

## *Biblically Based Correctional Ministry*

### **Dr. Karen Swanson**

Director of the Institute for Prison Ministries (IPM) at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College.



Dimensions of Correctional Ministry  
CM301 Dr. Karen Swanson, Ed.D.

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### **Correctional Ministries and Chaplain's Association (CMCA)**

A professional, evangelical association. The mission of CMCA is to connect, encourage, equip, and strengthen Christians as they fulfill the Great Commission in corrections.

[www.cmcainternational.org](http://www.cmcainternational.org)

Welcome to Dimensions of Correctional ministry. I am Dr. Karen Swanson, Director of the Institute for Prison Ministries at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. I am excited to have you join this learning community with other Christian volunteers, chaplains and reentry workers serving in correctional ministry. It has been my experience that you will be challenged and encouraged in your ministry throughout the course through the readings, lectures and assignments. But, a strong component of this course are the discussions where you will learn from and sharpen one another.

Dimensions of Correctional Ministry was created to provide an overview of correctional ministry areas and topics and the first course in the Correctional Ministries Certificate program. Some topics are developed at a deeper level and some have an entire course dedicated to them. So whether this is your first course or you started with another of the correctional ministry courses, welcome.

Before we get into lecture one, I want to introduce you to the Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association known as CMCA. In 2011, CMCA was birthed through the collaborative efforts of many ministries. CMCA is a professional organization through which Christians can celebrate their faith and passion for correctional ministry with other individuals, organizations and churches; develop professionally through online resources, trainings, and certifications; and be inspired through networking and conferences. The mission of CMCA is to connect, encourage, equip and strengthen Christians as they fulfill the great commission in corrections. The vision is for Christians to work together in correctional ministry to advance Christ's kingdom and enhance public safety. In other words, this umbrella organization seeks to bring together Christians who are volunteers, chaplains, reentry workers, pastors, corrections personnel and community leaders to work together making disciples of Christ. In this ministry we combine the Great commission, to make

## Definition of Correctional Ministry

Christian correctional ministry is an umbrella term that includes everyone serving in crime prevention and those impacted by crime and its aftermath through the transforming message of the gospel and holistic care grounded in love.

disciples, and the Great commandment, to love God and our neighbor. We recognize we need each other to accomplish this mission. We hope you will join CMCA. For more information, visit [www.cmcainternational.org](http://www.cmcainternational.org)

Let's open in prayer. Father, we humbly come before you as we start this course together seeking to learn from you. We want to serve you better as we serve those impacted by crime. Lord, I pray for those students who have experienced a growing passion for this ministry yet are unsure where you want them to serve. Please give them discernment as they seek your direction. Please guide our time together and help us to have your heart and love for others. In Jesus Name, Amen.

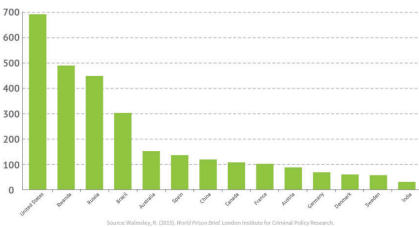
In lecture one we will define correctional ministry, introduce the mission field we seek to serve, and examine the Biblical support for correctional ministry. As Christians, the Bible is our authority for Truth and life which is foundational for our ministry.

So, what is correctional ministry? The more common term used is "prison ministry". But prison ministry brings with it a limited image of volunteers going into a prison and evangelizing inmates. Part of our role in correctional ministry is to educate others. Using the term correctional ministry may require a description as it is a broader term which is inclusive of the many aspects of those who serve people impacted by crime and the criminal justice system. It includes those who serve in jails, prisons, in reentry, with juveniles, their families, victims, and corrections staff.

