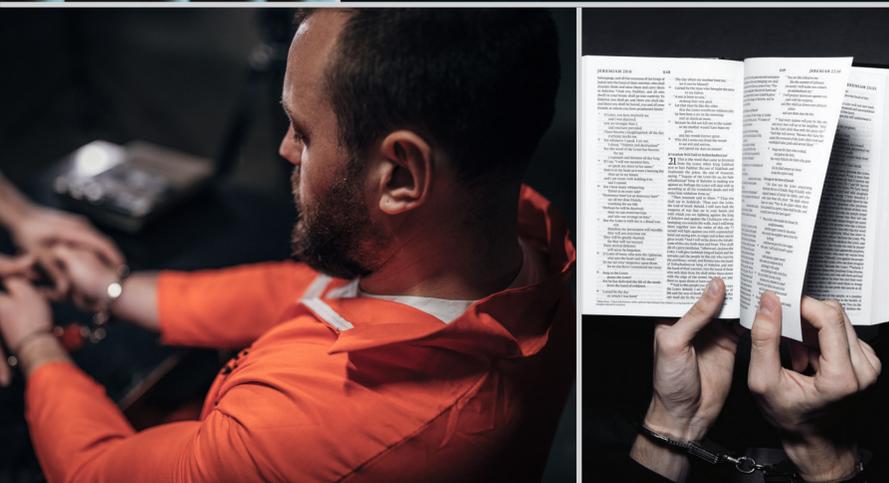


Start or revitalize a ministry in your church

## QUICK START GUIDE



# PRISON MINISTRIES COORDINATOR



Quick Start Guide for the Prison Ministries Coordinator

Available from:

*AdventSource*

5120 Prescott Avenue

Lincoln, NE 68506

402.486.8800

[AdventSource.org](http://AdventSource.org)

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# Introduction

Welcome to a very important yet often forgotten ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Because those who are incarcerated are often “out of sight, out of mind” the importance of ministering behind prison walls is sometimes overlooked. However, the significance of prison ministries cannot be underestimated.

According to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, one out of every 31 adults in the United States is currently incarcerated, on parole or probation, or under correctional supervision, and over 2.3 million inmates are confined to state, federal and local prisons, while correctional supervision of offenders and ex-offenders exceeds 7 million.

Prison ministries volunteers can take Jesus—the Light of the World—inside prison walls to introduce people to the saving grace of Jesus. Everyone can become a new creature in Christ.

## Organizing Prison Ministries

The goal of prison ministries is for every inmate and his or her family to have the opportunity to know Jesus Christ and be saved. This goal is facilitated through church members implementing various programs such as worship services for inmates, pen pal friendships, Bible studies, and reaching out to inmates’ families. Volunteers can also provide services to assist inmates and their families upon release.

### Prison Ministries Coordinator Job Description

Prison ministries in the local church is part of the personal ministries department, so communication between the leaders of these areas is essential. The prison ministries coordinator is responsible for overseeing all aspects of prison ministries, including connecting with corrections department personnel, selecting programs, appointing volunteers for key positions, communication with church leaders and members, and volunteer training.

As with other ministries, volunteers are a core component. However, due to the nature of prison ministries, specific and thorough training of all volunteers is crucial. In fact, recruiting, screening and training volunteers is a foundational part of the coordinator’s role. He or she also conducts annual program evaluations and finds ways to thank volunteers for their contributions.

### Prison Ministries Coordinator Qualifications

Any person who has a real desire to help others can become a successful prison ministries coordinator. True conversion and dedication are the only prerequisites. These qualities, combined with love for individual souls, will manifest through patience, perseverance, and a desire to serve. The coordinator should also have faith in God’s promises and a steadfast prayer life. Tact, wisdom, and genuineness are also desirable traits.



Beyond these traits, the ability to communicate clearly with multiple audiences will be helpful. A prison ministries coordinator also needs a determination to maintain the ministry despite hardships.

Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners. Hebrews 13:3, NIV

## Responsibilities of a Prison Ministries Coordinator

The outreach of prison ministries has several basic objectives. The spiritual objectives can be summarized as:

- Presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ
- Sharing the love of God
- Expressing the meaning of faith
- Showing the power of prayer

Some of the social objectives include:

- Providing a link between the community and persons confined in correctional institutions
- Preparing a person for re-entry into society (physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually)
- Serving the families of persons who are confined
- Helping a person to both accept and grant forgiveness
- Helping a person to understand the meaning of being loved and loving others

It is essential that a coordinator arrange for compatible people to work together, especially in cities where there are several churches. The coordinator meets with the superintendent of the correctional facility and the prison's chaplain during the planning stage. In some cases, the coordinator will also work with the prison's program director. The coordinator is the liaison between the church, prison administration, and local conference prison ministries director.

## Building a Team

In order to accomplish your goals and prevent burnout it is wise to organize a team of volunteers. In smaller churches one individual may fill more than one of the following roles:

**Leader** – Works with the coordinator to implement the program. He or she is at the door or gate of the correctional facility to supervise the team while signing in. Along with the coordinator, the leader evaluates the team's progress and submits reports of the work to the local conference. The leader is responsible for planning the weekly, biweekly, or monthly programs and making sure volunteers adhere to all regulations. Having an assistant leader is helpful if there is a large group.

**Music Leader** – Should be a dynamic musician. He or she will choose music and could encourage inmates to form singing groups.



**Literature Secretary** – Responsible for coordinating all literature, including Bible lessons and Bibles used in the correctional facility. The literature secretary will need to work with the prison chaplain and other authorities to ensure that literature is sent through the proper channels. The literature secretary needs to keep accurate records of all literature used and report to the church or group contributing the literature.

**Recording Secretary** – Records all aid extended to current and former inmates and their families. Copies of the records should be available to the correctional facility's program director.

**Health and Welfare Secretary** – Works directly with the local church Adventist Community Services director to supply the needs of inmates and/or their families.

**Volunteer Coordinator** – Gives volunteers a copy of the volunteer policy and acquaints them with the Department of Corrections' policy for volunteers. It is important to specify boundaries for authority, volunteer responsibility, and accountability.

**Bible Instructors** – Dedicated Bible students can make regular visits. They can even during the week if prison regulations permit midweek services or Bible studies.

## Types of Programs

After you have assembled your team you need to meet and discuss what types of programs you can offer. Can your group plan and conduct meaningful worship services? What types of Bible studies can you give? What types of educational seminars? What about 12-step recovery programs? Do you have any volunteers licensed to provide counseling services? Can you offer some kind of vocational training or career development? Perhaps you want to develop pen pal friendships, mentoring, or services for children of inmates. Find out what other community groups are doing and what needs exist at the correctional facility. When you have completed this assessment, check out the *Prison Ministry Handbook* available from AdventSource at 402.486.8800 or **AdventSource.org**.

## PEN PAL MINISTRY

Pen pal ministry with inmates is a good way to involve church members who want to participate in prison ministries but are unable to go to the facility. Pen pals must be screened and complete a training program before entering this ministry.

The prison ministries coordinator connects inmates requesting spiritual correspondence with appropriate pen pals. For safety reasons all correspondence is funneled through the coordinator so inmates never have their pen pal's home address. Obtain a post office box for this ministry.

Pen pals should not give out their address or phone number. They should not give or receive money or gifts. Spiritual literature can be sent through a publisher in accordance with the prison's policies.



## Gaining Entrance

The doors of churches are open to anyone interested in their functions and benefits. This is not true of prisons. There are a limited number of methods used in gaining acceptance by correctional institutions as a valid religious program, particularly if you do not represent a major religion. Because some denominations have more members than others, it is natural that some will have a higher representation of their adherents in jail. While the law states that inmates must have access to the services of whatever persuasion they happen to claim, since there are fewer Seventh-day Adventists in prison, you may need to explore other methods of entry.

One recommended process is to offer in-house seminars for inmates such as smoking cessation, health education, parenting skills, or GED preparation.

If requests to enter the facility are denied, church volunteers may be able to help with work release programs where inmates are allowed to live outside the prison setting. Volunteers at halfway houses can offer to assist these individuals with finding employment and permanent housing. Adventist Community Services can provide food and clothing. This type of help is appreciated by prison officials and may in time open doors that were previously closed for working inside the prison.

### **Want To Do More? Become a Partner in Transitional or Guest Housing**

#### **Transitional Housing**

Correctional agencies across North America are looking for a way to safely transition prisoners from prison to the community. Your church can assist by offering transitional housing where ex-offenders can receive lodging and other services such as drug treatment and job counseling in order to reestablish themselves in society.

