

ONE PARISH ONE PRISONER

LEARNING MODULE: ILLINOIS

ROLLING AWAY THE STONES



Jesus was friends with Lazarus. He loved him, was moved to tears that his friend was buried, and called his name in the tombs.

That's what you've all been doing—together. It might seem, at this point, one person is Lazarus and the rest is community. Later on, it might seem like we're taking turns being Lazarus, holding each other up and stepping out into the light.

You all are embodying this mystery with your letters, phone calls, and visits: entering into Jesus' kind of open-hearted relationship with those in Hades, the underworld. Hopefully you are learning to not only trust, but also to know and enjoy each other. Maybe you consider each other friends now. Church folks. Incarcerated people. That's the first part. You're seeing how these friends of yours, and God's, are coming to life.

But for Jesus, a relationship and coming to new life was just the beginning of resurrection.

That huge stone was still in the way.

Every once in a while, we ask people to imagine if they were Lazarus, waking up in the darkness, wrapped up like a mummy, with no one rolling away the stone at the entrance of their tomb. How would they feel?

"Trapped," some people say.

"Terrified."

"Stuck."

"Alone."

"Confused."

"I'd rather be dead than awake while sealed down there."

Bingo. That's exactly how millions of men and women—whom God has brought to new life while inside jail or prison—feel when they release and none of the reentry barriers are removed. Stuck underground.

Resurrection alone would be cruel without rolling away the stone.



LAZARUS DIDN'T ROLL AWAY HIS OWN STONE

Very few people released from prison (the lowest chamber of the underworld) are able to fully break free into the land of the living. These barriers—these gates of Hades we've put between the incarcerated and the living—are just too overwhelming.

The small community of local folks Jesus called to help roll away the stone, it probably didn't feel like "spiritual work": grunting, pushing, stopping and trying a different angle, working together. But today, the barriers are a mountain of fees, fines, requirements, offices, agencies, classes, holds on licenses, and closed doors to housing and employment.

We don't roll our sleeves up to push a 10-foot boulder. We get out laptops to research resources, pull out our phones to track down offices and set up appointments. We gently push and open new conversations with agencies in our community. Bear through cumbersome, expensive call systems to fill out an online application together. We print and sign and scan paperwork. We pick our friend up and drive to appointments, sit in court, and wait our turn together.

Along the way, you might feel overwhelmed—frustrated, angry, stressed. Why is it so difficult?

This is resurrection work: What every person in prison in America needs when they try to make it out, all the way.

IT TAKES A TEAM

OPOP Chicago has the good fortune of living in a state that is paying a lot of attention to reentry. For several years, coalitions and resource libraries have been building a process that was accelerated during the pandemic due to increased need. These are some really great comprehensive resources that help lay out the landscape and provide practical tips for addressing each of the stones that follow. Here are two that we recommend starting with:

- **Mapping Your Future: A Guide to Successful Re-Entry**
Published by the Education Justice Project at the University of Illinois, this guide is truly a goldmine for practical steps for before and after release, including forms, links, and organization strategies. Read through it yourself and please print out a copy for your incarcerated friend.
- **Inside Out Network**
This online networking community was built to create easy channels of communication between releasing individuals and service providers. Our friends currently in prison can create a profile and start growing their network of service providers in their specific areas of need.

We've boiled down years of reentry work into a few essential categories of "stones" to roll away.



A One Parish One Prisoner team meeting—organizing their reentry plans.

You're going to assign one parish team member to each (maybe you'll have enough for two team members on a role). The idea is to share the work. Spread it out. Focus on just one area and kick some butt(s).

Your incarcerated friend will lead the work, supervising with each respective role, both through letters and calls before release—then continuing that work together on the outside.

ROLES

For this month's learning, you get to OPEN and PEEK AT each of the roles linked below. (The last is the Pastoral one, so that one's probably settled. But everyone still sees what's involved.) Don't read the entire Role's page; each one is the comprehensive How-To for that person(s) to use in the coming months. Just skim and familiarize yourself with each one, asking:

Which would be a good fit for me?

This is the month everyone on the team takes on a role—and takes on this specific "stone" set for the next several months.

All hands on deck.

STONES & LAYERS FORM

Your incarcerated friend's most recent "Stones & Layers" form is your first map. This is where we start. (If you don't have it, reach out to us: alvin@undergroundministries.org.)

Check with your incarcerated friend about updates or progress that they've made already from the inside. Try to figure out which "STONES" they listed would fit under which role.

Now you're becoming a resurrection and reentry team, not just pals!

MUSCLES FLEX

Muscles, like the members of your team, move, adjust, shift weight, help each other.

That is to say, BE FLEXIBLE.

These roles aren't "set in stone." There's overlap. For example, the "DOC & HOUSING" person might need to collaborate with the "HEALTH SYSTEMS" person for parole-appointed chemical dependency classes.

