices and policies, the question becomes: As a society, is there another approach, a new paradigm or alternative perspective on transforming the lives of those returning from incarceration that moves from re-entry to reintegration? This is not to negate current efforts. Rather, the question can be posed to consider approaches that may supplement or, even better, complement the best efforts of current policy and practice.

Because the programs and policies that focus on housing, employment, education, health and family reunification are primarily service oriented and point to the needs of the individual returning from incarceration, we believe room exists for the development of networks of formal and informal support for returning citizens and their families. This is work that must accompany the delivery of services – work that congregations are well positioned to perform.

This points to the need for social and cultural change regarding the process of re-entry. Such change includes, but is not limited to, the policies that effect access to services. It also includes personal, familial and community attitudes that can be barriers to the development of the social networks needed to support returning citizens and their families. This type of change is necessary to facilitate successful re-entry and reintegration. In this vein, our primary objective is to document and enhance the role of the faith community as a source of values and commitment for building strong family and community networks that are critical components, along with a range of services.

The value resources of "forgiveness," "redemption," "reconciliation" and "healing," common to the majority of faith-based organizations and congregations in distressed neighborhoods, can be important tools for the reconstruction of a community consensus that welcomes the returning person and places them in relationships of support, both formal and informal, that contribute significantly to their reintegration. This becomes a Healing Community.

We use the term "forgiveness" because of its connotation of "thinking differently" about an offense. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting that an offense has occurred. Rather, it points to the need to receive the offender in spite of the offense and not define an individual simply or primarily in terms of what they have done in the past. True forgiveness, as a relational transaction, also calls for

As a society, is there another approach, a new paradigm or alternative perspective on transforming the lives of those returning from incarceration that moves from re-entry to reintegration?

the offender to acknowledge their responsibility for the offense. But such acknowledgement is not a prerequisite for the offer of forgiveness – often it follows a community's sincere desire to forgive.

We speak of "redemption" because of the religious traditions that pervade re-entry neighborhoods. Redemption refers to a "bringing back of that which was originally a part" of something greater. In this case, the neighborhoods and families the persons return to from incarceration is the "greater thing." While some refer to this process as "restorative justice," the "healing" metaphor emphasizes the relational capacity of faith communities as agents of redemption – using its resources on behalf of all persons affected by crime and incarceration.

Having the congregation as a place of redemption recognizes that while persons returning from incarceration must take responsibility for their decision-making processes when they return to the community, the community itself is an active agent in the restoration process. The community "pays the price" of mobilizing its resources of care, forgiveness and support to those who return. The community becomes intentional about its role in restoration, creating a sense of welcome and hope for the formerly incarcerated. The community's activity in this work replaces the "numbness" referenced earlier. Those who return from incarceration now have an advocate they can depend on to facilitate the process of their restoration and reconciliation.

"Reconciliation" refers to the actual reconfiguring of relationships that occurs as a result of the redemptive process. Those who have been incarcerated have committed acts that have brought harm to their neighborhoods, friends and loved ones, whether intentionally or not. Violence and property offenses bring pain to neighbors. Domestic violence brings clear harm to loved ones, and the reality of incarceration brings a separation that can and does strain, fracture and even end relationships within family and friendship networks. Redemptive processes involve a making right of relationships among all parties concerned: offender, victim, family and the larger neighborhood. All are stakeholders in the restoration of meaningful relationships that sustain not only the person formerly incarcerated, but also those who have been victimized, either directly or indirectly, by that person.

> The value resources of "forgiveness," "redemption," "reconciliation" and "healing" can be important tools for the reconstruction of a community consensus that welcomes the returning person and places them in relationships of support that contribute significantly to their reintegration.

"Healing" refers to the wholeness redemption brings both to the identity of the person returning from incarceration and to the community of reception and redemption. Successful integration comes not simply with access to services – even the successful implementation of the tools of services – but with the wholeness that comes when a Healing Community has welcomed the returning citizen as one of their own, and that individual has accepted the forgiveness inherent in such reception and incorporates it into a new identity structure, characterized by self worth and a sense of belonging.