Christian correctional ministry is an umbrella term that includes Christians serving those impacted by crime and the criminal justice system through the transforming message of the Gospel and holistic care, grounded in love. Correctional ministry includes prevention by serving the children and youth who are in the prison pipeline by addressing their needs. It includes speaking up against injustice in criminal justice policies and practices. It includes providing for the spiritual needs of those behind bars because we recognize that true transformation, healing and restoration can only come through Christ. It includes meeting not just the spiritual needs but every dimension of a person's life – physical, mental, emotional, social, by providing holistic care. As Christ followers we are to make Christ known through our words and our deeds. James 2:14-17 says, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds. Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without

## The Mission Field

### International Rates of Incarceration per 100,000



clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” As Christians we are to live and speak the gospel.

How we do our work is to be “grounded in love.” The Christian’s motivation for providing holistic care and making Christ known is our love for God and our love for others. Love is the purest motivation and exemplified by God when he sent His Son to die for us as described in John 3:16.

*As we grow more in love with God, our love for others should be growing as well.*

I Corinthians 13:1-3 reminds us that if what we do is without love, we are a clanging cymbal, what we do is nothing, and we gain nothing. Loving others, is also a witness to the watching world of Christ’s love in us.

Let’s take a look at the correctional ministry mission field.

In the US, we live during a time known as the era of mass incarceration where the United States is the world’s leader in incarceration rates. While the U.S. has 5% of the world’s population, it has 25% of the incarcerated population. In 2016, there were more than 2.3 million people in our nation’s prisons and jails — a 500% increase over the last forty years. This means that 1 in 108 adults in the US are incarcerated (2012) (jails or prisons). Males dominate the incarcerated population comprising 93%. Even though females make up only 7%, they have been the fastest growing inmate population in the past several years.

You can see on the graph that the US incarcerates more people than any other country in the world. There is no other country close to the U.S. There are multiple contributing factors as to why the US locks up more than other countries; it is not because we have a better police system than other countries. It is a complex issue. If you are interested in reading more about mass incarceration, a Biblical Response to Mass Incarceration is available at the cmca website.

This chart shows the number incarcerated in jails and prisons, and their crimes. I just want to point out a few things. First, half of those incarcerated in the federal prison are drug related crimes and half of those in state prisons are for non-violent crimes. The area of immigration may be changing with the

## Jails and Prisons

### Jails

- Local – vary in size
- Waiting trial, 62% unconvicted
- 38% convicted/serve < 1 year
- May stay less than one month – only a few hours
- Males, 87%; Females 13%

### Prison

- State, Federal, Private
- Different security levels
- In rural areas
- Sentenced
- Ave length of stay 2.5 years
- Males, 93%; Females 7%

changes in presidential leadership. The bottom line is that politics and policies directly affect incarceration rates.

I know when I first started volunteering, I did not know the difference between a jail and a prison. Let me explain. Jails house adult inmates serving a sentence of less than one year (although in some states it is less than two years) and the majority of inmates, 62% are waiting trial. A jail is found within each county or smaller counties merge and share a jail facility. Jail sizes vary from having 10 beds to thousands of beds. In most jails, both male and female inmates are held in the same facility, in different areas.

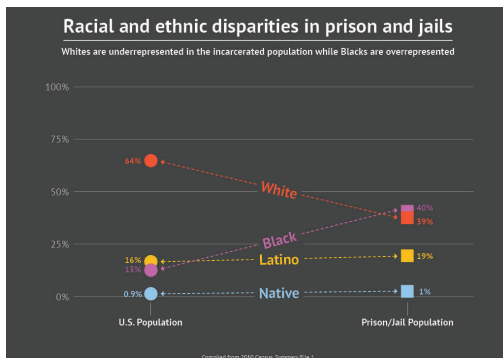
Inmates with different crime classifications are mixed together except in large jails. Typically there are few inmate programs offered since the purpose is temporary custody and the type of programming is different because of the high inmate turnover as some stay for a few hours and some stay for years depending on their case and if they can afford to be bonded out. The inmate population is 87% male and 13% female.