#### **Guest Housing**

Your church can assist families of inmates by acquiring a guesthouse to accommodate families when they are in town to visit a relative who is incarcerated. The accommodations would be free of charge. The house should be stocked with clean bedding, soap, towels, toiletries, and food.

## Ministering on “The Inside”

A prison is a city within a city. The same crimes that transpire outside the prison walls also transpire on the inside. The inmate population is filled with men and women with both noble and ignoble intentions. Denial, manipulation, dishonesty, and the violation of human rights follow them into the prison.



Some inmates are not connected with their families and find themselves with no connection to the outside world. Being thrust into such a lonely position and surviving in the prison environment can be unnerving at best. Façades and the appearance of being tough are developed as survival mechanisms in a subculture that often lends itself to violence.

## Prison Subcultures: Powerful Realities

**Drugs.** Every prison has drug dealers and users. The proliferation of the drug culture behind prison walls is aided by family members, disloyal employees, and smuggling through the mail system. A number of inmates run drug operations from behind the walls by phone.

**Alcohol.** Inmates sneak sugar, bread, fruit, and other items from the dining hall to make a prison brand of alcohol. The smuggled items are placed in a hidden distillery to ferment; then the brew is sold to the prison population for a modest price. Prisoners have made alcohol that is 85 percent proof or higher.

**Scams.** Prisons are supposed to be cashless, yet cash is present in all prisons. Poker games and loan sharks are a vital part of this economy. Loan sharks make 100-200 percent on the money they loan to other inmates. Inmates also run stores called commissaries out of their cells.

**Gangs.** Today's prisons are saturated by gangs and gang violence. Gangs are so entrenched in some prisons that they have become a management challenge for prison staff and administrators. Gangs can give inmates a sense of family and protection.

**Sex.** Same-sex relationships, gang rape, and sexual exchanges for money or other purposes are all too common in inmate subcultures. Some inmates have been the victims of gang rapes that have resulted in traumatic medical problems.

**Violence.** The dining hall can be the most violent spot in the prison community. Inmates try to sit with their backs to the wall in the dining hall. Watching their backs and being vigilant is essential to their survival. Some of the most atrocious killings have occurred in the dining hall. What should be a place of enjoyment is a nightmare for many inmates. Most inmates try to eat in about 10 minutes so they can move on as soon as possible.

Inmates soon discover that any desire to change prevailing attitudes and to be better people when they return to society seems to fade away. Hopes of developing skills, trades, or gaining education sink into oblivion for many. Unless there is an inner spark that creates a personal desire to make something positive out of life, inmates may drift with the tide. A relationship with Jesus Christ can make a huge difference.

## Relating to Inmates

The typical inmate experiences poverty, has little education, and was unemployed at the time of arrest. Younger inmates are often charged with drug-related offenses. Few have any kind of plan for dealing with their situation.

Yet to conclude that all inmates are hopeless would be a gross error. Many inmates have been exposed to Christianity at some point in their lives by attending church with someone in



their family. There are men and women behind bars whose knowledge of Scripture is simply amazing. God needs ambassadors to encourage those who know about Jesus, and to deliver the good news of the Gospel to those who have not yet encountered Him.

Seek understanding and accept each inmate as a child of God, just as God unconditionally accepts everyone. Let the love of Christ that flows through you provide you with the insight to look beyond an inmate's faults and provide for his or her needs. When inmates allow Christ to take over, He will help them make changes in their lives.

It is important to be fair and honest when you minister to inmates. They will respect you if you maintain a high level of integrity. As long as you are fair, inmates won't have a problem with you being frank with them. Just be yourself. They can detect a phony.

Volunteers must be friendly without being overly friendly. This is especially true when working with the opposite sex. Some inmates have a way of reading something into nothing. An inmate can misconstrue a smile or compliment. If you receive a compliment, say thank you and advance the conversation to another level where the focus will be on Christ. Be extremely cautious about romantic entanglements with inmates. These attachments are counterproductive, risky, and usually fail.

Be prepared to confront any manipulative behavior from inmates. If you give in to one manipulative act it sets the stage for you giving in again, and this can continue until a serious compromising blunder occurs. When any concerns arise, remember that the prison chaplain is your supervisor. If you have any doubts, ask him or her.

