



Building Trusting Relationships
Listening • Caring • Encouraging

**Virtual Aftercare
Volunteer Training
Manual**

December 2021

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Introduction

Thank you for serving as a volunteer for Yokefellow Prison Ministry! Your role as a volunteer is vitally important to this ministry. Other than the Staff, everyone affiliated with Yokefellow serves as a volunteer. The ministry could not function without our volunteers -- You are the backbone of the ministry! Please know that your service is very much needed and appreciated. Thank you for all you do!

Overview of Yokefellow

Yokefellow is an interdenominational, racially-diverse Christian ministry of reconciliation begun in 1969 (and incorporated in NC in 1972), which includes both lay and clergy, male and female. It is founded on the idea that people's lives are changed through committed relationships.

The ministry is conducted by trained volunteers who lead weekly meetings of small groups inside and outside North Carolina's correctional institutions. Yokefellow is not focused on worship, preaching, teaching, counseling, or studying the Bible, but is a ministry of listening, sharing, caring, encouragement and support provided by community volunteers from the "outside" yoked in fellowship with those who are, or have been, on the "inside" through weekly small group meetings.

The Biblical foundation of Yokefellow's commitment is the invitation by Christ our Lord in the Gospel of Matthew 11:29-30:

*"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and lowly of heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Yokefellow's objectives are to...

- Provide an open and inviting setting for inmates and returning citizens to examine their lives, talk about their faith, and search for direction and purpose with others who are committed to do the same.
- Offer opportunities for inmates and returning citizens to build relationships with Yokefellow volunteers in weekly group meetings, thereby lessening their separation from the "outside world" while inside and helping ease their transition back into society on the outside.

History of Yokefellow

Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina, Inc. is an outgrowth of the Yokefellow movement, begun in the 1950's by the Quaker theologian and leader, Elton Trueblood. On his way to a speaking engagement in Cleveland, Ohio in 1946, Dr. Trueblood read Matthew 11:28-30:

“Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

This gave him an inspiration centering on the image and function of the yoke. Just as oxen yoked together can accomplish more than a single animal, why can't Christians “yoked together” give added strength to the cause of Christ? This birthed the Yokefellow model for ministry: Christians yoked together for fellowship, encouragement, and mutual support.

In 1964, three pastors from North Carolina went to Pennsylvania for a Yokefellow retreat. They were so impressed that they brought the Yokefellow model and dream back to North Carolina. For the next few years, Yokefellow was shared primarily in local church and retreat settings. In 1969, the first effort to carry the Yokefellow movement into a prison in North Carolina took place, and Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina was born. The ministry was later incorporated as a NC nonprofit in 1972.

Since 1969, Yokefellow Prison Ministry has lived out its mission statement:

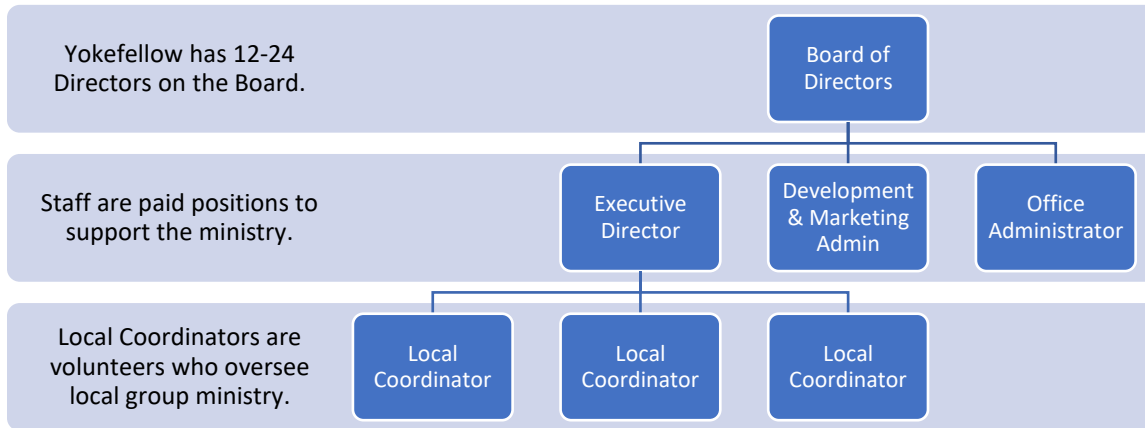
“to enable prisoners, yoked in personal relationship with community volunteers, to examine their lives; experience the forgiveness, healing, and power of God's love; and return to family and community with a covenant commitment to personal responsibility and contribution.”