HEALING COMMUNITIES

The Seeds of Implementation

In January 2007, the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), the Black Baptist denomination founded in 1961 as a social justice convention of congregations, approached the Casey Foundation seeking assistance in the work of its newly created Social Justice and Prison Ministry Commission. PNBC wished to develop a model for work with prisoners and those returning from incarceration. In a series of meetings, the Commission's leadership and Casey personnel created a model for implementing Healing Communities in several cities and a handbook for training church leaders and congregations called *What Shall We Then Do? A Family Freedom Kit*.[8]

The model emphasized that churches begin the work by ministering to members and families in their own congregations. The Commissioners introduced the handbook and model at their January 2008 board meeting and established pilot sites in Detroit, Mich.; Richmond, Va.; and Houston, Texas. The purpose of the pilots was twofold: implement the model and create a learning community for the churches, and the Foundation to identify ways the model could be improved. In each site, a cluster of congregations called prayer circles, met regularly to study the handbook and begin to develop the ministry. They studied examples of congregation-based reconciliation between communities and returning citizens to help them see the hope of overcoming stigma and shame. They examined sermons, Bible studies and testimonies of returning citizens and their families.

They also developed strategies for making their congregations safe spaces for the families of the incarcerated, and stations of hope for returning citizens and their families. Most importantly, returning citizens and their families found friends and networks of support; that is, people to walk with them, pray with them and listen to them. They also found support to find and keep jobs and housing.

By September 2008, PNBC partnered with Prison Fellowship, an international faith-based prison ministry organization, to provide training for congregations using both the Healing Communities handbook and Prison Fellowship's prison ministry curricula. By August 2009, they had provided training to more than 100 leaders and congregations through the Christian and continuing education structures of the denomination.

That fall also saw PNBC partner with Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, D.C., to provide regional training for its congregations and other interested faith communities. From that session developed a Healing Communities site in Charlotte, N.C., coordinated by the Exodus Foundation, a prisoner reentry faith based non-profit, which has recruited and trained a number of congregations in their region in the Healing Communities model.

In Richmond, Va., pastors and congregations began walking with families affected by crime, even before incarceration. One pastor found himself with two families in the congregation, one with a murdered son, the other the family of the alleged killer. His presence in the courtroom with the families defused potential tensions between them and intervened against the threat of revenge. As of August 2009, the Richmond, Va., congregations had served more than 200 families through Healing Communities, using real time video conferencing for remote visitation of inmates in the

Wallens Ridge prison, a seven-and-a-half-hour drive away. They also signed a memorandum of agreement to expand the video visitation program to include congregations in Norfolk and Alexandria, Va., with a goal of serving 600 families in 2010.

A PNBC congregation in Delaware discovered the impact of crime and incarceration on their church during a Men's Day sermon on the Apostle Peter's return from jail after his arrest, recorded in the New Testament Book of Acts. One by one, members shared their stories of the incarceration of fathers, sons and grandsons. One man heard his story in Peter's story – he happened to be attending church while on work release from a state prison. The pastor felt compelled to take the Healing Communities training materials and assigned the leadership to the congregation's department of missions and evangelism. "I knew we had these individual stories here," he said, "but today it all came together. Our church must respond."

In Washington, D.C., the Potomac Region of the United Church of Christ (UCC) formally adopted the Healing Communities model for their prison and re-entry work in October 2008. As they develop their prayer circles, they discover that even in their middle class congregations, crime and incarceration are family issues. The UCC group has taken the name "Matthew 25 initiative" for the Healing Communities model, citing the New Testament passage where Jesus says, "I was in prison and you visited me."

In Detroit, 42 families received counseling and support services by August 2008. By August 2009, this number grew to 365 returning citizens and their families, served by more than 80 houses of worship and faith-based agencies. Congregations provided transportation to job interviews for returning citizens and prison visits to families of those still incarcerated. Through informal networks in the congregations, individuals found housing, shelter and/or employment. In addition, Detroit, with its significant Middle Eastern population, challenged the implementation of the Healing Communities model to be intentionally interfaith.

