

**Yokefellow Prison Ministry
of North Carolina, Inc.**

A Guidebook

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Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina, Inc.

“A state-wide fellowship of Yokefellows dedicated to a ministry of reconciliation.”

Mission Statement:

In response to the call and the example of Jesus Christ, the purpose of Yokefellow Prison Ministry is to develop personal relationships between inmates and volunteers, individually and in community, which will create a nurturing, non-judgmental environment in which each will feel free to examine and share their lives and thereby experience the forgiveness, healing, and power of God’s love.

- Adopted by the Board of Directors, February 1996

Introduction:

The Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina, Inc. is an inter-denominational, interracial, lay-clergy movement whose purpose is to serve the religious, social and personal needs of the residents of our correctional institutions. The ministry is conducted through small, non-sectarian, sharing groups that meet weekly inside the correctional facilities. Residents of these facilities may choose to join one of the sharing groups and experience the meaning of a caring community. Christ’s love is shared with the correctional residents through the attention and presence of Christian people from nearby churches.

Residents may talk about their lives, the issues of their imprisonment, the meaning of God and their concerns for their family members and any other issues of faith and personal interest normal to such sharing groups. Linked with people from the outside in this Yokefellow setting, they may experience the nurture and wisdom of caring people.

The Yokefellow volunteers who come weekly to the prisons are both lay and clergy. They are dedicated to a ministry of listening, a ministry of healing, and a ministry of nurturing those whose lives have suffered the consequence of bad judgments and behaviors. Lost in a strange world of confinement, the residents can now belong to a group whose love has no bounds and whose message is transcendent.

Objectives of Yokefellow Prison Ministry

- 1) To provide an open and inviting setting for the residents of our correctional institutions, in order that they might examine their lives, talk about their faith, and search for direction and purpose with others who are committed to do the same. This happens in conjunction with the help of Yokefellows from nearby churches.
- 2) To offer opportunities for residents to build relationships with Yokefellow volunteers, thereby, diminishing the power of their estrangement with the outside world, and preparing them to reenter society with wholesome attitudes.
- 3) To demonstrate a concern for prisoners who have been released and paroled, ministering to their needs and supporting others who minister to them.
- 4) To encourage the establishment of (and to support the operation of) existing community sponsored “halfway house” facilities that provide housing for prisoners returning to freedom, and guidance in their reintegration into society.
- 5) To initiate cooperative efforts by other community agencies in granting assistance to inmates and their families.
- 6) To promote programs designed to improve correctional methods.
- 7) To **yoke** persons through Christ for many forms of ministry: to those in prison, those released, families of prisoners, victims of crime, and persons participating in victim/offender reconciliation programs.

“What is most rewarding is doing something that really matters with congenial colleagues, who share with us the firm conviction that it needs to be done.”

- Elton Trueblood

Yokefellow Prison Ministry

A ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness, where volunteers from various Christian denominations meet regularly with Yokefellow prison inmates for small group fellowship. The term “yokefellow” is symbolic of being yoked with Christ for help in making the burdens of life a little lighter to carry.

After an opening exercise, we break into small table groups of 3-5 Yokefellow inmates with one Yokefellow volunteer. A topic will be suggested to stimulate conversation, but if you have something special you wish to share, do not be bound by the topic.

The only rule we follow is that when one person is speaking, the rest listen. We are not a preaching or a teaching ministry. We are a listening ministry for the inmates of this institution. This is your night. We, the volunteers, want to listen to you and share our Christian walk with you. And we hope to encourage you to listen to each other during the week.

Why is the Yokefellow Ministry approach unique?

The Yokefellow philosophy maintains that people’s lives are changed through committed relationships. Yokefellow ministries, therefore, are designed to make the redemptive love of Christ known through the trust and care provided in these relationships.

While many ministries and church groups are willing to provide worship services, revivals, and Bible studies for prisoners; Yokefellow is the only organized, ongoing, state-wide ministry which gives an inmate the opportunity to share his or her pain, loneliness, and isolation with a caring Christian volunteer. First and foremost the volunteer listens, and as opportunities permit, the inmate and the volunteer sort out the issues of the inmate in search of guidance, courage, and hope for resolution.

“When Yokefellow is working well here, I get fewer calls for counseling from inmates. That is important because of the tremendous size of this prison. There’s no way I can respond to all of the inmate requests for my time.”