YOU'VE GOT THIS

It's natural to feel overwhelmed at this point, as you review these. Imagine how most reentering individuals feel! You are entering into the emotions of resurrection, and the hope of the gospel:

" . . . and the gates of Hades will not prevail against this movement."
— Matthew 16:18

We emphasized at the Kickoff Orientation how Jesus founded his “church” (ekklesia), or movement, with this radical confidence: the locked doors and prison walls of hell, of Death, of the underworld, won’t be able to stop us.

Let that encourage you this month.

It’s only good news—and hard to believe—when we see how intimidating these barriers can be.

Jesus recruited a handful of followers to expand this movement of divine Life breaking through barriers of Death in our world. You are part of this movement. It’s bigger than your small team. But this is the cosmic hope swelling up within us: Jesus saying, “We got this. Do not be afraid. I give you the spiritual keys to break these gates open. Watch me. I’m with you.”

All the social work barriers you’re taking on is also profoundly spiritual work.

It’s what the church is for, if we take Jesus’ purpose statement seriously. This is resurrection work you’re doing.

ACTION STEPS THIS WEEK

- Make sure to PRINT this heavy module (with all Roll Away the Stones Roles) and MAIL it into your incarcerated friend.
- Glance through all those Roles. Think which one you’d be best at.
- After you decide, in your monthly team meeting, who’s taking which Role, everyone tell your incarcerated friend (in your next letter or call or video visit) which you’ll be taking on. And ask where they’d like to start. Releasing friends, take the lead.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Who wants to take on which Role? This is the meeting to figure it out together.
- Triage: Which of these “Stones” might need to be addressed right away, given your incarcerated friend’s release timeline? Does everyone have a recent copy of your friend’s Stones & Layers form? Help each other as you practice divvying up the various reentry barriers, or stones, your friend identified on that form—so each Role feels clear which ones are their responsibility to work on with your releasing friend in the months ahead.
- Do you feel overwhelmed? Good. You’ve dipped your toes in reentry. Imagine how men and women releasing alone from prison feel. Let your feelings create KINSHIP with those releasing from prison.

ONE PARISH ONE PRISONER

LEARNING MODULES: ILLINOIS

STONES



When facing release from prison, the most basic question for every incarcerated person is: Where am I gonna live? What's my release address?

What makes this even more pressing is that IDOC requires an approved release address before their ERD (estimated release date). You literally can't get out of prison without an approved release address. Many folks facing release just want an address to submit so they can get out, with little intention of actually living there.

We are about much more than finding an address. Incarcerated applicants to One Parish One Prisoner should be in a different frame of mind: more focused on finding the right housing that supports their healthy reentry and gives them the best chance at starting their new life.

Already read this? Yep: as a team, you started this work in the HOUSING module a month or two ago. Has one team member already begun to take the lead on this? Maybe that's your natural candidate for this Role? This is the page for designated team member to carry this super important housing work forward. It's the role that's relevant starting right now (other Roles are more about preparing for barriers down the road).

Here's the DOC & HOUSING Role for your team's journey, should you choose to accept it:

BEFORE RELEASE

FIELD SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE (FSR)

IDOC has Field Service Representatives assigned to each incarcerated individual. It's sometimes difficult for our friends on the inside to know who their FSR is, and it seems case loads and turnover rates are high. This is an important contact however, because IDOC promises a list of reentry resources and materials on the way out.

We're not sure yet, with IDOC, if parish team members are able to be in direct communication with releasing friends' FSRs. But let's give it a shot!

If you're able to get in touch with your friend's FSR, it could shed a lot of light on the journey ahead. We have found, when DOC staff sees that a prisoner on their caseload actually has responsible community members out here who care about them, who are ready to help and coordinate details... once you're able to explain that, they're often ready to help.

- Ask your incarcerated friend if they can get you their FSR's name and contact info. Have them send a heads up that their OPOP team (reentry assistants) wants to connect for a quick phone call.
- Reach out, introduce yourself: that you're part of a Parish Team at so-and-so church, paired with your Releasing Friend (use full name and IDOC#) under a program called One Parish One Prisoner, building relationship and a positive release plan to support their reentry into your community.
- Clarify details, confirm your friend's estimated release date (ERD), and say that you're helping with the release address/housing process.

GETTING AN ADDRESS (Review this material from before.)

You can help your friend think through, contact, and secure one or two good housing situations, starting now. This is all about being in dialogue with your incarcerated friend. Print and send this page, and talk about their preferences, in order. It's good to have a backup plan.

Here are the three most common options to present and discuss with your releasing friend.

- Live With Family - This isn't as easy as it sounds. Many folks leaving prison don't have healthy relationships with family members. Even if they're around, well, it's complicated. Sometimes starting a new, sober life often means making a break from the very environments that helped put them in prison. Family members' addresses are sometimes not approved by a DOC house inspection (existing residents may have felony charges, firearms, known drug activity, etc). Maybe your friend has a romantic partner offering their home as a release address option, but your friend feels conflicted about whether that's the best way to start their new life.

