

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF MINISTERING TO PRISON INMATES:
A CASE STUDY OF OGBOMOSO PRISON YARD

AN ESSAY

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this essay is to examine the Challenges and Prospects of Ministering to Prison Inmates in Ogbomoso Prison. It is discovered that Churches operate Prison Ministry but the rate at which ex-convicts return to Prison is alarming. The purpose of the study was to examine the challenges associated with the Baptist churches ministering to prison inmates in Ogbomoso, find out the causes of imprisonment, examine the challenges of the ministry and the prospects of prison ministry. The study design was a descriptive one with a questionnaire as the instrument used for data collection shared among selected Baptist Churches in Ogbomoso and student Pastors in the Seminary. It was strongly established from the data collected that the major causes of imprisonment are unemployment, poverty, peer group pressure and broken home. Lastly, some recommendations were made to pastors, the church, the family members, the Ogbomoso Baptist Conference and the Nigerian Baptist Convention at large. Among the recommendation are: Pastors should give a sound biblical teaching, the church should identify with families of inmates, and systematic discipleship training should be encouraged from the convention and local Baptist Churches.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The Nigerian prison can be compared to mission fields, the field is ripe but the workers are few. The Nigerian Baptist Convention cannot just be satisfied with its effort so far but should do more through its prison ministry to affect the society for the better still. Prison ministry can be rewarding if churches in our convention will be more committed to funding it, if members live exemplary lives and see prison ministry as a calling of its own kind. This will make them not to see prison ministry as just another kind of ministry outside the church but as an integral part of the church's ministry to the world. Every church in the Nigerian Baptist Convention, every association and every Conference should remember that ministering to inmates is synonymous to ministering to Jesus. How? Jesus Christ said "I was in prison, and you visited me" (Matthew 25:40). There are souls to win and there are souls to save for the Lord Jesus Christ, they are right in the prisons. Prison ministry is a task that we must do and as a Convention family with enormous resources at our disposal we can still do much better. We should always be on our toes to go a step further in ministering to prison inmates and ex-convicts in all nooks and corners of this country. Prison ministry is a divine mandate from God to all believers. For the Nigerian Baptists to be able to make a better impact on prison ministry requires a lot of commitment on the part of the convention body and each local church alike. Effective prison ministry is the need of the hour. Considering the demanding nature of prison ministry churches should come together as Baptist prison ministers at all levels, this

will help a lot in putting resources in a good use to accomplish the task to the glory of God. Nigeria needs such a concerted effort if this generation will be a greater blessing and experience greater peace. We need to be more involved and do more exploits for the Lord in reaching this seeming neglected group of people amidst us.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a numbers of ways our churches can be involved in prison ministry. Much of respondents to the questionnaires and personal involvement and interview revealed this fact. The prison ministry shall flourish if churches that make up the Nigerian Baptist Convention in Ogbomoso Conference can take the following steps:

1. The conference churches should pray for open door of ministries not yet discovered in regard to prison ministry.
2. Prison Ministry of the churches should be fortified through a renewed interest as emphasis is laid regularly on the necessity for the ministry.
3. Church leaders should be more committed to the task of reaching inmates and ex-convicts by participating personally in going to the prison yards to minister.
4. Churches should be encouraged to be engaged in Christ-centered counseling and educational aspect of prison ministry. That is the church should adopt holistic ministry approach.
5. Churches should take discipline with seriousness with the mind to correct and restore the erring members rather than ex-communication.
6. Church leaders and ministry workers should give a sound biblical preaching and teaching an emphasis and rebuke sins among believers.

7. The convention and conference through churches should endeavor to train those who are committed and have the calling for prison ministry or chaplaincy.
8. For the conference to make better impact, they should make effort to establish rehabilitation centre and establish functional vocational training centers in Ogbomoso town and cooperate with other agencies and Christian bodies that operate this kind of ministry.
9. Systematic discipleship training should be encouraged from the conference level for all churches and be put in place for interested inmates.
10. The government should try and create more employment for her citizen or interest free loan should be given to young graduates and ex-convicts for agriculture to control crime rate caused by unemployment.
11. Parents and teachers should be more friendly, observant and careful at home and school to understand the problem and needs of their children/ pupils.
12. Moral education and citizenship studies should be included in the curriculum of studies of every level of education so as to dissuade people from crime perpetration.