- Chaplain Dawkins

What is the organizational structure and staff philosophy of Yokefellow?

“Dollar for dollar, Yokefellow Prison Ministry is one of the smartest investments around.”

- R.A.L. Walker, Coordinator of Chaplaincy Service

Yokefellow Is:

A small group Christian fellowship
A ministry of listening and caring
Interracial and inter-denominational
A ministry which encourages intentional spiritual growth

Yokefellow is Not:

Preaching
A Bible Study
Proselytizing
A “catch-all” for various prison ministries

The Disciplines of Yokefellow:

1) **The Discipline of Prayer:** Pray every day. Jesus said, “Pray for those who use you despitefully.” Yokefellows have found that it is difficult to hate others or treat them indifferently if you pray for them every day. Pray, also, for the other members of your Yokefellow group. Prayer strengthens relationships, increases our concerns for others and brings us closer to God. Prayer helps us acknowledge our shortcomings and provides an avenue for new understanding and healing.

2) **The Discipline of Reading Scripture:** Seek God’s guidance through reading the Bible each day. Many Yokefellows participate in the Prison Ministry because they read in the Bible: “...*I was in prison and you visited me...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.*” (Matthew 25:36 and 40) Jesus claims them as members of his family and encourages us to relate to them with love and compassion. Such guidance from Scripture makes a difference in how we see others, especially prisoners. They are children of God.

3) **The Discipline of Worship:** Worship, at least, once a week. God’s presence appears in the presence of others who are gathered for worship. “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.*” (Matthew 18:20) A collective effort generates greater energy and light. Elton Trueblood has written: “*Each candle may be small and may give very little light, but the combined light of many candles is truly impressive.*” Gathering for worship and fellowship enlarges the dimensions of God’s purpose and mission to the world, and increases our faith in God and our hope for that which is to come. As light grows, darkness recedes.

4) **The Discipline of Money:** Return to God a portion of your income by supporting Christian causes and people in need, such as your own church and community of faith. It includes giving financially to local and global causes that are important to you. It also means making the commitment to give financially to Yokefellow Prison Ministry. Our prison ministry is no longer substantially supported by denominational bodies and conferences. Now, more than ever, we are dependent on the financial gifts of local churches and individuals. This includes our volunteers

and Yokefellow board members. The truth is that we are the only ones who care enough to keep the ministry going, and we need to support it financially.

5) **The Discipline of Service:** Make time to help others on a regular basis. Yokefellow inmates have discovered the joy of helping others in various ways: preparing fresh air camps for children, carrying developmentally challenged children on Easter egg hunts, serving as volunteer umpires in baseball and softball leagues for boys, providing leadership for Boy Scout troops for developmentally challenged children, and showing concern for inmates who have serious problems and no friends. Yokefellow inmates can, and often do, yoke with other inmates in the same kind of ministry that has been offered to them.

6) **The Discipline of Witness:** Be ready to tell others about your Christian experience when they indicate an interest. Model a Christian perspective and live with humility and in harmony with others. One inmate, a refugee who had trouble using the English language to express himself, brought several men into Yokefellow groups by simply telling them, “It is very good. Come with me and see.”

7) **The Discipline of Study:** Study constantly for greater understanding and for spiritual growth. Certain devotional booklets help with the study process: *The Upper Room*, *Guideposts*, *These Days*, *Light for Today*, *Open Windows*, *Forward Day by Day*, and *Daily Devotional Guide*. These are available from the denominational publishers. Reading the Bible and these booklets each day develops a pattern for spiritual renewal and growth. Discussing what you read and absorb with other Yokefellows helps to reinforce your faith and to speak in witness of God.

8) **The Discipline of a Weekly Yokefellow Meeting:** Share your story and support with each other. Bear one another’s burdens. Encourage one another to love and to do good works. Hold each other accountable and grow in grace for the good of the community.

