

JUST FOR MENTORS

Tips, inspiration, and encouragement as you mentor men and women in prison



JULY 2023

Dear Mentor,

During a recent group discussion inside a prison, Hendrina and I listened to one of the participants share his disappointment with the latest chapel service, which was led by guests from a church outside the prison. He felt discouraged because the speaker left the impression that they, as the inside church, were “less than” the outside church.

Hearing this broke my heart, but it also gave me the chance to encourage him in his role as a faith leader within the prison church community. I explained to him the importance of having grounded leaders who have proven influence and firsthand experience of life inside prison. Outsiders may not fully understand the daily realities of prison life or the role of the church within its walls.

In our conversation, we also acknowledged the restrictions that people in prison face when it comes to faith-based gatherings. The freedoms we take for granted on the outside, such as the ability to gather for Bible studies or worship, are not always available inside jails and prisons. Without a staff person or volunteer available to oversee chapel services or Bible studies, they may not be held on a given week. These challenges make it more vital for the prison church to have strong leaders who can help guide and support others incarcerated alongside them in their faith journeys.

Within our correctional system, incarcerated men and women are typically not allowed to have a formal leadership title or position. These restrictions are put in place to avoid potential abuse or manipulation of power. As a result, titles such as pastor, elder, and deacon are not recognized within correctional institutions. However, one doesn't need a title to be a Christian leader within the walls of a prison. People who exhibit wisdom, integrity, and humility naturally attract others.

As mentors, we can encourage our students to discover how God wants them to live and engage in their community. As they grow in their understanding of biblical truth and practice its teachings, they can become people of influence and lay leadership. Genuine concern for others will flourish as they live out God's Word.

We can also encourage our students to be involved in the Christian community within their prisons. Whether through small-group Bible studies, volunteer-led discussions, or chapel services, participation in these activities can promote healthy experiences and provide living examples of kindness, acceptance, and accountability. By actively engaging in these opportunities, our students can cultivate the skills and qualities of a leader and make a positive impact on those around them.

“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20).

It was disheartening to hear that the volunteers who led the chapel service left a discouraging message behind. As we spoke with the church leader in our group, I encouraged him to counteract this message by affirming those who attended. The church behind prison walls is not “less than” the church on the outside. While they may have fewer resources, opportunities, and structures, it is important to recognize that the notion of being “less than” is a false belief that should not have been expressed to the chapel participants. They have been given the same commands (John 14:15), promises (Hebrews 6:13–20), and access to our Savior, who came to offer us all the same gift of truth that will set us free (John 8:32).

As you write to your students, remember that it is important to recognize the value of each member of the church, regardless of their circumstances or location. By doing so, we can help promote a sense of community and

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belonging and encourage each person to recognize their unique gifts and contributions to the church. Let us strive to support and uplift one another, whether inside or outside prison walls.

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Serving alongside you,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas Cupery".

Douglas Cupery
Church Mobilization Director

Have a question? You can contact the mentor support team at mentor@cpministries.org or 800-668-2450.

NEWS & NOTES

Quarterly Virtual Mentor Gathering

Vanessa Gardner will discuss the role of a prison chaplain and how they can support Crossroads students during their incarceration and reentry to society. Her knowledge and experience in this field stem from her master's degree in criminal justice, her former role as the head female chaplain within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, and her involvement as a board member and volunteer with the Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association (CMCA).

Vanessa has been a speaker at past mentor community gatherings, so you may already be familiar with her. As a former Crossroads student, she is eager to give back to Crossroads by sharing her expertise with our mentors. Please join us!

Tuesday, July 18th, at 8:00 p.m. (EST)

URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84182956475?pwd=QWs1OGIYZTZlejVOSkcyOEc5NW9SUT09>

Meeting ID: 841 8295 6475

Passcode: 329410

Comments in Lessons

Please take advantage of the opportunity to write comments within your students' lessons. Our students appreciate knowing someone has thoroughly reviewed their answers and are encouraged by your comments. If you are not sure what to write, you can simply include a word or phrase to offer encouragement and let them know they have demonstrated great effort or done excellent work. Avoid using check marks, as your student might perceive them negatively.

Parole Recommendation Letter Requests

If a student asks for a recommendation letter for parole, please tell them they may send a written request directly to the Crossroads office. We will provide them with an official letter confirming they are enrolled as a Crossroads student. Tier 1 mentors do not have enough information to advocate for students effectively. Tier 2 and 3 mentors will be given the opportunity to provide comments in the letter supplied by Crossroads.