While the PNBC and its ally, the Baptist Pastors' Council of Detroit, developed the initial prayer circles there, those in leadership, specifically PNBC Commission Co-chair Rev. DeeDee Coleman, pressed into leadership on prisoner re-entry in the larger Detroit community. Through sharing the model in other religious venues, as well as hosting a faith-based re-entry conference of more than 500 faith, government and community leaders in May 2009, the Baptist group has stimulated other faith traditions to look seriously at the adaptability of the Healing Communities framework. Specifically, plans were launched to produce Islamic and Hebraic versions of the handbook to supplement the initial Christian and interfaith versions.

The work in Detroit became occasion to introduce the Healing Communities model to the Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative (MPRI), the re-entry department of the Michigan Department of Corrections. The MPRI adopted the Healing Communities framework for its work with the faith community, organized a Faith and Justice Council of religious leaders to provide advice and counsel, and hired a full-time organizer to work with communities of faith in the implementation of Healing Communities.[9] Work began in the summer of 2009 with the organization of a prayer circle of eight congregations in the Grand Rapids, Mich., area.

In Indianapolis, the Community Resurrection Partnership (CRP), a collaborative of faith-based and community organizations in the Annie E. Casey's Making Connections neighborhood of Martindale-Brightwood, began its work with the Healing Communities handbook in July 2009. Eight congregations and two faith-based agencies constituted the prayer circle for CRP. Additionally, the Christian Association for Prisoner Aftercare (CAPA), a Casey grantee that serves as a trade organization for prisoner re-entry ministries, organized a dozen congregations in the Baltimore-Washington area in October 2009 to begin the work through CAPA's national convention, which was held in Baltimore that month. The CAPA sites for 2010 are Baltimore; Orange County, Fla.; and San Diego, with Milwaukee underway for 2011.

LESSONS LEARNED

Best and Promising Practices

1. The importance of addressing stigma and shame

From the onset of this project, Casey was aware of the stigma and shame that community members associate with incarceration, particularly African Americans. In the initial discussions about their congregations becoming Healing Communities, pastors clearly described both their own fears and those of their congregations. Pastors addressed the issue of stigma and shame in different ways – but the learning is how important it is to do this at the onset of discussions.

Some pastors told stories of church members who had hidden the fact that their family members had incarcerated loved ones, the tension in their congregations that resulted from their members being victims of crime, and the lack of experience they had with women and men returning from incarceration. The Casey Foundation Healing Communities handbook provided suggestions for discussion concerning congregations' attitudes about those who had committed crimes. The opening chapter records the experience of a churchwoman who had forgiven the murderer of her child and had been moved to make him a part of her own family. This chapter found resonance as a point of discussion for these churches to address their own fears.

Other pastors decided to publicly discuss their own relationship to the criminal justice system, from their own incarceration prior to entering the ministry, to their current family members in prison. Still others offered special altar prayer sessions for those with incarcerated family members during the Sunday morning worship services. All reported that these acts within the Sunday service created space for church members to share their stories of "families of the incarcerated," giving them permission to share their concerns about incarceration, and opportunity for others to think differently about the reality of incarceration.

2. Developing a continuum of care

Congregations with prison ministries come to realize they must engage prisoners upon their release. Similarly, congregations already engaged in re-entry come to understand that their re-entry work begins at least six months prior to release. As a result, re-entry ministry necessitates working with people who are incarcerated, and prison ministry should care for those released after incarceration. The churches came to see this: "Prison Ministry must go through re-entry. Re-entry ministry must begin with prison ministry and re-entry must reflect a commitment to reintegration to congregation, family, work and community." This realization took Casey beyond Healing Communities as simply a re-entry strategy, to one that considers the "continuum of care" for men and women from arrest to re-entry through to reintegration.