Prison (DOC) Guidelines for Religious Volunteers

- 1) Security is a must for good communication. Please respect prison staff at all times.
 - 2) In general, the inmates are very respectful and friendly to Yokefellow volunteers. But, remember you are not at home.
 - 3) Please do not give anything to any inmate, except materials of a religious nature that have been approved in advance.
 - 4) Do not debate with inmates or others. Anything confidential that you learn should remain that way. As a Yokefellow volunteer, you will want to share your experience with friends, but be careful not to share any potentially confidential information.
 - 5) Do not accept **anything** from any inmate.
 - 6) Do not contact families, lawyers, judges, or make phone calls for any inmate without first talking with the chaplain or the inmate's counselor.
 - 7) Tell the chaplain or officer if you are having any problems.
 - 8) Do not give your address or phone number to any inmate.
 - 9) Do not criticize or defend the staff (or the system) in the presence of the inmates. These comments should be addressed to the chaplain.
 - 10) Do not believe everything the inmate tells you. Some inmates tend to exaggerate and distort the facts.
 - 11) Build a relationship of trust with an inmate. The inmate may not know how to relate to others. Expect him or her to distrust you at first. Be patient. Trust will come in time.
 - 12) Be yourself. Please do not approach the inmate as a psychiatrist, lawyer, or minister (unless you are one). Try to relate to him or her honestly and simply – “person to person.” This will make it easier for the inmate to do so with you.
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Guidelines for the Admittance of New Volunteers

Approved by the Yokefellow Board of Directors Executive Committee, March 1992

- 1) **All existing volunteers should be registered with the Department of Corrections and should have filled out a Department of Correction Volunteer Application Form.** If your existing volunteers have not filled out a DOC volunteer application, you must have them do so. Upon approval by the DOC, they will receive a DOC volunteer card. They will present this card as they enter the unit for the Yokefellow meetings. If you have questions about the application, ask the Program Director at the unit to explain the approval process to you and/or to the group.

2) After the initial members of a Yokefellow group have gone through the training process, the following procedures must be followed in admitting new members to the group:

1) Persons interested in visiting or wishing to explore joining the Yokefellow group must first call the Yokefellow group coordinator, program director, or chaplain to have their visit to the Yokefellow meeting approved. If the program director or chaplain approves the visit, the program director or the chaplain will notify the Yokefellow group coordinator. The YF coordinator will greet the new visitor upon arrival at the prison and “assign” the visitor to an existing volunteer for the duration of the Yokefellow meeting. The existing volunteer will serve as a “shepherd” to the visitor and will make sure the visitor does not feel uncomfortable, break prison rules, or disrupt the YF Ministry model (i.e., begin preaching instead of listening and sharing.)

2) Visitors, wishing to return to the group or to join, **must** fill out a DOC volunteer application. (Visitors may attend once without the Volunteer Identification Card from the DOC). If your group is out of compliance with this procedure, please contact the program director at your unit and ask for help. An application takes several weeks for processing. Once acceptance is given, the person will receive a DOC Volunteer Identification Card.

This process is for the protection and the security of the prison, the Yokefellow group, the inmates, and you. It helps to assure that the Yokefellow groups will not be used for illegal activity or by individuals who are not seriously interested in becoming Yokefellow volunteers. Yokefellow is not an “open door” access to the inmates for everyone.

3) The Yokefellow group coordinator will then schedule a time for training the new volunteer. It will be coordinated with one of the available YF trainers. This time could be directly before or after the group meeting, or apart from the inmates during the meeting.

If the DOC application process does not include an orientation time with a unit staff person to acquaint the new person with the rules of the institution, then the Yokefellow coordinator should provide basic guidelines for the new volunteer. It is recommended that a program staff person meet with the Yokefellow volunteer group at least once a year to answer questions, update them on DOC rules and concerns about volunteers.

4) When several new volunteers have joined the group, or if it has been a long time since a training session has been held at the unit, call the Yokefellow office (336-724-9801) for a new training session. New volunteers should understand that the Yokefellow training is a necessity for their continued participation in the group. **Training is not optional.** Usually, the best time to schedule training is during the time period that the Yokefellow meeting occurs.

5) Visitors must have an I.D. check. When a new person arrives at the Yokefellow meeting, he or she must present an I.D., preferably a driver’s license or some other picture identification. The I.D. number and address should be recorded. (Other forms of I.D. are acceptable if the volunteer doesn’t have a driver’s license.)

6) New people may NOT enter the prison without identification, even if they are attending with or at invitation of an existing volunteer. The Yokefellow group coordinator arranges with the chaplain or program director for someone to check identification.

7) Circulate an attendance roster during meetings for both volunteers and inmates.

