

Balancing Justice with Mercy: What is a Healing Community?

1. Vision. A Healing Community seeks to engage congregations in the restoration and healing of people in their own congregations affected by crime, incarceration and reintegration after prison or jail. The model builds on the inherent strengths of faith communities and what we know about prison ministry and reentry, but avoids the challenges presented by program development by instead focusing on a ministry of healing to the congregation.

2. Building on the faith community's unique strengths. A Healing Community offers a place where the belief systems and unique strengths of the faith community are invoked - acceptance, compassion, forgiveness, redemption and restoration. It can offer what programs and services generally cannot - the transformation of hearts and minds and the building of relationships that support people.

3. Who is served? A Healing Community serves both the individuals *and their families* affected by the criminal justice system and reentry - for instance, the mother *and* her son who is in prison, the wife and children *and* the father who was just arrested. "This is a ministry that starts with people you already know."

4. Timing of service. A Healing Community may help members of the congregation and their families at any time from arrest through reintegration after coming home from prison.

5. Nature of service. A Healing Community offers a ministry of presence; they "walk with the person" and connect them to their faith. The community's members open their hearts and offer an embrace of love and understanding - without necessarily providing the services that programs deliver. But a Healing Community can also go further and address needs of the larger community and policy issues as well.

6. Strengthening individuals, families and communities. A Healing Community seeks to strengthen individuals, families and communities by creating a sense of welcome inclusion, by reducing stigma and shame, and by building networks of support that start in houses of worship and expand to the community at large.

7. Personal responsibility. A Healing Community facilitates taking responsibility for harm done and encourages taking action to repair harm to the victim, community, family and self.

8. Transformation. A Healing Community transforms the congregation, which leads to the transformation of neighborhoods and communities.



GETTING STARTED: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HEALING COMMUNITIES FRAMEWORK

1. Faith leaders commit to creating a Healing Community.

2. Faith leaders reach out to other faith leaders and join with them to study the guide. Often these joint efforts are called "prayer circles." Within them, the leaders study and reflect on what it means and requires to create a Healing Community. Study is usually 6 - 14 weeks.

3. Education. The study group educates itself on the impact of crime, incarceration and reentry on their community and brings in experts to inform their reflections. Chapter Two of the guide is a starting point; finding out about the criminal justice system in your state and community is the next step.

4. Faith leaders introduce the Healing Communities concept to the congregation. The stories told in the guide (Chapter One and Appendix A) are a rich source of inspiration for sermons, study and discussion groups. Model sermons have been developed, too.

5. Outreach and welcome. The faith leader preaches, teaches and reaches out to members of the congregation to create a culture of healing and restoration for people affected by crime and incarceration. Volunteers from within the congregation are tapped to lead the effort.

6. Congregational education. The congregation learns how crime, incarceration and reentry affect their own members and what they can do to minister to them. They reach out to and partner with others in the community to identify resources and policy issues needing to be addressed.

7. Volunteer engagement. Members of the congregation volunteer to spread the Healing Communities message and foster shared responsibility for supporting individuals and families affected by crime, incarceration and reentry and the transformation of their house of worship,

For more information about the Healing Communities model, including guidebooks on how your congregation can create one, please contact Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Goode, Sr. at wgoode@ppv.org, or via telephone at 215-557-4497.