Congregations also discovered that correctional policy often presented an obstacle to the idea of a continuum of care. Many correctional systems prohibit volunteers who work with inmates in

prison programs and ministries from continuing to work with them (or even have contact with them) subsequent to release. In some cases, faith communities have been exempted from this prohibition. In others, they are required to develop two separate programs, one for ministering to inmates and a separate one for working with those who return from incarceration. This challenge requires further investigation and reform, especially in light of the recently passed Second Chance Act, which stipulates a continuum of care as a condition for receiving federal funding for re-entry programs such as mentoring returning citizens.

3. "Any church can and every church should"

Since working with a congregation's membership centers this work, there is no size limitation on the ability to become a Healing Community. It is not a program so much as a change in congregational attitude and living out of values that becomes a contagious perspective that influences those both inside the congregation, as well as within the broader community. The PNBC adopted the phrase, "Any church can do this; every church should do this," when they realized that becoming a Healing Community is more about becoming a community that embraces the returning citizen and his or her family, than setting up a separate program. If a congregation has a small membership, it can still be a Healing Community. Just as these congregations care for people who are sick in a variety of ways – prayer, calls, visitation, meals, transportation to doctor visits and a circle of support, they can care for the prisoner and his or her family.

Also, our experience tells us that this is not simply a problem for the poor with whom the middle class has an increasingly strained relationship.[10] Though this issue impacts people in poor communities, the congregations in those communities include middle class members who increasingly find themselves the relatives of persons who are incarcerated. In addition, the experience of the UCC congregations and Casey's work with the Christian Association for Prisoner Aftercare developing the Healing Communities model shows that the issue of incarceration affects congregations from predominantly white suburbs, rural America, Native American, Latino communities and others as well.

When the PNBC says "Every church should…" it acknowledges that virtually every African American Congregation has families with incarcerated members. When they say "Any church can…" they recognize that the ministry does not depend on church size, budget or program capacity. Religious capital exists in a faith community irrespective of congregational demographics. Healing Communities takes the basic resources of forgiveness and relationship building, and applies them to a historically underserved population.

The PNBC adopted the phrase, "Any church can do this; every church should do this," when they realized that becoming a Healing Community is more about becoming a community that embraces the returning citizen and his or her family, than setting up a separate program.

4. Pastoral vision and lay leadership are critical

Pastoral leadership has always been crucial to congregational mobilization. Clergy implementing Healing Communities, as well as PNBC leadership, insisted that clergy be empowered to cast the vision necessary for their congregations to become Healing Communities. In Casey's work with Making Connections neighborhoods, this has been true as well. Making Connections is Annie E. Casey Foundation's 10-year, multi-site effort initiated in 1999 to improve the lives and prospects of families and children living in some of America's toughest neighborhoods.

Less obvious, but no less critical, has been the role of lay leadership in the development of socially based ministries with Healing Communities being no exception. Pastors discussed the need to have

their key lay leadership on board for the work from the inception. In more than a few cases, it was lay leadership, with the blessing of the pastor, which took the lead from the very beginning. In no cases did pastors report that they could or would implement Healing Communities without key lay leadership support and involvement. In the Healing Communities sites developed in conjunction with the Christian Association for Prisoner Aftercare, lay leadership proved critical. In Orange County, Fla., and Baltimore, Md., lay volunteers already associated with ministries to county jails and state prisons formed the nucleus of the prayer circles implementing Healing Communities, with strong support from their clergy.

5. Healing Communities is a flexible framework and congregations adapt to their strengths and available resources

Because the Healing Communities framework offers general guidelines for developing relationships of care and support, congregations have been able to adapt its principles to the strengths of their own specific infrastructures. Some congregations offer access to existing programs for youth and families as an extension of the Healing Communities model. In like manner, the National Re-entry Resource Center, sponsored by the Council on State Governments, introduced Healing Communities at its Second Chance Grantee Conference in 2009 as a model for supplementing existing mentoring programs in the faith community.

As congregations identify services in the community, they help persons in their Healing Communities ministries develop access to those programs that assist in job training and readiness, housing and education. They have also determined areas where applying the principles of Healing Communities has exposed places in their ministries that require additional training and competency building.