Unfortunately, the above process adds to the workload and responsibility of the YF group coordinator. Yet, it is necessary to avoid even stiffer entrance procedures that could be imposed by the unit superintendent. While we do not wish to discourage new volunteers with cumbersome procedures, we also do not wish to permit any illegal activity that could arise from our lack of attention to prison policy. People could be hurt and Yokefellow Prison Ministry could be in jeopardy if we fail to comply with prison rules.

8) Please make sure that all existing and new volunteers have completed the Yokefellow Volunteer Information Form.

It is imperative that this form is mailed to the YF Executive Director at the office in Winston-Salem. These forms have to be on file and the information recorded in our electronic database. If the coordinator would like to keep copies of the volunteer information forms, for their own record, that is fine. Please mail all original forms to the Yokefellow office:

Yokefellow Prison Ministry, Executive Director
1001 Reynolda Road
Winston-Salem, NC 27104

A copy of this form is included in the guidebook.

The Do's and Don'ts of Prison Ministry

A basic rule in prison ministry is that a volunteer must follow prison policy in visiting with, relating and ministering to inmates. In case a volunteer does not know policy, he or she must not do it until gaining clearance from a prison official. It is proper to say, "I don't know, but I will check it out and get an answer for you." In simple words, "Ask if you do not know."

The following do's, don'ts, and cautions will serve as guidelines for you as you begin prison ministry.

The Do's

- 1) *Do* be an example of truth, hope, honesty, and optimism to the inmate.
- 2) *Do* be certain that what you tell the inmate is policy, the truth, etc.
- 3) *Do* realize that you have your limitations as to how much help, support, and counsel you can bring to the inmate.
- 4) *Do* remember that even you are not going to save the whole world.
- 5) *Do* learn all rules and regulations of the institution and strictly adhere to them.
- 6) *Do*, as a group, arrive together and on time, and always leave right on time or a few minutes early.
- 7) *Do* be extremely careful how you receive and handle information that "supposedly" is confidential.
- 8) *Do* be sure to guard your name, your image, your position, your character, and your credibility in reference to places where you pray with, counsel with, visit with, or just listen to an inmate.
- 9) *Do* bridge the gap between staff members.
- 10) *Do* make sure you are not called "anti" administration, but rather work for its improvement.

- 11) *Do* let the administration know of any dangers and share with administrators any information regarding an inmate's plan to hurt himself, others, plans to escape or damage prison property.
 - 12) *Do* remember you are there to help the inmates and be sure to accept them right where they are.
 - 13) *Do* settle the question, "Are you there to bring the gospel to the inmates or there to get them out of prison?"
 - 14) *Do*, when writing letters, write only what you know about the inmate, and not a letter recommending parole.
 - 15) *Do* remember to go into the prison as a beggar going to another beggar, and telling him or her where the bread is.
 - 16) *Do* dress properly. (See attached dress code, page 11)
 - 17) *Do* be careful about physical contact.
 - 18) *Do* be prepared to handle flirting or romantic advances.
 - 19) *Do* stay with your group.
 - 20) *Do* beware of con games.
 - 21) *Do* be trustworthy when someone shares with you personal or confidential information.
 - 22) *Do* be a good listener.
 - 23) *Do* try to find ways to encourage and give hope.
 - 24) *Do* notify the chaplain or staff person in charge if you have a close relative who is an inmate. You cannot participate as a volunteer as long as that relative is an inmate at the facility where you volunteer.
 - 25) *Do* talk with any inmate about anything the two of you desire.
 - 26) *Do* refer legal (probation/parole/prison) questions to prison staff.
 - 27) *Do* leave keys, weapons (i.e., knife), pocketbook in locker or vehicle outside the gate.
 - 28) *Do* get back with an inmate on matters you have promised to get back with him or her on.
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The Don'ts

- 1) *Do not* bring anything into the institution for an inmate.
- 2) *Do not* carry out anything at the inmate's request.
- 3) *Do not* make phone calls or deliver messages for an inmate.
- 4) *Do not* accept gifts from any business deal with an inmate or his or her family.
- 5) *Do not* engage in any physical contact with an inmate, which could arouse sexual emotions or cause others to become suspicious.
- 6) *Do not* discuss one inmate's problem with another inmate.
- 7) *Do not* ask about the inmate's crime.
- 8) *Do not* provide direct financial resources to the inmate nor purchase money orders.
- 9) *Do not* be shocked or surprised by what you hear.
- 10) *Do not* make promises you cannot keep.
- 11) *Do not* dress inappropriately. (See attached dress code, page 11)
- 12) *Do not* share church problems with, nor criticize churches to the inmates.
- 13) *Do not* share your marital or domestic problems with an inmate.
- 14) *Do not* stress particular denominational doctrines, which cause division and confusion.
- 15) *Do not* give out your address or telephone number.
- 16) *Do not* go into a prison if you are younger than the required age. (You must be 21 years old or older with a special permission.)