Today, over 300 volunteers from a variety of churches and ministries across the state of North Carolina conduct weekly Yokefellow meetings for inmates in 2/3 of the state's prisons. Volunteers also serve returning citizens in person as well as through the Virtual Aftercare ministry on Zoom. Our volunteers are male and female, clergy and laity, from different racial, ethnic, and denominational backgrounds. Some have served for over 30 years! Thousands of inmates and returning citizens have found acceptance, a listening ear, an encouraging voice, and the reality of Christ's love.

Aftercare Ministry

The Yokefellow Prison Ministry model that has worked successfully in the prisons is now being offered to returning citizens, those who have recently been released from prison and returning to society. Aftercare ministry is provided both in person and over the Internet using Zoom.

Yokefellow Structure



Board of Directors

Yokefellow's bylaws require 12-24 Directors to serve on the Board. This is a volunteer position. The Board oversees the Staff and ensures the ministry fulfills Yokefellow's vision and mission.

Staff Positions

The **Executive Director** is a paid position overseeing the day-to-day operations of the ministry. The Executive Director is responsible for all aspects of the ministry, including strategy and programs.

The **Development & Marketing Administrator** is a paid position responsible for developing the financial base and publicity of the ministry.

The **Office Administrator** is a paid position providing administrative support and overseeing finances.

Local Coordinators

Each local Yokefellow group has a volunteer Local Coordinator, who takes care of administrative duties to ensure the local group ministry runs efficiently and effectively. This is the primary point of contact for volunteers.

Virtual Aftercare Volunteers

Yokefellow Virtual Aftercare volunteers serve those returning to society after prison using Zoom on a weekly basis. Volunteers are Christians and must complete Yokefellow training before they can participate.

Volunteer Application and Requirements

Potential volunteers are required to complete a Volunteer Application Packet (see Appendix A). In addition to completing and submitting a signed Volunteer Application Form, applicants must have a pastor, Bible study leader, or equivalent submit a letter of good standing and two non-family members submit letters of recommendations directly to the Executive Director. Volunteers must also complete a background check, which can be accomplished free of charge through a local jail or prison. Finally, applicants need to be trained on using Zoom. **Trained prison and in-person aftercare volunteers can call the Executive Director at 336-740-0392 or info@yokefellowprisonministry.org to learn what steps are needed to complete training for Virtual Aftercare ministry.**

After the Volunteer Application Packet has been fully completed and submitted, the Executive Director will contact the applicant about completing Yokefellow training. The Executive Director will also put the applicant in contact with the Local Coordinator for the local Aftercare ministry.

Before volunteering with a local Yokefellow group, volunteers must meet the following requirements:

- Be a Christian who has been active within the Body of Christ, such as with a church or ministry.
- Complete Yokefellow training.
- Complete a background check.

To continue volunteering with a local Yokefellow group, volunteers must do the following:

Grow as a Disciple of Christ

- Engage in the Seven Yokefellow Disciplines.
- Focus on returning citizens rather than themselves during local meetings.
- Listen to and encourage returning citizens without judgment.

Respect Yokefellow Policies

- Attend Yokefellow annual meetings, if possible.
- Attend Yokefellow volunteer events regularly.
- Invite others to volunteer and encourage local church support.
- Notify Executive Director about changes to contact information.
- Participate in Virtual Aftercare meetings regularly.
- Refrain from sharing personal information with returning citizens.
- Refrain from preaching the gospel and holding Bible studies in meetings.
- Respect returning citizens, fellow volunteers, the Local Coordinator, and Yokefellow staff.

Preparing for Volunteer Service

After applicants have completed the application process and training, they are ready to serve as volunteers. The Executive Director will connect the volunteer with the Local Coordinator for the desired Virtual Aftercare ministry.