Congregations have added to the Healing Communities framework with such programs as substance abuse counseling, ministry to halfway houses and real-time video conferencing as a tool for long distance prison visits. By working together in the prayer circles, they have created joint ventures to provide transportation for family visitation through the pooling of church vans, and sharing information and making referrals to each others' congregations for returning citizens and their families to receive specified services.

In the case of exposing weaknesses, some congregations found they needed further training in dealing with the criminal justice system as a whole and mentoring prisoners – returning citizens and their families.

The PNBC/Prison Fellowship memorandum of agreement referenced earlier reflects the Baptist congregations' desire for supplemental training to go with their Healing Communities framework. Prison Fellowship also agreed to share their power of certification for prison ministry with PNBC, giving the denomination the power to certify their own congregations as trained in prison ministry.[11]

In other cases, the weaknesses exposed reflected the need to increase the understanding of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. As they studied the handbook, some congregations found the need to dig more deeply within their own religious traditions to find the attitudes necessary to support the transformation of individuals and families affected by crime and incarceration. In the words of one pastor, "I have worked in re-entry for a long time – but I discovered a shortcoming in my own attitude. In studying the material with other leaders, I found that I was good at second chances for people coming home, but if that didn't work out, I wasn't available for third and fourth chances. I had to examine that."

6. Relationship building is an important message

One challenge of introducing and implementing the Healing Communities framework rests with keeping the focus on its simplicity. Because so many faith-based efforts in the criminal justice system come in the form of specialized ministries, the idea that Healing Communities is not a program, but more an attitude or a way of being, was difficult to communicate. Additionally, because congregations

already involved in some forms of prison or re-entry ministry through their community development corporations were involved in ministries surrounding employment and housing, some faith leaders resisted the Healing Communities emphasis on relationship building and networks of support. They pressed for the Foundation to be more proactive in the "concrete" issues of job development and securing housing.

The Healing Communities response is to acknowledge the importance of these efforts, but to help congregations build on the strengths of their existing resources, rather than support an effort that only selected congregations possess the capacity to implement. As well, the handbook contains a section on building networks of referral to encourage congregations to connect with existing agencies that provide other services. In Indianapolis, the congregations and agencies of the Community Resurrection Partnership, with the support of Making Connections staff, decided to work with the Indiana State Office on Faith Based and Community Initiatives to create a directory of services for returning citizens that would be available to all congregations involved in the Healing Communities initiative. Healing Communities congregations in Baltimore did the same. The Wings of Faith CDC of the Russell Street Baptist Church in Detroit had worked in the area of job training for returning citizens for some time. Becoming a Healing Communities congregation enabled them to wrap support networks around families involved in the job-training program.

While many correctional systems continued to use terms such as "ex-offender" and "ex-con," Healing Communities congregations recognized the importance of the "returning citizens" language as a part of becoming a site for transformation and redemption.

In Indianapolis, several congregations had partnerships with transitional housing programs that enabled them to work with the populations in those centers through mentoring programs and worship services. Becoming Healing Communities congregations enabled them to offer additional support to families of those residents, who were still technically in the custody of the state while in the transitional housing facility.

Additionally, being a custodian of the message of relationships and transformation required ongoing work on the redefinition of terms. For example, while many correctional systems (as well as religious institutions) continued to use terms such as "ex-offender" and "ex-con," Healing Communities congregations recognized the importance of the "returning citizens" language as a part of becoming a site for transformation and redemption. Cursory review of the reach of the Healing Communities' model in the cities where the handbook is in use revealed a number of places using "returning citizens" language. In Washington, D.C., a city councilman has held several rallies for "returning citizens," while in Detroit, the term has become well used in community agencies and within the philanthropic community.

Finally, in addition to organizations that have officially adopted the Healing Communities model as their primary means of prison ministry and prisoner re-entry (Progressive National Baptist Convention, Christian Association for Prisoner Aftercare, Michigan Department of Corrections/Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative), others have endorsed the model as an effective means of ministry for congregations working with individuals and families affected by crime and incarceration. Among the organizations that have either posted the handbook on their websites, or made it available to individuals and congregations in their orbit of influence, are the American Baptist Churches/USA, The Institute for Prison Ministry of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton (Ill.) College, the New Jersey Corrections and Community Summit, the Indianapolis Center for Congregations and Prison Fellowship International.

