



Prison Solutions: Faith-Based Rehabilitation and Privatization Show Promise

by John R. Hendrickson

State Legislatures and Governors across the United States have to deal with the problem of increasing prison populations. “According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, the number of women offenders under state or federal jurisdiction grew 55.1% over the last ten years, while the male offender population grew 33.0%.”¹ The increase in the prison populations creates a problem in terms of our culture and it applies additional fiscal hardships on Legislatures and taxpayers. Solutions to this problem are needed both from the public and private sectors. Faith-based programs, privatization, and other solutions need to be considered.

A report released by the Iowa Legislative Services Agency, Fiscal Services Division reported that the number of women offenders in correctional facilities is still smaller than the male population, but female prisoners are increasing at a faster rate.² “In Iowa, the women offender population grew 83%, while the population of men grew about 49%,” over the last ten years.³ In addition the Department of Corrections predicts that by July 2007 the prison population will be 9,438 and as much as 10,000 by July, 2011.⁴

Iowa has nine state correctional institutions, in addition to the several community based correctional facilities. “Iowa’s prison system has designed capacity of 7, 256 beds, with 573 beds for women and 6,683 beds for men.”⁵ “On November 17, 2006, the prison system was operating at 120.4% of designed capacity. Overall, facilities for women are operating at 128.6% of capacity, while facilities for men are operating at 119.8% of capacity.”⁶

The increase in the number of prisoners is due to a number of factors including increased drug and alcohol abuse and related crimes. The Legislative Services report demonstrated that “57.6% of the women and 47.1% of the men were identified as needing” treatment for substance abuse.⁷ In addition, all prisoners, regardless of the crime, need professional counseling.

The Department of Corrections in fiscal year 2006 had an operating budget of \$292,975,307 out of the General Fund. This did not include tobacco money or other revenue sources.⁸ In Fiscal Year 2008 the Department is requesting “\$2.5 million in capital costs to address overcrowding at the Iowa Correctional Institution at Mitchellville.”⁹ In addition, if approved, this appropriation “would include \$1.5 million to convert the Institution into a therapeutic community, which is a substance abuse treatment model that creates a culture, or community, by providing a structured environment for changing human behavior to be more receptive to and supportive of pro-social principles and a ‘right-living’ code of conduct.”¹⁰ The Department is also seeking appropriations for building additional beds to cover the rising population.¹¹

Iowa is not alone in dealing with this problem, and it is certainly not alone in having a tight budget. In dealing with increases in the prison population it is not advisable to ease up on sentencing guidelines. The primary role of any government is to protect against force and fraud and to uphold the rule of law. Early release is also not a good solution, especially if recidivism rates are high.

Constructing new prison facilities is expensive. South Carolina, for example, “developed an alternative—the use of prison inmates to build new prisons. In this way, they cut the cost of new prison construction by 25 percent, enabling the state to build enough new facilities to end the early release of dangerous criminals.”¹² States can also look to privatization to save money through management or even private correctional facilities.

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Although much attention has been paid to population increases and budgets, more attention needs to be paid toward rehabilitation methods. “According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 53% of men and 39.4% of women are returned to prison within three years of their release date.”¹³

To work towards lower recidivism rates proven rehabilitation methods are needed, including methods from the private sector. Prison Fellowship, a ministry started by Charles Colson, former counselor to President Richard Nixon, is a non-profit volunteer ministry program focusing on the rehabilitation of prisoners through spiritual faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁴

Prison Fellowship operates The InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) program, which is a “Christ-centered, faith-based prison program supporting prison inmates through their spiritual and moral transformation.”¹⁵ Prison Fellowship started the program in 1997, and currently it operates as a separate 501 (c) (3) organization, and IFI operates “in prisons in cooperation with the state.”¹⁶ “The state continues to provide food, clothing, shelter and security to the inmates while IFI staff provides the intensive program.”¹⁷ For more details on the IFI program please visit: <http://www.ifiprison.org>.

This voluntary program operates in five states including Iowa. Iowa’s Newton correctional facility is a participant in the program, although in June of 2006, the United States District Court ruled the program unconstitutional for violating the separation of church and state. The decision is currently on appeal. Although the debate surrounding the constitutionality of IFI is serious, the focus of this BRIEF is on the credibility of the program as a serious option for correctional facilities to utilize.

A study conducted by the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society reported that “IFI graduates are less likely to be either arrested or incarcerated during the two-year period following release from prison...”¹⁸ Faith-based programs such as IFI should be utilized in correctional rehabilitation efforts even more than they have been, given this proven success.

Both faith-based programs and privatization programs should be examined as real solutions in dealing with both increasing prison populations and working toward lower recidivism rates. The solution does not lie in early paroles or liberalizing sentencing guidelines, but using taxpayer dollars effectively.

(Endnotes)

¹ Iowa Legislative Service Agency: Fiscal Services, “Women Offenders,” January 3, 2007. <<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/lisadocs/lssReview/2007/IRBAL000.PDF>> (12, Jan 2007)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Iowa Department of Corrections, “Quick Facts, May 2006,” <<http://www.doc.state.ia.us>> (12, Jan 2007).

⁵ Women Offenders.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Quick Facts.

⁹ Women Offenders.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sam Brunelli, “State Legislatures: The next Conservative Battleground,” The Heritage Foundation, May 31, 1990.

¹³ Women offenders.

¹⁴ For more information on the constitutionality of Prison fellowship programs please see INSTITUTE BRIEF, *Why Constitutional Interpretation Matters*. This can be viewed at www.limitedgovernment.org.

¹⁵ Prison Fellowship, “About IFI,” <<http://www.ifiprison.org>> (15, Jan 2007).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Byron R. Johnson, David B. Larson, *The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program*, The Center for Research on Religion and Urban Society, 2003, <http://www.pfm.org/media/ifi/Docs/crrus_innerchange.pdf> (10, Jan 2007).

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