Local Coordinator

The Local Coordinator is the primary point of contact for the volunteer. The Local Coordinator is responsible for all administrative matters related to the Virtual Aftercare ministry, such as handling the technical aspects of the Virtual Aftercare meetings. Please notify the Local Coordinator about any changes to your contact information or status of volunteering (if you plan to go inactive for over a month). The Local Coordinator is also your first point of contact for questions, concerns, or suggestions related to the ministry. If you encounter issues with a returning citizen or fellow volunteer, notify the Local Coordinator immediately.

Executive Director

The Executive Director is paid Yokefellow staff who oversees the Local Coordinators. If you have concerns, questions, or suggestions that are more global in nature or that your Local Coordinator is unable to address, please email the Executive Director at info@yokefellowprisonministry.org or call 336-740-0392.

Seven Christian Disciplines

Yokefellow is a Christian ministry. Thus, volunteers are expected to grow in Christian discipleship. As they transform further into the image of Christ, they are better able to communicate God's love to those they serve. Yokefellow volunteers commit to engage in the following seven disciplines regularly, which are commonly-accepted disciplines for Christian living:

- (1) **Prayer:** Pray every day, preferably at the beginning of the day.
- (2) **Scripture:** Seek God's guidance through reverent reading of the Bible every day, following a definite plan.
- (3) **Worship:** Participate, at least once a week, in the public worship of God.
- (4) **Money:** Return to God a definite portion of your income to support the Christian cause.
- (5) **Service:** Invest a specific amount of your time in humble acts of love and service to others.
- (6) **Witness:** Be an unapologetic witness in daily life, daily work, and daily words.
- (7) **Study:** Become a better-informed Christian by careful study of Christian books.

Understanding Those Who have been in Prison

Before volunteering with returning citizens, it is important to understand them. The following inmate statistics were provided by the NC Prison Fellowship:

- 95% are not close to their fathers.
- 80% of female inmates were abused.
- 66% come from broken homes.
- 66% used/experimented with drugs.
- 65% have previous criminal records.
- 60%-80% are functionally illiterate.
- 50% of male inmates were abused.
- 50% did not go beyond the 6th grade.
- 45% were unemployed when arrested.

Prison is a desperate place. Many inmates are lonely, insecure, starved for love, and depressed and may carry these struggles with them after they are released. They may suffer from addictions or mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual disorders...or even a combination of all of these. When they do not seek help for their problems, chances are they will return to prison within one to four years. If they do not change what they are doing and thinking, they will continue along the same path. The answer to change is choice.

Many returning citizens have been imprisoned several times and have accepted the Christian faith each time they were incarcerated, only to return to prison several years after release. Persons with certain behavioral challenges have a propensity or a penchant to do the same harmful act over and over again. This results in the same punishment repeatedly. Virtually every prison in the state has as many as 2-4 Christian prison ministries visiting these inmates at least once per week. If the very essence of Christianity is repentance (the act of changing behavior) and we still have 65% recidivism, then something is wrong with this picture. Maybe we, as Christian Virtual Aftercare volunteers, need to spend more time listening to those we serve and get to know them better. We need to encourage them to work on behavioral improvements.

In order to change a behavioral challenge, a person would do best by:

- 1) Admitting to or recognizing the problem(s).
- 2) Confessing to a friend, a clergyperson, or a trained professional.
- 3) Making amends.
- 4) Joining a support group.

The above steps are very difficult for most people and require much encouragement from family, friends, and clergy.

As volunteers with face-to-face contact through video, we can...

- 1) Make a friend, be a friend, and bring a friend to Christ.
- 2) Refrain from preaching, teaching, or proselytizing.
- 3) Just show up and listen, encourage, and pray.

Those who attend the Virtual Aftercare meetings do not care how much we know until they know how much we care. We must first gain their trust, assurance, and confidence so that they know we are real and true friends. Gain their friendship by showing them that you really are concerned about what they are concerned about. You cannot understand their concerns without a great deal of "listening in order to understand." Until you establish this foundation of friendship, all your good intentions will most likely be viewed with great skepticism! They will see through your intentions like a windowpane and resist your sincere efforts to bring them into your world of fellowship. These friendships are oftentimes not easy or quickly attainable. Our patience will be tested for sure. Until they are yoked with you in friendship, bringing them to Christ may not be attainable.