There are state, federal and private prisons. Prisons are designated by gender and designated a security level placing inmates with the same security level together. Prisons house adult inmates serving more than one year and those on death row. Prisons are typically found in rural areas within each state. The prison population is 93% male and 7% female.

In addition to the issue of mass incarceration is the racial and ethnic disparities in the US prisons and jails. Again you can see by the chart that minorities are overrepresented in the incarceration population.

This chart depicts the lifetime likelihood of imprisonment based on gender and race. Again it demonstrates both mass incarceration and disproportionate confinement which especially impacts black communities.

In this chart, you see the disparity of incarceration rates by state. I have included the top 5 incarceration states with Louisiana leading the way and Maine having the lowest incarceration rate. There is not one “American Criminal Justice System” but 51 – 50 state and 1 federal. In addition, counties have their own system so again there is disparity depending on where the crime is committed.



## Reentry

- At least 95% of federal and state prisoners will reenter society
- More than 700,000 prisoners were released in 2010.
- Approximately 9 million individuals are released from jail each year.

### At-Risk Youth

The “criminalized environment” facing Latino and African American children where “like the victims of a crippling or wasting disease, once drawn into the prison pipeline, massive numbers of young people lose their opportunity to live happy, productive lives, not because of festering microbes but because of years spend behind bars.”

Marian Wright Edlemen, President of the Children's Defense Fund

Of the millions incarcerated, at least 95% will one day be released back into their community. The issue of reentry and reintegration is a huge ministry area because of the number of people, their multiple needs and the barriers they face. In 2010, more than 700,000 prisoners were released. In jails, approximately 9 million individuals are released from jail each year. You can see by these numbers that the mission field is not just while someone is incarcerated but continued care after their release.

What about juveniles? Juveniles are also often omitted when people think of correctional ministry. In this chart you can see the crimes and numbers of youth who are incarcerated. In the past couple of years there has been movement for prison reform within the juvenile system because what was being done was not working. The reform has reduced the number of youth incarcerated by offering alternative housing and sentencing options.

Prevention is another area of correctional ministry. Churches can choose to engage in helping at-risk youth who are in the prison pipeline, especially minority youth. Marian Wright Edlemen, the President of the Children's Defense Fund states, The “criminalized environment” facing Latino and African American children where “like the victims of a crippling or wasting disease, once drawn into the prison pipeline, massive numbers of young people lose their opportunity to live happy, productive lives, not because of festering microbes but because of years spend behind bars.”

The Children's Defense Fund has created a program to stop the Cradle to Prison Pipeline by offering ways individuals and churches can address the following risk factors:

- Poverty
- A culture of punishment rather than prevention
- Inadequate access to health care
- Gaps in early childhood development
- Disparate educational opportunities
- Intolerable abuse and neglect
- Unmet mental and emotional problems

### School to Prison Pipeline

"In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunities of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available on equal terms."

Chief Justice Earl Warren, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)

- Substance abuse
- Ineffective juvenile justice and child welfare systems
- Sub-cultures that glorify violence and illegal occupations

You can see by this list, the complexity of criminal behavior and the multiple factors which contribute to it.

Another area of concern is the School to Prison pipeline. Chief Justice Earl Warren, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) states, "In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunities of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available on equal terms." Each child needs an opportunity for a quality education.

Risk Factors include:

- Zero tolerance policies – locking kids up
- Standardized testing – schools teaching to the test
- Overzealous policing efforts
- Inadequate resources
- Lack of qualified teachers
- Insufficient funding for counselors, special education services, and textbooks
- Overcrowding classrooms

All of these factors contribute to at-risk kids failing school and turning to a life of crime for survival because they can't make it through conventional means.

What about those who are left behind – the families and children of the Incarcerated? One in 50 children in the U.S. have a parent in prison. Fifty-eight percent of children of prisoners is under the age of 10. Here is another ministry area. Both children and caregivers have special needs.