You're not the parent or boss, but ask good questions as good friends would. Maybe a family situation is just right. You can help communicate with the family, if nearby, and build relationship with them, too! Ask if it's OK to visit the home/family. Invite the family member or loved one to a team meeting, help them feel embraced and supported as well.

- Halfway Houses (90-Day Stays, Assigned and paid for by IDOC):
 - Cornerstone: (773) 909-2424
 - Serves men
 - private recovering community—specializes in the treatment of alcoholism, opioid addiction, substance abuse, and mental health and substance abuse
 - Hand'n'Hand (RSO-friendly): (773) 722-1312
 - Serves men
 - provides around the clock staff, meals, NA/CA/AA meetings, workshops, job training and placement referrals, substance abuse and mental health assessments
- Recovery or Transitional Housing Options (non-RSO, not assigned by IDOC, may need assurance of first month's rent) - Many communities have some local residential recovery programs. These are usually non-profit programs, with a stronger addiction-recovery (and often faith) focus. You may be turned off by a home with a manager and structured program. And/Or you might feel that's exactly needed for what's next—to grow, have a stable and sober environment, with some daily support to thrive.

Here are options within Cook County:

- St. Leonard's House (West Loop)- St. Leonard's Ministries provides interim housing and supportive services for formerly incarcerated men and women returning to the community from Illinois prisons. Program participants come to St. Leonard's House to find a safe environment in which they can develop skills to rebuild their lives and reshape their futures.
 - slministries.org/housing/saint-leonards-house/
- Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) - IMAN's Green ReEntry Housing Program works to implement IMAN's overall mission of health, wellness, and healing by making its leadership homes spaces that encourage the success of its residents by providing safe housing, structured programming focused on mental, emotional, and spiritual development, and the tools, and resources to create a life vision and a pathway to attain it.
 - imancentral.org/chicago/project-green-reentry/housing/
- Oxford Houses - These resident-run, clean-and-sober, group houses are in most counties. There's no staffing, no sign out front. They are resident-run, like Twelve Step meetings. The only conditions are a strong commitment to addiction

recovery and paying rent (usually around \$500/mo). There are random UAs (urine analyses), required Twelve Step meetings, and house meetings.

■ Chicago site: 773-424-6029 / 5441 S Wood St.

FREQUENTLY ASKED HOUSING QUESTIONS

- Why not have the One Parish One Prisoner team/church offer a place to live?

It's a good question.

When we first started our One Parish One Prisoner experiments, our hope and assumption was that every church has someone with a room or cottage or downstairs apartment or something to rent. After all, most faith communities can supply a used car, an employment connection in the congregation, etc. What better way to serve someone coming home from prison?

There's too much power in being someone's landlord. It puts you in a bind: you need to enforce basic standards of behavior, which they might fail. And if they were to relapse on an old addiction, or fail to pay rent, you are not the ones they can come to for mercy and accompaniment; instead, you're the landlord/enforcer they need to avoid. Months of deep relationship building is out the window.

Our policy is NOT offering housing directly with your church or Parish Team members.

- Who pays early rent? Your church community. The Welcome Home Prep Event module lays out how to present this plan to your congregation: the hurdles keeping your friend in the underground and how Jesus called the community to roll barriers away. At that event, your congregation will build up the ROLL AWAY THE STONE FUND.

Securing housing is the largest purpose of your ROLL AWAY THE STONE FUND: the first 2-3 months of rent for release housing. No more than three months, in the One Parish One Prisoner model. Once your team works with your friend to secure housing, once you help your friend apply and get accepted, you should feel good as a team to help close that gap and pay rent for the first month or two—or three, max.

- Is Section 8 housing an option?

Not in Cook or the surrounding counties. While Section 8 housing and vouchers do exist in these places, the wait lists are currently closed and have been for some time. The Cook County waitlist, for example, has been closed since 11/2/2020.

The Housing Authority of Cook County offers some alternative ideas for assistance here: thehacc.org/residents/#housing-choice.

AFTER RELEASE

PAROLE OFFICER (PO)

Probation = 6 months to 3 years after release, released citizens have to periodically report to their probation officer (PO). Any “violation,” and someone on probation can get 1-3 nights in jail as a swift warning, or a month back in temporary prison if it’s serious. Sometimes this is better than drifting into full relapse into addiction or new crimes, and offers a wakeup call and chance to hit re-start.

Your Role now is to ask your friend’s permission to reach out and open a line of communication with their PO. Let the PO know who you are and what your One Parish One Prisoner team is, with what church, and how you’re there to help support your friend’s successful (they love that word) reentry.

