

R E C O V E R Y

Extensive ministry assists inmates, newly released

Jail and follow-up ministries sponsored by First Pentecostal Assembly of God in Ottumwa, Iowa, are helping reduce recidivism rates.

Richard Schlotter made Jesus his Savior as a result of the jail ministry at the church in 2002. Now, he leads the church's Once Lost, Now Found after-

care recovery group. Every Thursday night, church buses gather people from a Department of Corrections relief center, a halfway house, and a recovery house for women and bring them to the church for spiritual guidance and support.

In a contemporary church service, Schlotter preaches how to find a new identity in Christ, including finding jobs and being healed of illnesses. About 130 attend weekly, most of whom have been incarcerated and have had substance abuse problems.

Participants receive free editions of *The Life Recovery Bible*. As many as 40 people a week have accepted Jesus as Savior at the gatherings.

Schlotter, who spent 18 months in prison on a drug charge, has since earned a bachelor's degree and is in the process of obtaining AG ministerial credentials.

Linda Fears heads a church-sponsored Bible study Tuesday evenings at the Wapello County Jail. Fears, who is blind and had no experience with jail ministry until she started six years ago, has counseled around 1,000 women at the meetings, which focus on building relationships, as well as in individual sessions

on Fridays.

Shane Frazier, a former felon, leads the church's jail ministry to about 40 men. Three times a week he visits the jail to preach, conduct Bible studies and counsel.

"We talk about issues that overwhelm us and keep us away from the things God has for us," says Frazier, who had been disciplined by the Once Lost, Now Found program. "People can be completely free inside jail. Many times I don't want to leave."

The church also offers a "Freedom" Sunday School class where 90 percent of the attendees have been behind bars.

— John W. Kennedy



Mark Tanner and Lisa Mullikin lead worship at a recovery session.

New classes in works

Global University is developing four new Bible-based courses for the incarcerated.

The curriculum will be designed to disciple inmates and prepare them for making the transition back into the community upon release.

The studies will emphasize reconciliation with family and community; identification with a local church; financial stewardship and the biblical work ethic; and overcoming addictive behavior, particularly sexual addiction.

Bob Durham, national director of prison ministries for Global University, says more than 1,000 inmates already take advantage of discipleship and ministerial classes through Global University.

Credentialing courses are offered for inmates who believe they are called into ministry. Durham hopes to expand the availability of these programs by gaining funding to help cover textbooks and fees, costs that inmates currently pay on their own.

"We want to turn prison time into Bible school time and send men and women back out prepared for ministry," Durham says.

SOCIETY

Release doesn't end risk

Prison life may be dangerous, but getting out can be deadly, too. Newly released inmates were almost 13 times more likely than the general public to die during their first two weeks of freedom, a study in Washington state found.

Drug overdoses were the top killer, with ex-convicts 129 times more likely to die that way within two weeks of their release than the general population. That cause of death was followed by heart disease, homicide and suicide, according to the study.

"The differences are more striking for women than they are for men," says

lead researcher Dr. Ingrid Binswanger of the University of Colorado at Denver.

The findings show the need for more programs to help ex-inmates with a history of addiction and poor health to cope with the stress of finding housing, a job, health care and other necessities, says Christy Visher of the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute.

Dr. Scott Allen, co-director of the Center for Prisoner Health and Human Rights at Brown University, says that without help, released offenders likely "will reassociate with the group of people they got in trouble with in the first place."