Another people group impacted by crime are corrections Personnel who are often omitted in correctional ministry. But they

### Families and Children of the Incarcerated



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58% of children of prisoners are under the age of 10.

## Crime Victims

- The violent crime rate was 26.1 victimizations per 1,000 persons in 2012.
- The rate of property crime was 155.8 per 1,000 households in 2012, primarily due to an increase in theft.

**This mission field is in our homes, churches, and communities.**

are doing time in a different way than inmates and have unique challenges. Their job is stressful and it takes a toll on their wellness. There are chaplains who can minister to both inmates and staff but a volunteer most often must minister to one or the other. Maybe you are called you minister with staff.

Chaplains are also doing time and have unique challenges. Chaplains are either employed by corrections, non-profits or serve as volunteers. Two of their primary challenges include working in the corrections environment and religious pluralism. The demands of the job are overwhelming as well as the issues they deal with and the environment in which they work.

We must never forget the crime victims. The violent crime rate (which includes rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated and simple assault) was 26.1 victimizations per 1,000 persons in 2012. The rate of property crime (which includes burglary, theft and motor vehicle theft) was 155.8 per 1,000 households in 2012, primarily due to an increase in theft.

Let's not forget whole communities which experience high levels of poverty, issues contributing to the prison pipeline, more crime and a higher number of offenders returning to the community. There are many needs and opportunities for ministry.

As you can see the mission field is vast, complex, and multi-faceted. But this mission field is not in another country – it is in our homes, churches, and communities. Most people in the U.S. now know someone who is justice involved or been impacted by crime. We can no longer ignore the issues of mass incarceration and disproportionate confinement.

So, as Christians, what should be our response? Silence is not an option.

First, we should care because Jesus cares. Luke records the beginning of Jesus's ministry in Luke 4:16-19. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah (61:1-2) was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he had anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Matthew tells us to visit prisoners and provide aftercare.

Luke 4:16-19

### Jesus Cares

"And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah [61:1-2] was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'"

*For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited me in; naked and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me. . . Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'*

Visiting means to give comfort and encouragement. We can do this through loving the incarcerated by caring for them and treating them with dignity. We can provide aftercare by meeting formerly incarcerated persons' needs of clothes, shelter, food, and health care when they return home.

We reflect God's heart when we share the gospel. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Tim 2:3-4 and 2 Peter 3:9...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

As Christians, we know the power of the gospel and that any life can be transformed. Just look at the apostle Paul and his transformation. There is no one, no one, who is beyond the reach of Christ.

*2 Corinthians 5:17: Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

As we talked about earlier, our motivation must be love. We understand how much God loves us and wants us to share His love with others.

*Jesus reminds us of what is important to God in Matthew. Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

I John 4: 7-11 states,

*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God*

1 Tim 2:3-4, 2 Peter 3:9

### Reflect God's Heart

"This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

1 Timothy 2:3-4

"Not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

2 Peter 3:9

Matthew 22:37-40

### Motivated by Love

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

*so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

This means we need to let go of judgement stigma and shame we place on those who have committed a crime and often on their families.

We are also called to fulfil the great commission - to make disciples of Christ. This is one of our purposes as followers of Christ.

*Then Jesus came to them (disciples) and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20*

Lennie Spitale, author, chaplain and former prisoner states, I do not know of any more fertile ground for the gospel in all the United States than our jails and prisons. I make that statement unequivocally and without reservation. If you are looking for a more fruitful harvest field, apart from leaving the country, you will be hard-pressed to find it.

How do we minister effectively? First, we need to be Biblically Grounded.

