

# NETWORKING IS ESSENTIAL

By Buck Griffith

What do we mean when we say that networking *is essential*? *Networking* is mentioned when connecting office equipment. “Franchise” *networking* is critical to take advantage of a brand name and in advertising and marketing. With increasing numbers of medical specialists, it is important to know who is on 1<sup>st</sup> base, 2<sup>nd</sup> base and so forth in healthcare. In the case of a jail or prison ministry, *networking* means connecting with other people in other places and utilizing more tools, agencies, and organizations to accomplish your mission. We “use” each other to reach individually desired destinations. Too many do what they do in *Lone Ranger* fashion. A few even “brag” about it. They fail to see the bigger picture. The work suffers and when the *Lone Ranger* dies and *Tonto* rides away. The ministry dies!

If the ministry survives long enough and grows and . . . most *will* grow despite us . . . we (hopefully) come to our senses. No one can do everything that needs to be done – alone. So, a decision must be made to connect and *network*.

## ***First, the “Fields” Are Different***

Each specific “field” has unique needs and must be pursued accordingly. These fields include . . .

<i>Juvenile Detention Facilities</i>	<i>Deportation Centers</i>
<i>Juvenile Probation</i>	<i>Death Rows</i>
<i>County Jails</i>	<i>Work Release Facilities</i>
<i>Restitution Centers</i>	<i>Probationers</i>
<i>State Prisons</i>	<i>Parolees</i>
<i>Private Prisons</i>	<i>Halfway House Residents</i>
<i>Federal Prisons</i>	<i>Alcohol/Drug Treatment Facilities</i>

Obviously, a congregation just starting a ministry cannot be in all these places simultaneously. Plus, males need to work with males while ladies minister to ladies. Trying to be in too many places at the same time will drive you *nuts!* Such is the path to an early grave or . . . *burn-out!* Thus, you must decide on your “field” of focus. Then, you must determine specific methods, tools and approaches to employ, depending on your personal skills and those of other volunteers.

## ***Specific Avenues of Involvement***

In the beginning you will likely select one or two roles with a limited work force. As the ministry grows as well as willing workers, you can take on more. Faithful with a little, God will open more doors. In time, you will increase the scope of your mission . . .

<i>Teaching offenders one-on-one</i>	<i>Halfway houses</i>
<i>Teaching offenders in a class</i>	<i>Community housing</i>
<i>Teaching in a formal worship</i>	<i>Job searches</i>
<i>Teaching children of offenders</i>	<i>Transportation needs</i>
<i>Leading song services</i>	<i>Clothing needs</i>
<i>Praying for offenders</i>	<i>Furniture needs</i>
<i>Baptizing offenders</i>	<i>Food needs</i>
<i>Following up on new believers</i>	<i>Medical needs</i>
<i>Writing to offenders</i>	<i>Dental needs</i>
<i>Mentoring</i>	<i>Vision needs</i>
<i>Twelve Step Recovery</i>	<i>Counseling needs – offenders</i>
<i>FamilyNet - Family Ministering</i>	<i>Counseling needs – spouses</i>
<i>Bible Correspondence Ministry</i>	<i>Counseling needs – children</i>
<i>Aftercare</i>	<i>Counseling needs – parents</i>

First, we crawl and later we . . . walk, run, and jump. We *first* decide how WE will be involved and then . . . *network* with others who compliment what we are doing. We do what we do and they do what they do. We will find some who are doing such a superior job in their field that all we need to do is refer our contacts to them.

## ***What Is First?***

Most of us are primarily interested in saving incarcerated souls. We know souls can go to Heaven poorly dressed, smelling bad and penniless. But outside of Christ, souls can also go to Hell in \$1,000 suits or driving a *Mercedes – convertible* (red)! This means we seek to locate other persons, programs and agencies in our community that offer assistance in areas of need *outside the realm of what WE are doing*.

## ***Networking Sources***

For instance, it is expensive to own and operate a residence for those coming out of prison. Several such facilities exist in most urban areas. Visit and develop a healthy relationship with their staff. Let them know of your willingness to help residents. You may immediately be invited to teach a weekly Bible class! Later, you may be able to secure a bed there for a promising person you have been working with that will need a place to stay upon release. Programs exist in most states to help ex-offenders find gainful employment. This includes tax write-offs for businesses hiring felons. Participants, however, need to make contact with the program prior to release and immediately afterward. You need a strong connection with local judges, city police and those connected with the county jail. Do the same with probation and parole departments. Know elected officials. These liaisons open doors. In a similar manner, contact food suppliers (Food Bank, Wal-Mart, etc.) and clothing, furniture and appliance outlets. *Dress for Success* helps females prepare for more successful job interviews. Find economical places that do good automotive repair work. Be careful not to take advantage of or abuse your connections. Work will be done to assist ex-offenders or family members based on the trust *you* have established with these vendors.

## ***National Directory – Baptistries Around the World***

The *National Directory of Churches of Christ & Individual Christians Involved in Jail & Prison Ministries* is a helpful tool. It is used to locate fellow workers in other geographical areas who are doing in their community what you are trying to do locally. You need to *network* together. If not already, *you* and congregation should be in this *directory*. Then, others will be able to contact *you* when contacts come into your area. This includes not only prisoners and ex-offenders but family members. Together, we can form a strong and powerful *network*. There are now 1000+ churches of Christ and 2,300+ individual Christians identified as “involved” in jail-prison ministries in the USA. If you find new contacts or *more recent contact information*, you can help by notifying us. The directory is updated daily. We also maintain an active list of aftercare programs operated by churches of Christ. Many states maintain an active list of its prisons and workers in the nearest local congregations who can be contacted for follow-up. They submit annual updates for the *National Directory*. A free CD of the *National Directory* is given to those attending the *National Jail-Prison Ministry Workshop* each June. The workshop moves across the nation to give everyone an opportunity to attend when in their area. Of course, one of the greatest needs to *network* is when we have a contact needing assistance in being baptized or . . . released and looking for a good congregation with which to work and worship. *Baptistries Around the World* is a program of Kings Crossing Church of Christ (Corpus Christi, Texas) that places baptistries in jails and prisons. This eliminates the excuse often made: “We do not have the facilities to accommodate immersion.” This is just one more reason we need to coordinate our efforts in carrying out the Great Commission. Alone, we are very limited. United, we can do so much more.

## ***Remember: Network!***

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