- 17) *Do not* give or send money to any inmate.
- 18) *Do not* criticize staff, an institution, other races, countries, or religions.
- 19) *Do not* enter into any business transactions with prisoners.
- 20) *Do not* forget to bring in a valid and current photo ID.
- 21) *Do not* forget to check the rules if you are an ex-prisoner going into prison (If you are an ex-prisoner, you cannot be on parole or probation. You must be out of prison and off parole or probation for at least one year.)
- 22) *Do not* run on prison grounds.
- 23) *Do not* take car keys and weapons into the unit.
- 24) *Do not* set up programs without approval of the program supervisor.
- 25) *Do not* mail anything **for** an inmate.
- 26) *Do not* go shopping for an inmate without the approval of the officer-in-charge.
- 27) *Do not* accept gifts from inmates.
- 28) *Do not* do anything you wonder about without first discussing it with the staff.

Cautions

Please be cautious about...

- 1) Helping an inmate family with their rent, fuel, telephone, medical bills, etc.
 - 2) Loaning books, commentaries, Bibles, etc. to inmates.
 - 3) "Following" inmates from prison to prison in terms of letters and visits.
 - 4) Becoming too involved in an inmate's case or his family problems.
 - 5) Going to an inmate's house to visit his parents, wife, etc.
 - 6) Accepting the inmate's view of things (crime story, family, education, etc.) as being the whole truth.
 - 7) "Betting your life" on an inmate being not guilty, never returning to prison, not being a homosexual, etc.
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Dress Code for Volunteers

*****Failure to Adhere to this Dress Code will be Reason to Deny Entry*****

- 1) No shorts (this applies to males and females).
- 2) No dresses or skirts above mid-thigh.
- 3) No tank tops.
- 4) No bare feet (unless it is approved for a drama, etc.).
- 5) No "see-through" shirts without an undershirt.
- 6) No garment displaying mid-rib or stomach area.
- 7) No dresses or blouses that are excessively low cut.
- 8) No sleeveless dresses or blouses.
- 9) No skin-tight clothing.
- 10) Other apparel, if judged by the shift O.I.C. or the chaplain to detrimental to the orderly operation of the facility.

Covenant for Yokefellow Groups

Yokefellow groups are organized under the direction of Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina, Inc, and operate in accordance with the tenets of Yokefellow International, and as set forth in this covenant.

- 1) Groups are organized and trained by area trainers in cooperation with the chaplains in the local prisons, and under the direction of the State Trainer/Developer.
- 2) Groups choose a Coordinator (and an assistant coordinator, if needed) as leader(s) of the group, subject to endorsement by the State Trainer/Developer. (The Coordinator's responsibilities are attached to this covenant.)
- 3) Volunteers are accepted as Yokefellow group members based on the following assumptions:
 - a) Yokefellow volunteers are Christian.
 - b) Yokefellows are volunteers approved by the Prison System of North Carolina.
 - c) YF volunteers continue in membership by faithfully attending the YFPM meetings scheduled by the group.
 - d) YF volunteers are servants of God who are available to inmates to listen, to encourage, to counsel, and to share God's love.
- 4) YF groups and volunteers agree to the following tenets of YF ministry:
 - a) YF volunteers agree to follow the patterns, policies, and purposes of YFPMNC.
 - b) YF volunteers agree to attend the Annual Meeting of YFPMNC as often as possible.
 - c) YF volunteers agree to participate in the training programs offered by state/area trainers, and/or by the prison chaplains.
 - d) YF volunteers will cooperate at all times with the prison officials and the prison chaplains.
 - e) YF volunteers agree to treat the inmates with respect, and to keep their contact with the inmates confined to the goals and purposes of YF ministry.
 - f) YF volunteers agree to refrain from giving-to or receiving-from inmates items of any kind, unless first approved by the group coordinator and the prison officials.
 - g) YF volunteers agree to be present with inmates, leaving their own agendas at the door.
 - h) A YF volunteer will listen to the inmates' concerns and will respond in an encouraging and loving manner. Offering advice is not central to the focus of YF ministry.
 - i) YF volunteers will strive to bring out the best responses possible from the inmates.
 - j) YF volunteers, following the pattern of Jesus, make no judgments against an inmate and do not offer condemnation. Rather, they invite the inmate to see the wisdom and mercy of God.
 - k) YF volunteers agree to support the efforts of their colleagues in the ministry, and to work together with them in serving the goals of a Yokefellow group.
 - l) YF volunteers think of an inmate as a child of God and a receiver of God's grace.
 - m) YF volunteers agree to invite others to join the ministry, and to solicit the aid of local Christian congregations in promoting and supporting YF Prison Ministry of NC.

Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina is a ministry to the inmates of the North Carolina prison system. The ministry consists of groups of volunteers, containing 5 to 15 members per group. The groups meet weekly in the local prisons, to listen to the inmates' concerns and to respond in a loving way. Yokefellow volunteers think of themselves as Christ's agents to the inmates who have gathered. They yoke with them out of compassion. ***"It is more blessed to listen than to give advice."*** Matters of faith and personal experience (on the part of the volunteers) must be offered to the inmates with spiritual sensitivity.

A regular YF Prison Ministry meeting may consist of the following:

- 1) A devotional moment of greeting, song, and prayer.
- 2) An informal time to define Yokefellow, welcome new participants, and set-up small groups for sharing.
- 3) A sharing time that allows inmates to talk about anything they wish to, and/or use discussion handouts.
- 4) A time for refreshments and closing prayer.

Options:

- 1) Small group sharing and listening time (at least 45 minutes).
- 2) Use of discussion material and handouts provided by YF Area Trainer.
- 3) Use of scripture as appropriate.
- 4) Praying at the opening of the whole group, before refreshments, and at the closing.
- 5) Singing a song for opening and closing.
- 6) Quiet meditation

The Role and Responsibilities of the YF Group Coordinator/Assistant Coordinator

- 1) As leader(s) of the group, the coordinator/assistant builds morale, offers spiritual direction, and counsels with members of the group about matters relating to ministry.
- 2) The coordinator/assistant is responsible for keeping ministry valid and alive, and in focus with Yokefellow.
- 3) The coordinator/assistant is responsible for the agenda of the meetings.
- 4) The coordinator/assistant arranges for refreshments.
- 5) The coordinator maintains current membership lists with contact information (addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, etc.) and communicates this information to the Executive Director at the Yokefellow Office. Volunteer Information Forms need to be filled out by each volunteer in the group.
- 6) The coordinator requests membership and education materials for volunteers from the YF office.

- 7) The coordinator arranges, 24 hours in advance of visit, with the superintendent of the prison (or program director) for visitors from the outside.
 - 8) The coordinator is the designated person to communicate with prison officials on matters relating to the YF group's ministry.
 - 9) The coordinator/assistant maintains schedules of times/places of meetings, and communicates any changes in these schedules to the membership.
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The Operation of a Yokefellow Group

Volunteers are Yokefellows. Inmates are also Yokefellows. They are bonded together in a unique ministry. It must be noted that all volunteers are Christians. It should also be noted that inmates may or may not be Christians. Linked, however, in this unique way, they experience God's presence and the love that Christ offered to the world. A clear understanding of how a Yokefellow group functions will be helpful to all participants.

The meeting is usually divided into four parts: 1) Opening; 2) Discussion Time; 3) Refreshments and Fellowship Time; 4) Closing.

1) Opening

Volunteers enter the prison as a group. They meet with the inmates in one common area, usually the prison cafeteria. The group leader calls the meeting to order.

2) Discussion Groups

1) Yokefellows (volunteers and inmates) sit together in small groups with one or two volunteers sitting with three or four inmates.

2) Each inmate is given the opportunity to talk about his or her life. To begin, a volunteer may ask a question or introduce a topic. Information on how to start a discussion is given in the training sessions. After the greetings and small talk, the volunteer may say: "*What's on your mind this evening?*" or "*Is there anything special you wish to share with us?*" or "*What's happened with you this week?*" (Volunteers should meet each week for a few minutes before meeting with inmates, in order to discuss questions and ways to initiate a good discussion in the regular meeting. This is also a good time for further training by the group coordinator or someone designated for that particular session.)