IMPORTANT: You are not required, at all, to give the PO any inside information, or report any slips or mistakes by your releasing friend. You don’t lie or hide anything, either. It’s just staying in your lane, letting them do their job, you do yours. You’re not the social worker with ethical obligations. You are not “responsible” for your person’s slip ups, failures, or violations. That’s between them and the policing system. You are like family, you are friends, you are simply church members here to love and support and clarify in order to help your person—never to help IDOC. We can be so eager to please authority systems that we forget who we’re here to serve.

In John (chapter 8) Jesus handles the woman caught in adultery by 1) protecting her from the oppressive enforcers of the law. Only then does Jesus 2) privately talk with her about her poor decisions, in a context of trust and care. On the rare occasion that someone’s life is in danger, or children are being hurt, yes, we need to report this for harm reduction and safety of vulnerable others. But most of the time when our friends in reentry slip up, there are personal struggles in sobriety, curfew, stepping outside the lines, technical violations that can get them sent back into the toms for a long time. Those violations are not our job to report, ever. That’s not our relationship with POs. Misplacing our fidelity in these situations is a great way to break all your trust with your releasing friend for good.

It’s possible, but rare, that your releasing friend will have no probation time upon release.

RENTAL AGREEMENT

This is for down the road a bit. You might want to come back to this page a few months after your releasing friend is home and employed. They’ll eventually be ready to move out of just a “transitional” housing situation and into a real house or apartment, paying steady rent.

That’s hard to do.

And why your parish, a team of community members, is vital for breaking out of the underground. You’re helping open doors of trust in the community. You know this person. You can vouch for them. Hesitant landlords will listen to you.

Many formerly incarcerated people who have done courageous recovery work, reentry work, can rarely break out of the low-income, low-quality housing sector because their rental applications show a criminal record and very slim rental history.

The work will be this:

- Look at online classifieds together for rental listings that your released friend can afford, and would apply for anyway—but where they don't have a chance at acceptance when their application is compared to others.
- Look for “mom and pop” rentals, a family who rents this one house, or two. They can hear your friend's story and make their own decision. Larger rental agencies have policies and the staff person on the phone doesn't have the discretion to take a risk on your friend.
- Do what we at Underground Ministries have done for years: we make the initial phone calls, not our released friend. This is where we leverage our social capital to open doors, roll away stones locally.

Say something like this: “Hi, my name is Susan. I'm calling about the rental listing I see posted. Is it still available? . . . Great. I'm not inquiring for myself, but for a good friend. See, I'm a member at _____ Church and we have been walking with a family for some time, who have made really incredible steps into a new life after the father/mother has recovered from a past of addiction and trouble with the law. They have a strong job, we at our church love and support them, and they are ready to move into a better living situation. We are looking for the best setting and landlord where my friends can continue their future together. Before I take up any of your time, does this sound like a situation that might interest you?”

And wait. Don't say more. You'll hear quickly in their voice if they're not into it, or if they're interested. If not, say thanks, and call the next person. And the next.

- If someone says, “Well, maybe. Tell me more . . . ” now you have permission to tell them about your friend. First name only, at this point. Tell all the winning details, the hard work, why you and your team believe in this person, why they're ready for a long term lease. Basically, this is exciting! Some landlords want to make their rentals part of something meaningful, and help their community. You are bringing them the gift of a great candidate, who comes with your whole team's support!
- Set up a meeting with your applying friend. Go together. When you get there, that's where your friend does all the talking. You've opened the door. Let the landlord be won over by this person transforming their life, and make a decision based on their personal interaction. If you get this far, many times the landlord will give the person a chance. You're there to show them it's less risky than they fear (ie, the landlord doesn't feel scammed, they see other community members are vouching for and taking time to invest in this person. “Let's give it a shot!”).
- Your team and parish can help with the (often huge) move-in fees.

- Your church can celebrate, put the word out, and have others in the congregation show up with a truck to help your friend (and anyone in their home) move. Bring pizzas!

This is the fattened calf party. This is a coming home celebration. This is where you feel the heart of God, like a parent, swelling with joy inside your veins. This isn't social work. It's more. In Jesus' parable of the wayward child who returns, the father exclaims, "My child was dead! Now he's alive!"

This is the language of resurrection.

Savor it.

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LEARNING MODULES: ILLINOIS

ROLLING AWAY THE STONES



Starting today, you can begin a conversation with your friend about health needs. Using the resource guide Mapping Your Future, identify action steps you can start taking together while they are still incarcerated.

Once your friend gets out, during that full first month of getting plugged into the land of the living—that's when this role requires a good amount of focused time and energy navigating multiple health systems: insurance, mental health, drug treatment classes, primary care.

You'll see how many calls, appointments, forms, insurances, evaluations are needed—and why so many re-entering folks get overwhelmed, and end up “violating” their requirements and neglecting their own health. These systems are “stones,” big barriers to reentry.

This is where you come in! You are the gift God has sent to walk with your friend through these systems—their wholeness and health is important to God and to us.