EXPANDING BEYOND CARE TO JUSTICE

Policy Considerations

We recognize that a fully orbed approach to prison ministry, prisoner re-entry and reintegration will not only address issues within the care paradigm, but will also explicitly address the public dimension or concept of justice, from both a civil-legal and a theological notion. At the end of the day, after personal energies have been mobilized to effect care, mercy, forgiveness, redemption and reconciliation, we might ask: "Have the scales of justice been leveled?"

Several persons we interviewed noted that it was often easier to secure assistance from returning communities for restorative justice initiatives than it was from public officials and those working in the criminal justice system. This could be a reflection not simply of personal reticence, but also an ethos within the criminal justice system that reflect shortcomings in public policy. We must specifically ask whether after the person returning from incarceration has done his or her work of trying to make everything whole and putting things right with others and with their community, what is the obligation of a just society to lend assistance to those who need support to live productive lives? When will persons returning from incarceration who have paid their debt to society be permitted to fully exercise their voting rights and overcome the challenges of employment and housing restrictions? Is American society prepared to practice justice towards poor people placed in wretched situations where crime and violence are environmental norms? What new policies and public commitments are necessary and forthcoming to sustain the good work that faith communities, private philanthropy and community good will have produced?

> Healing Communities can reverse the trends of social disintegration facing communities that receive a disproportionate number of persons returning from incarceration.

The Healing Communities model offers a distinct approach to public policy and advocacy ministries that reflects the best of research and experience in mobilizing congregations to do "social ministry."[12] Congregations are more likely to mobilize around social issues when introduced to them through the lived experiences of those they work with, as opposed to adopting an advocacy position based on the content of the issue itself. Policy advocacy flows from congregations encountering the consequences of hurtful or insensitive policy through the lives of those they know. The Healing Communities model enables congregations to work with families affected by collateral sanctions in employment, housing, citizenship and other areas, and to develop activities or organized ministries of policy advocacy based on seeing the real consequences of policies that work against successful reintegration.

One question is: To what extent are clergy in low-income African American communities aware of, and participating in, the public policy debate about the future of prisoner re-entry? Despite the heroic efforts of many organizations in re-entry ministries, we did not find widespread involvement in care-giving and healthy community initiatives by African American clergy. In our interviews, only a small percentage of clergy mentioned policy and public mobilization as a component of their strategy.

However, congregations and clergy become more aware of policy issues as they encounter barriers to reintegration through their ministry with families affected by crime and incarceration. They increasingly see the need for advocacy regarding employment, housing, education and citizenship, as well as services for their children. They develop awareness of the specific issues and policies that require their attention. They see the need for collective organization on behalf of returning citizens and their families, and take advantage of the collective strength of the congregations of the prayer circles to use their collective voice and resources.

Congregations and their leaders should be aware of the local and state agencies that have responsibility for the incarcerated and returning citizens. They develop referral networks for services beyond what they can offer at the congregational level. They develop a working knowledge of the role of federal agencies and the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Working together, the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have attempted to help persons returning from incarceration find and keep employment, obtain transitional housing and receive mentoring. Additionally, many states (including Michigan and Indiana where congregations are employing the Healing Communities model), have their own offices of faith-based and community initiatives, where partnerships with criminal justice, human services and other agencies can be brokered for the faith community.

The passage of the Second Chance Act gave more visibility to the challenges facing returning citizens and their families. Congregations are growing that hold federal and state agencies accountable for proper implementation of the Act and for proper community involvement in shaping the ways in which the resources and programs flow from the Act. The development of truly Healing Communities requires that even governmental institutions – in our democracy extensions of the people – reflect the aims of justice as reflected in the restorative justice movement. This is a fully orbed approach.