## Communicating with Inmates

In order to minister to inmates, it is essential to effectively communicate with them. Ministering to inmates requires good eye contact. This allows you to learn a great deal about the inmate with whom you are conversing, and will help you assess his or her needs. The eye is the window to the soul. Good eye contact will play a major role in convincing inmates of your sincerity and will help determine the magnitude of your influence as you introduce them to Jesus.

While communicating with inmates, don't be overly eager to correct illogical comments. This is a product of defensive listening. Defensive listening will alienate rather than establish the bond of trust you will need to win the inmates' confidence so you can share the love of Christ in the most efficient manner. Often their ideas are not going to be congruent with your theological ideology, but resist the temptation to interrupt them because you are going to have many opportunities later to share your point of view. Sharing prohibits dogmatism and unpleasant encounters. Sharing is a magnetic agent and dogmatism is a repelling agent.

Avoid argumentative encounters with inmates. Always speak the truth in love, following Jesus' example. In all your conversations with inmates make Jesus first, best, and last.

Don't say, "I know how you feel" if you haven't been incarcerated.



Avoid breaching an inmate's confidence unless it involves the safety of another inmate, or is a security risk for the institution. Confidentiality does not mean keeping secrets, but it does mean respecting the inmate's viewpoint without making a public display of what has been shared. Refrain from talking about one inmate to another. This could create an unpleasant situation for security personnel, staff, and other inmates.

## **Inmate Attitudes toward God**

God saved Jonah in the belly of a very big fish. Sometimes He saves the inmate in a prison cell.

Prison has afforded countless inmates the opportunity to sit down and think about the course of their lives and seek help from God. Inmates on death row have given their lives to Christ and chosen to be baptized.

Security levels in correctional facilities play a significant role in inmates' willingness to participate in religious activities. For example, inmates whose security levels range from medium to maximum are likely to welcome any opportunity to get out of their cells.

Inmates at minimum security institutions are allowed to work for private and government institutions outside the prisons. They might have access to money, can freely walk back and forth from the picnic area to the visiting gallery, and have free world clothes. All this can make them feel less of a need for God or religious services.

There are inmates who are strong enough to resist ridicule from other inmates and stand for Christ. There are others who have no interest in spiritual matters. Numerous inmates are under the stronghold of Satan. Scores of inmates are caught up in the vices of their environment, eclipsing any spiritual inclinations.

Inmates will respond to the invitation to attend religious services for various reasons. Some just want to escape the monotony of being confined to a cell for countless hours. Others will respond because they hear that some females are coming into the prison and they think it is a way to establish an acquaintance. Others will respond to the call purely for companionship with friends whom they anticipate will be there. However, there will be some who will come because they love the Lord and are eager to hear a word from the Lord's messengers. In spite of their motives for coming to the worship services, the transforming power of the Gospel can reach their hearts.

## **BAPTISMS AND WEDDINGS**

Baptisms can be performed in prison. Work with the chaplain to accomplish this. Weddings can also be performed, although this is not recommended. Inmates requesting to get married must obtain the warden's approval and have counseling. Marriage requests often include a lengthy waiting period. No provision is made for consummating the marriage.



## Working with Prison Officials

Ministering to inmates is a commission that comes from God. It is also a privilege extended by the Department of Corrections. Consequently, volunteers must obey the prison rules as they minister to inmates. Rules vary from state to state, and in-house rules and protocols differ between prisons. Prison ministries volunteers are expected to know and obey the rules and policies of the institution.

Prisons operate on a paramilitary system. The men and women employed there are referred to as security officers, not guards. These persons may view you as do-gooders or bleeding hearts until you win them over by showing respect for them and for the inmates, and through the unwavering principles by which you live.

Working with security personnel is not always easy. However, when something does not transpire as it should you have a channel inside the prison for complaints and concerns. That person is usually the prison chaplain or volunteer coordinator. He or she will address concerns to the appropriate personnel and help to bring a resolution to the existing dilemma. Even if security personnel are in the wrong, do not engage in any kind of argumentative discussion because the experience will usually be unpleasant. Moreover, the prison ministries volunteers may be branded as troublemakers, not only at that institution but at other correctional institutions as well.

