

Yoke-Sharing



"for my yoke is easy and my burden is light"

August 2009

Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

by David Guthrie, Board of Directors

It says it right in the Yokefellow Guidebook:

Yokefellow is not focused on worship, preaching, teaching, counseling, or Bible study, but is a ministry of listening, sharing, caring, encouragement and support provided by community volunteers from the "outside" yoked in fellowship with those on the "inside" through the weekly small group meetings.

So, to put it plainly: If you are focused on anything else in that list except "listening, sharing, caring, encouragement and support through the weekly small group meeting", then you aren't doing Yokefellows. In your meeting, if you are doing most of the talking, you aren't doing Yokefellows. If most of your time is taken up with songs, and birthdays, and announcements, and reading a devotional, and the whole group praying together (as good as that may be), you aren't following the Yokefellow method of ministry.

Those other things are important. Other groups that come into the prison do them. Those things can be a small part of a Yokefellow meeting. But, they are not the main thing.

The main thing is the small group meeting – One or two "outside" Yokefellows sitting down with 3-6 "inside" Yokefellows and having a conversation in which the "inside" Yokefellows do MOST of the talking, and the "outside" Yokefellows do MOST of the "listening, caring, encouragement and support". It is a process of building relationships of trust so that the inmates can share questions, concerns, burdens, successes, good news, etc., of importance.

One of the Objectives of Yokefellow (from the Guidebook) is:

To provide an open and inviting setting for residents of our correctional institutions to examine their lives, talk about their faith and search for direction and purpose with others who are committed to do the same.

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Most of the time, residents of our correctional facilities are getting talked to, told what to do and being told to listen. A Yokefellow meeting gives them a place and a time and a group where THEY can talk and share their concerns for a change. Our ministry is built on that – giving them that opportunity as a gift.

The Yokefellow Covenant (page 11 in the Guidebook) gives an outline of a Yokefellow meeting. Here is the part about the sharing time:

Sharing (30-45 minutes): *Table groups of 3-6 inmates and 1-2 volunteers are formed to share about the topic for the night, or anything else as appropriate. If there are two volunteers, one is the leader. This is a listening ministry. Avoid: criticism, judging, giving advice, interrupting, doing all the talking, and breaking confidentiality. Work at: being respectful and considerate, helping people talk and share, including everyone, when one is speaking the rest are listening, etc. Encourage (but do not force) everyone to take part.*

And, there is this very important note: *"Adjust other parts of the meeting before taking time away from the Sharing portion."*

If you need more volunteers to have the right number of people in the table groups, recruit them. Don't give up on the small groups. Don't take away from the time for them.

Why are the small sharing groups the main thing? Again, from the Guidebook:

We strongly believe that people's lives are changed through committed relationships. We work to make the redemptive love of Christ known through the trust and the care present in these relationships.

I want to encourage you to "keep the main thing the main thing". It is what makes the ministry of Yokefellows unique among the programs that are out there. Yes, it is hard work. But when people are given the opportunity to talk, and someone is there as a caring, encouraging listener, lives get changed. And that is what it is all about.

Plan now to attend:

40th Anniversary Celebration

Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina

Annual Meeting

Saturday, October 24, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

First Baptist Church, Burlington, NC

(look for further information later)