In 2010, the Annie E. Casey Foundation formalized a relationship with the Philadelphia Leadership Foundation (PLF) to take on the role of intermediary for the Healing Communities model. PLF is a chapter of the national federation, Leadership Foundations of North America. PLF, led by board chair W. Wilson Goode, continues to develop the initiative through strengthening existing sites and creating new ones. They continue to work with congregations and religious bodies dedicated to bring to bear the resources of their faith traditions for families affected by crime and criminal justice. AECF has looked to see how religious institutions can mine their traditions of forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation and healing to be a viable resource in making communities more receptive to those returning from incarceration. We continue to seek to identify best and promising practices, continue the process of developing a dissemination strategy, and **enhance a network of Healing Communities** that will develop more fully in the disadvantaged communities of our nation. Healing Communities can reverse the trends of social disintegration facing communities that receive a disproportionate number of persons returning from incarceration. We believe faith communities can be a resource in their development.

End Notes

1 Interview with Rev. Lonnie McLeod, co-founder of Exodus Transitional Community re-entry program, August 2006.

2 Correspondence with Kay Pranis, former director, Minnesota Department of Corrections, Re-entry Programs, June 2006

3 "America Behind Bars," Pew Center for the States, 2008

4 Bureau of Justice Statistics "Prison Inmates at Midyear 2008"

5 Ibid.; see also "Balancing Justice with Mercy" at www.aecf.org

5 Cnaan, Ram A. and Jill W. Sinha; *Research & Action Brief #2 - Back into the Fold: Helping Ex-Prisoners Reconnect through Faith*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation: Baltimore: MD. 2003; also see Smith, R. Drew, *Beyond the Boundaries: Low –income residents, faith-based organizations, and neighborhood coalitions building*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation: Baltimore: MD. 2003. Owens, Michael Leo and R. Drew Smith. "Congregations in Low-Income Neighborhoods and the Implication for Social Welfare Policy Research." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 34 (3), September 2005, pp 316-339. Cnaan, R.A., Stephanie C. Boddie, Charlene McGrew, and Jennifer Kang. (2006). *The Other Philadelphia Story: How local congregations support quality of life in urban America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Barnes, Sandra. "Priestly and Prophetic Influences on Black Church Social Services." Social Problems 51(2), pp.202-221. Note Mark Chaves suggests a minority of churches actually provide services like prison re-entry that require more frequent contact and substantial staffing and financial resources. See Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

6 T.R.Clear, D.R. Rose, and J.A. Ryder, "Coercive Mobility and the Community: The Impact of Removing and Returning Offenders," paper prepared for the Re-entry Roundtable, Urban Institute, October 2000.

8 The handbook "What Shall We Then Do? A Family Freedom Kit" resulted from a collaboration between Casey and the Progressive National Baptist Convention's Social Justice and Prison Ministry Commission. Its religious and cultural orientation reflects the ministries of African American Baptist churches. Two subsequent version of the handbook are entitled "Balancing Justice with Mercy," one for an ecumenical Christian audience and the other for an interfaith audience. All three versions have Casey Consultant Linda Mills as primary author.

9 See their website www.healingcommunitiesmi.org

10 See "The Black Middle Class Church and the Quest for Community," Harold Dean Trulear in The Drew Gateway, 1991.

11 In some states and counties, congregations must be certified by some recognized prison ministry agency to gain access to prisons or jails to do ministry. Prison Fellowship is recognized as a training agency for many departments of correction.

12 Dudley, Carl and Sally Johnson. *Energizing the Congregation: Images the Shape your Church's Ministry*, Louisville: John Knox, 1993. Dudley and Johnson demonstrate that congregations are better mobilized to social forms of ministry and advocacy once they are familiar with the stories of the lives that social systems and policy affects.

Contact Information

Philadelphia Leadership Foundation
2210 S. 71st Street
Philadelphia, PA
19142
215.726.1247
www.healingcommunitiesusa.org

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Carole Thompson
Chief Administrative Officer
Office of the Executive Vice President
410.223.2933
cthompson@aecf.org

Tiara McKinnon
Administrative Assistant
Office of the Executive Vice President
410.223.2997
TMcKinnon@aecf.org

Notes

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
410.547.6600
www.aecf.org