Here we go:

HEALTH INSURANCE

In Illinois, thankfully, almost everyone releasing from prison—with no income—qualifies for free health insurance through Medicaid. The resource guide *Mapping Your Future* has great suggestions for how to get organized when it comes to healthcare—even before release.

Some of the things that can start moving before release are:

- Physical exams
- Requesting copies of medical records
- Signing up for Medicaid
- Making plans for doctor visits and medications after release

MENTAL HEALTH

Hopefully the upcoming Mental Health and Trauma modules will open rich conversations between your team and your friend about these important realities that so many of us face.

Meds

Ask your friend if they have any mental health meds (prescription) they are taking while inside prison. Take note of this. So many men and women are released from prison with only 30 days' worth of their prescription—but they don't set up mental healthcare that first month, to continue some form of their medication.

We've seen many folks relapse into their old addictions in their second month out of prison, only to later find out that they had run out of their mental health meds. This hidden factor deserves our attention ahead of time. The first month is overwhelming, and no one else in their life is helping them continue in mental healthcare.

Some guys have told us, "I don't want to be on those meds. They're just trying to sedate me in there." Maybe so. We often counter with, "That may be true, but your brain is gonna go on a bender if you go off the meds cold turkey. Out here, mental healthcare isn't trying to numb you like prison does. Let's get you a better evaluation and the care you deserve, so you don't struggle more than you have to!"

Mental Health Evaluation

This part is often required—by parole, anyway.

Look up a local mental health agency (there's usually a couple, for low-income clients). Sit down together and call to set up an evaluation as soon as you can. Put it in both your calendars. Go together (give them a ride). They might get recommended weekly meetings with a therapist, or groups/classes. Excited? Great! Bummer? Encourage them that it's OK. It's part of healing—and if required, part of staying out of prison!

PRIMARY CARE

You may need to do this immediately, as some mental health agencies don't prescribe meds. You can help coordinate their agency's evaluation with a doctor's visit, to get their prescription in order.

Most men and women leaving prison have never had regular care with a doctor, or "primary care provider." This will take some more time sitting down making calls together: call some local doctors' offices that you (or your team) trust, to find one that takes your friend's public health insurance. Find one? Hooray! Schedule another appointment.

That's where you can go together, bring any prescription to be refilled or adjusted, AND bring any other health concerns. Get a full checkup! Invite them to see this not as another inspection, or requirement, but as treating their bodies to the same care as a good car: get a full inspection and all the repair they deserve!

If you've raised kids, you've done this before. Sadly, too many boys and girls grow up without parents offering this kind of attentive care. You are part of a deep redemption at this point.

CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY

This is one of the most common requirements by prison probation: go get a drug evaluation, and go to classes or groups. Ask your friend if this will be required as part of their probation. And if so, you'll help them every step of the way, no problem.

Most towns have both a mental health agency and a drug treatment ("chemical dependency") agency (sometimes the same office, often called "Behavioral Health").

Same thing: sit down together that first month, call the agency and set up an evaluation. Mark your calendars. Go together on that day.

If the evaluation recommends several weeks of classes or appointments, that's a normal part of reentry. Lots of appointments—on top of all the courts and studying to get your driver's license, with your other team member. Which is why we fundraise as a congregation to help pay early rent costs—so they can focus on all this reentry work as their full-time job the first month or two!

You can help your friend by reminding them that all these appointments are normal, worth it, and necessary. You're here to help with energy, rides, and coordinating their (increasingly full) calendar.

Those are the four basic health systems to navigate with your friend. To review:

- Health insurance (<https://www.healthcare.gov/>)
- Mental health (agency)

- Primary care (find a doctor)
- Chemical dependency (agency)

Most of this will come together in a storm of appointments and rides that first month or two. You have space in your brain and emotions to keep track of these four systems. You've done some of these for yourself, already. But for someone undergoing transition from prison, it's overwhelming. Your presence, doing it together, is a miracle.

After that, celebrate what you've done together. Relax. Go out to lunch.

It can feel like burdensome "social work"—but in our years of doing this, we've found the greatest conversations, trust-building, laughter, and opening up to real stories happens when going to these appointments together. Remember that this work is the front lines of deeper relationships and ministry.

BONUS HEALTH

Ongoing Resurrection & Repair

As time goes on, months after your friend releases, they may be more aware of more repair their bodies deserve—after years of neglect on the streets and in prison.

Willy had broken bones in his hand, from an old crime. His hand never healed well in prison. His team helped him make the calls, get x-rays, talk to Labor & Industries for some coverage, and they set up his surgery. The team coordinated a Meal Train for the church to come around their beloved community member after surgery. It was beautiful.

Roxanne was now clean and sober, graduating from a recovery home, and working—but she was shy about smiling. Years of meth addiction had taken a toll on her teeth. For her, resurrection meant working with her health providers—and her support community—to get new teeth through her dental insurance! Now her smile is as huge as her heart.