*2 Timothy 2:15 states, Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Be a student of God's Word and create learning opportunities for those you serve to encounter God. This may be in such forms as in a worship service, Bible study, mentoring or counseling.*

Second, we need a biblical view of crime. A theology which balances justice and mercy, and individual and community responsibility. Yes, crime is an individual moral issue. The Bible is clear that God will hold each person accountable for their thoughts and behaviors and there are consequences for sin. Justice is getting what we deserve and we all deserve death because of our sin. But justice must include mercy. We reflect the character of God when we show mercy to others by loving them and reaching out to them. Biblical justice demands we also speak up for those who are treated unfairly and to address injustices (social, economic and criminal justice) in the community that contributes to crime. This means we are to speak up for and with those im-

Matthew 28:18-20

### Make Disciples

"Then Jesus came to them [disciples] and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

2 Timothy 2:15

### Be Biblically Grounded

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Close your eyes for a second, envision a drug user. What kind of person do you envision?

pacted by policies and procedures which are unjust. That we can no longer be silent while systemic injustice continues around us.

Society and those in the Church, tend to fall along two lines of thinking. Some people feel that mass incarceration is justified. Criminals should go behind bars, right? Do the crime, do the time. Lock'em up and throw away the key. Others in society want to rescue and blame society and systems without holding individuals responsible for their actions. Neither extreme is effective in transforming lives and making a safer community nor Biblical. We need to hold people accountable and also seek to have a just system for all, not justice for those only because they are wealthy or of a certain race.

A third area which affects ministry is your image of criminals. Close your eyes for a second and envision a drug user. If you were to describe that person, what would they look like?

This question was used in a study published in the Journal of Alcohol and Drug education. 95% of the respondents pictured a Black drug user, yet at the time (1995) only 15% of drug users were Black.

How should Christians view criminals? Again, Scripture informs our thinking. God does not see criminals any differently than a non-criminal.

- Everyone is created in the image of God – Genesis 1:31
- Everyone is a Sinner – Romans 3:23
- Everyone is forgivable – Ephesians 1:7
- Everyone is redeemable – Galatians 3:13
- Everyone is held Accountable - Romans 14:12

Society's view of criminals is painted through the media as those who are evil, monsters, losers, and often minorities. Society locks out everyone who has committed a felony by creating an undercaste system where the person will never be a full citizen again and carry a life sentence by being locked out of professions, community engagement, and housing just to name a few.

As you develop your beliefs about correctional ministry and

### Faith Works

Byron Johnson, a leading researcher, finds an overwhelming amount of empirical evidence of an inverse relationship between religion and crime.

Source: *More God, Less Crime*, p. 81

those we serve, seek Scripture to provide the foundation of those beliefs. It is Christ we are serving.

As Christians, we know that Christ makes a difference in our lives. Some people, especially unbelievers, wonder if Christian Correctional Ministry makes a difference. Byron Johnson, a leading researcher and author of *More God, Less Crime*, reports an overwhelming amount of empirical evidence of an inverse relationship between religion and crime. In other words, those who engage in religious activities engage in less crime. This can also be a prevention by taking youth to church, or youth group, they will engage in less risky and criminal behaviors.

Not only does religion help reduce crime, but Todd Clear and associates found “Religion in prison helps to humanize a de-humanizing situation by assisting prisoners to cope with being a social outcast in a prison situation that is fraught with loss, deprivation, and survival challenges. Prison religion can be thus justified because it prevents the further deterioration of inmates.” Christian Correctional ministry does make a difference.

Correctional ministry is supported with numerous Scriptures and how we think and respond to crime and offenders must be biblically based. Like many mission fields the needs and opportunities exceed the resources and people available. There is always more to be done.

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

I don’t know how you got involved in correctional ministry. Maybe you have a personal connection because of a loved one being justice-involved or maybe you were recruited by a volunteer or chaplain. However you became involved, I want to thank you for answering the call to serve and speak up for this mission field. I encourage you to invite others and to educate them on this vast mission field as there is so much fear and myths associated with it.

Thanks again for taking the course. For some of you, it may be a long time since you were in school and taking an online course is intimidating. I promise you will get the hang of it and it will get easier. I do want to remind you that this course is demand-

ing and that you will need to carve out space in your schedule and not just add it on to a busy life. Enjoy!