Upon entering the prison, follow the directives given by security personnel and proceed to the designated area for religious services. Unauthorized wandering around in a prison is extremely risky. While walking to the area designated for the service, don't be shocked or intimidated by what you see or hear. There is an eleventh commandment among inmates which says, "Thou shalt not hurt a free world visitor." Many inmates are mindful of the fact that free world visitors are their connection to the outside world and their vessels of hope. They are not willing that this connection be severed.

The warden must give approval if you desire to bring anything into the facility. Shun every opportunity to compromise the rules by bringing unapproved items into the prison or taking items out of the prison. Carry only necessary keys, ID badges, materials, and other permitted equipment needed to minister to the inmates. Decline any opportunity to exchange phone numbers and addresses. This prove fatal if the information ends up in the wrong hands.

## Handling Emergency Situations

Riots, fights, and fires are all possible emergencies in prison. However, volunteers are unlikely to be harmed because the safety and security of visitors and inmates is the highest priority of correctional facilities. Their staff have been trained to effectively handle emergencies. In the event of a crisis situation volunteers should remain calm, summon staff members, and follow their instructions. Visitors should not attempt to stop fights or riots.



## Diversification in Prison Ministries

Hearing the slam of doors behind you and entering the domain of convicted criminals can be an unnerving experience for the bravest of people. And certainly, it is not a common desire. Yet every church member can participate in some way with prison ministries. It is not a requirement for everyone involved in this ministry to go behind prison walls.

Below are some areas of prison ministries that are available for total church participation:

**Personal Hygiene Kits Ministry:** Check with the prison authorities to see whether your church would be allowed to share personal hygiene kits with inmates. Assemble personal hygiene kits and supply them to the appropriate prison employee. Alternatively, your church could provide hygiene kits for inmates who are being released.

**Clothing Ministry:** Supply clothes for inmates who are being released from prison. Help the chaplain and counseling staff become aware of this ministry.

**Van Ministry:** Transport inmates' spouses and children to the prisons to see their loved ones. This ministry is for families who live at a distance and have no transportation. Ask the chaplain to inform the inmates of this service. Keep logs, addresses, and phone numbers of those who benefit from this ministry. Share religious literature with them.

**Literature Ministry:** Support prison ministries with money to keep the ministry supplied with Bibles, tracts, Bible studies, and other needed materials.

**Prayer Ministry:** Organize a group of prayer warriors who consistently pray for the prison ministries team each week.

**Support Groups:** Start support groups for wives, fiancées, and families of inmates. Hold support group meetings at your church once a week for one hour. Free childcare should be provided.

**Pen Pal Ministry:** Correspond with inmates who are without family or who do not receive correspondence from the outside world. Keep all correspondence above board. Don't write letters that would suggest an intimate relationship. Share no phone numbers, addresses, or names except for a pen name. Use the church's post office box address.

### Ministry to Children of Inmates:

Angel Tree Program: Provide gifts to inmates' children during the holiday season.

Summer Camp: Send children of inmates to summer camp and introduce them to Jesus.

Tutorial Services: Tutor children of inmates after school to help them improve academically.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of ministries that can be done outside the walls of the prison. Jesus needs church members to prayerfully consider how they can step up to the plate and participate in this important ministry.



## Working with Inmates' Families

As you minister to inmates, you may also find opportunities to minister to their families. When this level of confidence has been reached, the inmate will disclose information about his or her family. If requested, a volunteer should attempt to visit the inmate's family (after the inmate has notified his or her family that he or she requested the visit). Families will often welcome your visit if you approach them with a caring attitude of friendliness and compassion.

Incarceration imposes emotional, psychological, physical, and financial burdens upon the family. Often families do not know how to deal with the stress of having a loved one incarcerated. Each family needs a support system to help them cope with the strain.

Try to assess their needs and alleviate them through social service agencies or church ministries. Do not make personal contributions of money. This will protect you from manipulation and scams. For example, if money is needed to pay the electric bill the church treasurer can write a check directly to the electric company. Adventist Community Services can provide food (but not cash).

If possible, organize a family support group. Cover topics such as anger management skills, assertiveness, money management, job placement, and healthful living.

Remember that some members of your congregation may have loved ones who are incarcerated. This can be a particularly isolating experience within the church. Make sure your church reaches out to these members and keeps them involved in the church's ministries and events. Ask how these members are doing and how your church can best provide support for them and their loved one who is incarcerated.