If your incarcerated/releasing person gets this far out of the underground, it's not uncommon to loop in members of the congregation to help accompany and enjoy this resurrection journey. As the Health Systems lead, you will be the best point person to direct and coordinate these new players. Have fun!

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"GET A JOB!"

That's what everyone in and out of incarceration has heard, over and over, for too many years.

This role is dedicated to helping your incarcerated friend not be bullied by that voice—and instead slowly work on their early "reentry work" as their full time job the first month. Then transitioning smoothly into a solid, quality job you'll be scouting out ahead of time together. Then helping protect that income from common threats, so it directly fuels the new life they've so wanted.

START THE CONVERSATION

If this is your role, your "employment" work the next couple months is conversation with your incarcerated friend, through your letters and phone calls:

FIRST JOB: THEIR OWN reentry

The goodness of this One Parish One Prisoner model is that they don't have to scramble into a job right away. Rather, your team can help with the first three months' rent—because their full-time job for the first month is their reentry.

You get to be the voice that helps them unplug from that anxiety. “First month: we got you, focus on setting up your life, getting to a dozen appointments, adjusting to life on the outside, with our help.”

ODD JOBS

Because it feels good to be productive, and have some loose cash for personal spending, we’ve found an “odd job” or two with people in the parish is gold: an elderly lady in the church who could use some wood stacked or lawn mowed or gutters cleaned. Let your friend know you’ll be putting the word out through your team and pastor to find some odd jobs where they can earn some small money but not have to lock into a full-on employment situation immediately. This is a chance to further connect with more people in your congregation and community.

Just help the odd job being brokered to be clear what the pay amount is for the task, ahead of time, ask if that sounds fair, and make sure they are paid that same day when the work is done. Feeling slighted is a terrible way to begin working together. Too many men and women have been used in the past. We want to create new experiences where they feel dignified, respected and honored.

So tell your friend about this idea of some odd jobs, to enjoy that first month as they adjust and go to all their appointments.

EMPLOYMENT INTERESTS

The main thing to discuss is what kinds of jobs interest them—for when they step into full-time employment the second or third month. You’re their support to explore this exciting horizon together.

Instead of just scrambling for anywhere that will hire, assure them you now have time to make a better plan and honor their interests.

Do they have a certificate or training from their years inside the prison that they’d like to continue using on the outside? Like plumbing, electrical, carpentry? Computer programming? Food services?

No training is ok. What are they simply interested in pursuing?

Take notes. Tell them you’ll get to work starting some new conversations in the parish and in your network.

DEPARTMENT OF CONNECTIONS

Your connections in your parish and networks in the community are your treasure. Remember, your friend is stepping out of the Department of Corrections and into something better: we are the Department of Connections.

EMPLOYERS IN YOUR PARISH

Much of your work will be reaching out to people in the church: Who are the employers in your parish? Any of them have the kinds of positions that would fit your friend coming home? This is a great opportunity to broadcast the need in a worship announcement, and follow up with people in your community.

Tell them about your friend. His interest. Show them a picture, a letter.

You are an ambassador. You're inviting people outside your team into this journey with you. Their company can be a vital part of local ministry, and your friend's resurrection from the old life. Tell the employer your team is behind this prospective employee, giving them the support they need to thrive.

You can bring interested employers to part of your monthly Team Meetings. This is how we grow: opening new relationships, opening new doors.

ODD JOBS

Same with the smaller, odd jobs. When it gets closer to release, ask around and put feelers out for who might need yard maintenance or property projects. Increase time with good people, not in a company yet. Low pressure, low risk, high rate of connecting and feeling good. Warmup work. Clear payment, agreed beforehand: cash, or amount toward a month's rent.

RESUME

One of our recent One Parish One Prisoner graduates, now home from over a decade in prison and working as an engineer with a local tiny-home manufacturer, recently advised us: "It would have been cool if your program got folks on my Team to work on a resume with me, while I was still locked up."

So here it is: as the Employment & Finances role, have fun drafting up a resume together. We don't have a template; there's a thousand online.

Some suggestions, though:

- emphasize "Strengths": resiliency in facing setbacks, loyal to my team, determined to find solutions when facing obstacles
- boldly list any in-prison jobs, with titles: ie, State of Illinois, Menard Correctional Center Kitchen

- strongly consider a cover letter that states you are currently incarcerated, focused on a specific job path, briefly own your past crime and mistakes and now current preparation to build a future with the right company

UNDERGROUND EMPLOYMENT MODEL

As you talk with potential employers in your area, you may be interested in using Underground Ministries' "Underground Employment" model. It's a proven template that outlines three partners:

- Re-entering Employee
- Quality Employer
- Support Organization

The Employer sees a legitimate model on the webpage, to trust and understand this opportunity. The Employer agrees to a 90-day onramp period, accommodating the Employee's probation appointments, maybe treatment class schedule, and driver's license tests—so they can be a solid member of the company after the 90-day onramp.