3) *Be very attentive* when a member of the group is speaking. Do not start a private conversation with someone at your table when anyone else is speaking. Stay with the whole group. When it is your turn to talk, everyone will then listen to you.

4) The Yokefellow group is a place where people can talk about their life experiences and their feelings. It is not a worship service, a time to give personal testimonies, or a Bible study.

5) Yokefellows come from different Christian backgrounds and may have different opinions on certain matters of faith and practice. But as Yokefellows, we come together as caring Christians who want to help each other. Criticism of the doctrines and practices of other Christians, and debates on matters of faith, are not helpful and are discouraged.

6) In a Yokefellow group, do not judge or criticize another person for what he or she says or has done.

7) Do not give advice in a Yokefellow discussion. It is better to create a climate that gives the person an opportunity to work through the issues for himself or herself.

8) Be considerate. Do not interrupt another person while he or she is speaking. Avoid dominating the conversation. Do not feel compelled to jump in if there is silence. Give others a chance to begin to speak and think through what they wish to say.

9) Observe confidentiality. Be honorable. Do not talk about what you have heard with others. **(Please note, however: Prison rules require volunteers to report anything they hear regarding an inmate who may harm himself or others, weapons in the prison, an escape or attempted escape.)**

3) Fellowship and Refreshments

The group leader (coordinator) will call the discussion group time to an end, and invite everyone to have fellowship. Sometimes refreshments will be served. At this free time, you may visit with people who are not sitting at your table, and you may talk individually with anyone.

4) The Closing

1) Yokefellow groups usually close with a prayer circle. The leader asks if anyone has special prayer requests. Briefly ask for prayers for yourself or others. This is not a time to give a testimony or witness. After requests are heard, the leader (or someone he or she chooses) closes the meeting with a brief prayer.

2) Everyone must leave promptly. Do not hang back and try to talk privately with someone when it is time to leave.

Further Guidelines for Yokefellow Meetings

1) Yokefellow volunteers may **NOT** do special favors for inmates. They cannot bring anything in or take anything out. They cannot call a family member or write them letters.

2) Do not exchange addresses or ask for telephone numbers.

3) Yokefellows are all brothers and sisters in Christ. If anyone seeks a romantic or personal relationship in Yokefellow, he or she will be removed from the group.

4) Males and females may only shake hands. Hugs and other touching are not allowed.

5) All prison rules must be honored.

We believe that you will find friends in the Yokefellow group who will listen to you, who will show you respect, who will share with you God's love and strength. Please let us know if you have questions or concerns, by contacting the Executive Director. The address for the Yokefellow office is: 1001 Reynolda Road, Winston-Salem, NC 27104. The phone number is (336) 724-9801.

Sample Yokefellow Meeting Agenda

Before the Meeting:

Volunteers gather 15 minutes prior to the meeting. This provides an opportunity to discuss Yokefellow meeting business, meet new or potential volunteers, review current meeting plans (i.e. songs, readers, and designate prayer and song leaders), and make announcements of future meetings and events (such as training sessions or social events).

The Meeting:

Opening (15 Minutes)

- 1) The leader has everyone sign a Yokefellow attendance roster (one for volunteers and one for inmates). The coordinator maintains the attendance files.
- 2) The leader calls for a friendship circle.
- 3) Recognize birthdays, new volunteers and inmates, inmates who will be released prior to the next meeting.
- 4) Sing an inspirational song or hymn. (Providing song sheets may be helpful.)
- 5) Prayer
- 6) Read aloud the definition of Yokefellow Prison Ministry (found in training manual).
- 7) Read a small portion of scripture.
- 8) Introduce the topic (This is optional. The coordinator may pre-select a topic or each table leader may suggest a topic at his/her table.)

The Discussion Period (30-45 minutes)

- 1) The circle is dismissed to form table families or groups to discuss a suggested topic. (A group is made up of 3-6 inmates and one volunteer table leader. This depends on the ratio of volunteers to inmates.)
- 2) During the discussion, the residents are encouraged to begin the sharing of the topic, or they can talk about anything else that may take precedence.
- 3) Remember that this is a listening ministry. Do not interrupt. Do not preach. Do not be quick to give advice.
- 4) Encourage each table member to participate, but don't force anything. You may have a shy or reserved participant. They will speak when they are ready to do so.
- 5) The meeting leader will call time after 30 or 45 minutes have lapsed, and the table groups will go back to the circle for closing.