## Evaluating Prison Ministries

The following questions will be helpful for evaluating prison ministries in your church. Go over this list at least once per year:

1. Is our team well trained and reliably functioning?
2. Are we presenting the gospel of Jesus in appealing ways?
3. Are we positively relating to inmates?
4. Are we working well with prison officials?
5. Are we serving the needs of inmate families?
6. Have we diversified our programs so all church members may participate?
7. Are we preparing inmates for re-entry into society?



## Conclusion

Jesus affirmed the importance of prison ministries and its relevancy to the church when He hung on the cross between two thieves. In fact, He was a prison chaplain on death row when He changed the sentence of one thief to receiving eternal life. He took upon Himself a death sentence so prisoners behind the walls, as well as prisoners of sin, might have the opportunity to be paroled into the Kingdom of God.

As sinners who have experienced salvation, we are the best communicators of God's grace to those who are behind prison walls. We are the conduit through which His love flows to those who have been ostracized by society. Jesus admonishes us to throw out the nets and fish. The net will reveal a vast size and variety of fish. Yet it is not the duty of Christ's workers to sort or clean the fish that have been caught in the net. That is the job of the Holy Spirit.

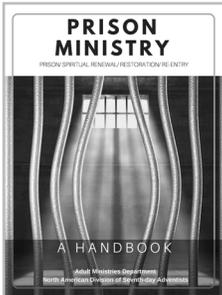
We are "To preach good tidings unto the meek . . . to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that are bound" (Isaiah 61:1, KJV).

Setting the captives free and opening the prison doors does not suggest that they will exit the prison the moment they accept Christ. However, it does suggest that when inmates accept Jesus their minds are no longer imprisoned, but set free. The shackles have been loosed, the burdens lifted, the yokes broken, and the power of the saving Gospel of Christ has made them new creatures.



## Resources

The following resources are available from AdventSource. Visit [AdventSource.org](http://AdventSource.org) or call 402.486.8800 for a complete list.



### Prison Ministry Handbook

Created by NAD Adult Ministries

The Bible is clear that one of the priorities for Christians is to minister to those who are in prison. This handbook starts with an overview of the criminal justice system in the United States, Canada, and Bermuda including the steps of a criminal case. It includes chapters on prison subcultures, working with inmates, and much more.

Product #532133

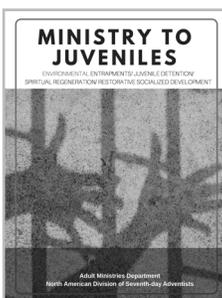


### Keys to Prison Ministries

Created by the General Conference

This book is your guide to starting a prison ministry. It covers the steps to starting a ministry, inmate attitudes toward religion, prison subculture, ideas for outreach and much more.

Product #554300



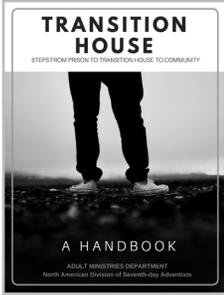
### Ministry to Juveniles

Created by NAD Adult Ministries

This book serves as a guide for those ministering to juvenile offenders and at-risk youth. Sections include factors of juvenile behavior, media and music influences on behavior, gangs, and absentee fatherhood. You will also find basic information on ministering to juveniles.

Product #532135



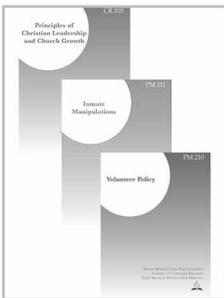


## Transition House

Created by NAD Adult Ministries

This handbook outlines the framework and tools for creating a transition house. It starts with the reasons, demographics, and need for transition houses. You will also find sections on organization and operation that will be essential to the success of your facility.

Product #532134



## Prison Ministries Series

By Dr. Cleveland Houser

This series is for people interested in learning more about prison ministry. Learn how to witness to those in prison and what is required in order to volunteer as a chaplain.

Product #456970



## Prison Ministries Coordinator

The prison ministries coordinator is responsible for overseeing all aspects of prison ministries, including relations with corrections department personnel. Tasks include recruiting, screening, and training volunteers. The coordinator is the liaison between the church(es), the prison administration, and the local conference prison ministries director.

Other titles in the Quick Start Guide series:

- Personal Ministries
- Adult Sabbath School Facilitator
- Church Board
- Interest Coordinator

For a complete list of Quick Start Guide titles visit [AdventSource.org](http://AdventSource.org)



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