Your One Parish One Prisoner Team would be the Support Org role: sponsoring/referring this Employee, brokering the trust, and committing to ongoing reentry support for the Employee the first three months (with all the reentry challenges of appointments, probation, personal struggles that come up).

If this sounds helpful, and you'd like more help, click over to undergroundministries.org/employment.

CHILD SUPPORT

This is important.

Once someone finally gets a great job and their first check comes—half of it has been "garnished" by Child Support (a state institution that offers financial support to single parents but charges the other biological parent, hounding them with mountains of debt whenever they get a legitimate job). Too many reentering individuals lose heart here—their first check cut in half—and they go back to street income.

The solution is relatively easy. Child Support only takes half the income if the parent hasn't set up a plan with them first. So you sit down with your reentering friend, call the local Child Support office together (on speakerphone, for moral support, if you want) and they say, "Hi, my name is _____, I am fresh out of prison and just starting a new job (say where). I'd like to set up a minimum monthly payment plan to be taken out of my checks. I'm barely able to pay rent right now, but I'd like to start paying my debt at the smallest amount possible for the next six months, if that's OK."

Oftentimes, the Child Support Enforcement Officer appreciates a father/mother taking initiative, not hiding from the system, and offers a low payment. \$50-75/mo taken out of their checks is different then \$950/mo!

Voila!

You're rolling away these stones that keep millions of parents in the underground. High five, and go out to lunch again!

BANK ACCOUNT

If you haven't set up a checking account at a bank yet, now's the time. It might be your friend's first time having money in a bank—where their income can grow, with a savings account, rather than just a wad of cash in their wallet/mattress/freezer.

And now that you've set up a payment plan with Child Support, they won't seize money deposited in a bank!

BUDGETING

This is the last part of your role! Congratulations to you, your team, and your releasing friend for getting this far.

Again, we don't offer a template or a class on budgeting. But just sitting down and typing up a simple INCOME vs. EXPENSES grid of costs each month is a massive step towards financial literacy. The same way a calendar can profoundly help a re-entering individual take control of all the commitments in their life—so a simple budget will likely feel like a profound new tool to help them feel more in control of where they want each dollar they earn to go.

Start with Essentials: Rent, Car Insurance, Court payments, Groceries, Gas.

Then see how much is left for Other Costs: Clothes, Eating Out, Fun with Kids.

Savings Goals? Newer Car, Downpayment for Better Apartment, Trip to See Grandma, etc.

So many men and women we've accompanied gain a good job with income, but feel discouraged and "broke" and unable to pay rent for many months, because they haven't gotten help learning how to budget essential costs and think hard about which costs come first. End of the month, there's just not enough money sitting around!

Remember that letting someone look at your money with you feels very vulnerable, like parenting or sex advice. But hopefully you've built enough trust working on Employment and Finances together over these months, so help with budgeting feels natural.

Congratulations!

Always find ways to celebrate together. Our friends in leaving prison have been punished for thousands of missteps, but rarely celebrated for their courageous new steps. Send a text. Share a hug. Meals and ice cream are always best.

ONE PARISH ONE PRISONER

LEARNING MODULES

STONES



YOUR ROLE

You're not organizing meetings, leading the group, nor in the most relationship with the Releasing Friend coming home from prison. Your role as a pastor in the Parish Team is to stand one step back from group and bring four of your greatest gifts as a pastor to this team of your congregants:

PASTORAL CARE

You have the eyes and experience to bring pastoral care to your team of congregants on this journey. Some tricky situations will come up, which you can address with seasoned love. Deeper issues within your congregants will likely emerge, and if you're one step back, you can attend to the unhealed wounds or bigger questions that Christ brings to light.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Your team will likely react to the many relational challenges with common defense mechanisms: fear, avoidance, control, distance, disapproval, micromanaging, etc. You can help steer the team's concerns, discussions, and reflections back to what Christ may be doing in us through all this.

Remember that this is less about ensuring a “successful reentry” for your releasing brother/sister, or a “successful” group project. Rather, this is a larger opportunity for discipleship—to point your congregants toward following Jesus in a tangible way together.

Look for moments where a team member’s “underground” is coming up—a stated fear, a more vague and oversized anxiety, maybe veiled anger, or an aggressive need to control or fix or rescue. Ask questions that help the person and group pause and reflect on what’s beneath the surface—what Christ may be “resurrecting” from their personal underground. Stories of past hurts might be revealed and become an opportunity for healing and kinship. Or a deeper worldview may rise that can be brought to reckon with Christ’s kingdom.

If this goes well, if everybody leans in together, you may find moments for discipleship, pastoral care, and deeper spiritual formation.

