

Do's and Don'ts of Prison Ministry

To be an effective volunteer you will have to know some principles and guidelines for this type of ministry.

DO'S

The cardinal rule of prison and jail ministry is to learn and obey all the rules of the institution. One volunteer can ruin a whole program and bring it to an end by not following the rules.

There will be many things you will not understand at first never assume anything; ask questions of those in authority.

See inmates as individuals. Don't make assumptions based upon generalities or stereotypes.

Keep your objectivity. If you become too wrapped up in the needs of the inmate you will lose credibility with the administrators and quite possibly lose your access to the institution.

Be willing to learn from the chaplain as well as the inmate.

Be patient—prison and jail work is a long and slow process.

Be a good listener. Many inmates have never had anyone seriously listen to them and really hear them.

Be honest. Inmates are very sensitive to hypocrisy and to phonies.

Be prepared.

Be a Christian. Go into a jail or prison ministry with the spiritual distinctive that should mark the follower of Jesus.

DON'Ts

Do not take anything into a prison to give to an inmate nor take anything from an inmate to take out without the explicit permission of the chaplain or responsible jail official.

Don't distribute tracts or literature without the chaplain's approval.

Don't make promises you can't keep.

Don't come in to tell the prison officials or the jailers how to do their jobs.

Don't go into the prisons to help yourself. If you have problems or needs, then deal with them before you go to the prisons.

Don't criticize the staff and chaplain in front of the inmates

Don't give personal information