The Closing (15 minutes)

This is a time to make announcements, to thank everyone for coming, to offer prayer requests, and to close with prayer.

(Note: Refreshments and the time to serve them are optional. It is suggested that they be light – cookies, cake, etc., and something to drink. Please clean up and leave promptly on time!

Do You Listen with Your Third Ear?
by **June Critcher** (with Family Ministries, Inc.)

Someone has used the expression “*listening with your third ear*” to describe what happens when you hear joy that isn’t stated or feel pain behind words that appear empty of feelings. Listening for feelings behind words is no doubt part of what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote, “*Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.*” (Romans 12:14) This is what listening is all about – touching one’s heart, celebrating joys, sensing one’s fears, sharing dreams, sharing pain, healing hurts, and caring for one another. **We can develop sensitivity, the ability to see beneath the person’s skin, by increasing our ability to listen.**

Deal with Feelings

At least at first, we need to deal with feelings. Later we can focus on information. But, initially, let’s encourage the happy or hurting person to express his or her feelings. An atmosphere of love and acceptance helps the person to express these feelings. The non-judgmental listener, who genuinely cares for the person, can tune in with compassion and respond with love to the person’s feelings.

“If anyone gives an answer before hearing, it is folly and a shame.” (Proverbs 18:13)

“Let everyone be quick to listen, but slow to speak.” (James 1:19)

In his helpful book on communication, *Speaking from the Heart*, Ken Durham writes:

“Christian listening is an act which communicates to another, ‘Right now, I am here for you. No one else, just you. I want to hear and understand what you have to say. I’m all yours.’ Listening is allowing the other person to set the agenda for the conversation, seeking to clarify his or her point of view. Ultimately, listening is helping a person to understand themselves better.”

Don’t try to talk someone out of his or her feelings. Instead, encourage free expression of all feelings. Try to acknowledge how painful or frustrating the person’s situation must be. Be alert to ways that show you feel something of what the person is struggling with.

Communicate with phrases like these: “*Tell me how you’re feeling right now.*” “*You just said (repeat what the person said). Tell me some of the thoughts behind what you said.*”

A statement like, “*You must really feel rejected after being betrayed by your best friend*”, will show that you are hearing their feelings. This expression of concern might lead to deeper communication.

Sometimes it helps to nod now and then. Or, you can show you are focused on the person sharing feelings by softly making some sound such as, “Mmmm”, “I see”, “Uh Huh”, “Ohh”, or “I’m so sorry.” You may draw out feelings by asking open questions that cannot be answered with yes or no. Questions that start with who, what, when, where, why, and how draw people out and encourage them to express feelings.

Develop a Listening Ear

Listening is hard work. Most of us think about four times faster than we talk, and most people speak from 150 to 300 words per minute. However, we can hear from 400 to 1,000 words per minute. It is so easy to let our minds wander while others are talking.

We can learn to be good listener. Using our ears is a matter of attention and practice. Maintain good eye contact. Be natural and comfortable. Refuse to be judgmental. Be accepting of others. Learn to keep your wheels idle while the person is talking. Don't give answers to questions that are not being asked. We don't need to apply a scripture verse to every problem (there are times this is appropriate, but not every time). Keep your experiences to yourself, until there is an appropriate time to share them. Let the person release his or her feelings first.

Listen creatively. Instead of focusing on your own interests, ask about the interests of others. (See Philippians 2:4)

Give the person plenty of time to feel, think, and carefully choose his or her words. Repeat back what the person tells you to make sure that you understand his or her feelings clearly. Practice listening again and again!

“Listen”

- Source Unknown

When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving advice, you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me; strange as that may seem.

So please listen and just hear me. And, if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn, and I will listen to you.

Talking and Long Life

A Soviet gerontologist published research statistics that could transform the old adage, “He kills me with his chatter” into “He's killing himself with his chatter.” Professor Gurianin says his statistics show that the less one talks, the longer one lives. Anyone in the conference industry knows that constant talking exhausts one physically and mentally, and ages one prematurely. Deaf people, hermits, shepherds, and monks – all usually taciturn – are known for long lives. For your own health, maybe you should start “listening” more and “speaking” less.