INTEGRATION WITH THE WIDER PARISH

With such a discipling potential in mind, don’t waste this opportunity. Be thinking about ways to keep this growing story of relationship with your incarcerated brother/sister—and all that the team is learning—in front of the entire congregation.

This relationship with someone in prison is a gift to be shared with the whole congregation. While there are five or so parishioners on your Parish Team, you can help spread the goodness, energy, ongoing story, and challenge of this resurrection work.



How can you regularly loop the congregation into this church-wide journey?

Here are some ideas:

- If you haven’t already, share both our “Practice Resurrection” (5 min) and “One Parish One Prisoner” (7 min) videos with your congregation during different worship services, sharing the larger picture of the journey your church has begun.
- Integrate a commissioning service into worship soon: where your 5-7 member Parish Team is blessed by leadership into this journey as delegated ambassadors of the parish’s love in Christ.
- With permission, bring fresh, short announcements to the congregation each week/month about your incarcerated brother/sister’s upcoming release, transfer of prison, prayer requests, challenge ahead, update after a prison visit.
- Some parishes have monthly “readings from the epistles of _____”. Your team can pick a selection from your incarcerated friend’s letters each month and—with his/her

permission—share with your congregation. What a beautiful way to lift up the modern day prison letters of God's people!

- Team members can offer short testimony each month: not on the "program," but sharing their own joy, struggle, prayer, transformations you see happening in them.
- Think with your team about congregation-wide book readings or documentary movie nights to learn about the criminal justice system, mass incarceration, themes of captivity and liberation in the Bible.

PREACHING

Some issues will come up that you can only preach your way into.

The core, radical movements of our faith—grace, forgiveness, atonement, embrace of the foreigner, loving our enemies, plank in our own eye, death, sin, resurrection—are easy to think we know as church people in Bible studies and pews. But someone coming home from prison will trigger all the unconverted parts in your congregation's hearts. That is, parts of their worldview, priorities, or even past wounds, that are not seeking God's heart. Listen for the fears, murmurings, biases that arise in the congregation.

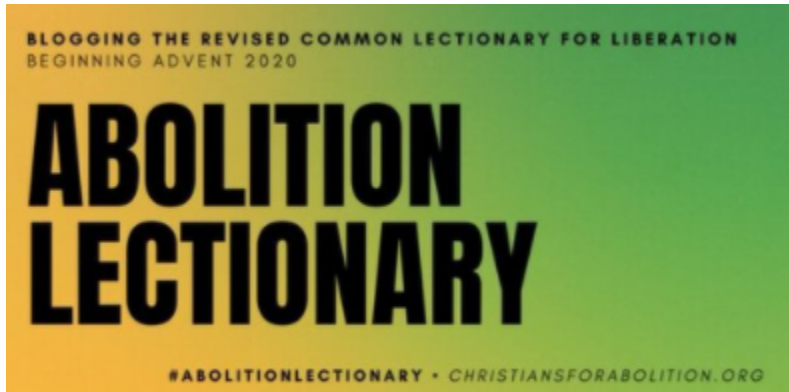
What an opportunity to listen well and reframe the conversation, returning to the gospel with fresh need and relevance!

- Advent: A liturgical season about waiting for an anticipated arrival. One that arrives in humble, stressful, non-ideal circumstances. This experience of relationship with a returning prisoner offers endless reflection on new struggles with hope, recognizing what God is doing in unlikely and uncomfortable settings.
- Lent: This season begins with facing our fears. Ash Wednesday should help Christians face our death, the foundation of so many fears. It's then a season of embracing limits on our desires, freedoms, appetites—something the incarcerated have experienced aplenty. It's a season of introspection, honest self-evaluation. How can you invite the congregation to enter into these disciplines in solidarity (kinship) with the incarcerated—and specifically your incarcerated friend? Share stories to inspire everyone to reckon with how they've hurt others and what they may need to let go of.
- Holy Week / The Passion: It's a story of betrayal, arrest, a corrupt court process, community shouting for the death penalty, and God-in-the-flesh being executed by the state with the church's help. How can you help your congregation feel anew how the Holy Week drama mirrors our religious participation with systems of arrest, torture, removal, and death?
- Easter: This entire journey in One Parish One Prisoner is about practicing resurrection! Tell the Lazarus story, how Christ's resurrection is the ultimate inauguration of a "resurrection people"—who continue today going to the places where we've buried our community members, where Jesus is weeping and bringing new life to those "inside the

tombs,” and how we get to roll away the stones! This is the year to make Easter all about what God’s doing in your church through this reentry journey.

PREACH THE LECTIONARY?

Our friends at Christians for Abolition of Prisons have created a brilliant Lectionary resource: short thoughts on how each upcoming week’s Lectionary readings are invitations into God’s larger work of setting the captives free through all history and creation.



Check out their page and subscribe for free reflections.

Web Link: <https://christiansforabolition.org/2020/11/20/abolitionlectionary-starts-next-week/>