Faith of those with a Prison Background

As Yokefellow meetings are open to all people with criminal records, those you minister to may already be Christians, embrace a different faith, or have no faith at all. The goal of a Yokefellow meeting is not to convert attendees to the Christian faith. Instead, your role is to listen to whatever the attendees would like to talk about, sharing God's love as you listen attentively and express sincere interest and caring, even to those with a different or no faith. As they see Christ in the way you interact with them, some will be drawn to get to know the God who leads you to treat them in such a loving and compassionate way. When they ask you about your faith, that is your invitation to discuss the Christian faith with them.

Resources for Returning Citizens

According to the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NC-DPS), over 20,000 people are released from NC state prisons every year and return to their local communities.¹ As returning citizens transition from prison back into society, they face many challenges and often do not know where to turn for resources. Someone who is concerned about finding employment or a place to live is less focused on emotional or spiritual needs. Yokefellow volunteers can help by directing returning citizens to local resources.

Common Challenges of Returning Citizens

While this list is not exhaustive, here are common areas of concern for returning citizens as they transition back into society:

- Addiction
- Decision-making
- Employment
- Family estrangement
- Financial concerns
- Guilt
- Housing
- Legal entanglements
- Loneliness/loss of sense of community
- Medical issues
- Mental health issues
- Restoring driver's license
- Shame
- Transportation

NC Local Reentry Councils

In February 2018, the State of North Carolina developed a reentry action plan with the goal of assisting returning citizens as they transition from prison back into society.² As part of this initiative, the State of North Carolina establish **Local Reentry Councils** throughout the state. The function of Local Reentry Councils is to connect governmental agencies, non-profits/community organizations, and other stakeholders to collectively meet the needs of returning citizens in the local community.³

Below is a list of active Local Reentry Councils across the state, which will be updated as more are launched. You are encouraged to refer returning citizens to the applicable Local Reentry Council as they express needs. Each Local Reentry Council can connect returning citizens with nonprofits and community organizations that can assist with specific needs.

¹ <https://www.ncdps.gov/our-organization/adult-correction/reentry-programs-and-services>

² <https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/documents/files/NC%20Reentry%20Action%20Plan%20Final%20Feb%202018.pdf>

³ *Ibid.*

Local Reentry Council	Phone Number	Email Address
Buncombe County	828-250-6409 984-209-8868	brent.bailey@buncombecounty.org
Carteret County	252-725-0851	jsmith28570@gmail.com
Craven-Pamlico Counties	252-263-7247 252-288-7683 (C) 252-631-9525 (C)	greg.singleton@cpreentrync.org tonya.shaw@cpreentrync.org
Cumberland County	910-583-0424	JGarner@co.cumberland.nc.us
Durham County	919-560-7589	delynn@dconc.gov
Forsyth County	336-748-4666	rsauter@ptrc.org
Guilford County	336-297-9444 336-207-5865 (C)	ewillia@guilfordcountync.gov
Hoke County	910-565-0016	hokecounty.reentry@gmail.com
McDowell County	828-559-2224 828-803-3953	dhampton@freedomlifeministries.org
Mecklenburg County	980-314-5044	marcus.reddrick@mecklenburgcountync.gov
Nash-Edgecombe Counties	252-567-2819 (C)	Anita.Lynch@nccaa.net
New Hanover County	910-332-1138	lthomas@lincnc.org
Orange County	919-245-2064 919-614-3604	mepatterson@orangecountync.gov
Pitt County	252-717-9600	Rodneycon2007@gmail.com
Robeson County	910-272-6610	Angelina.phillips@co.robesson.nc.us David.Powell@co.robesson.nc.us
Scotland County	910-276-4260 (O) 910-405-9024 (C)	rmacy@scotlandcounty.org
Wake County	919-856-2716 (O) 919-618-1060 (C) 919-856-2750 (O) 919-805-9456 (C)	malinda.todd@wakegov.com Nikki.Williamson@wakegov.com
Wilson County	252-234-1129, ext 222 252-907-9266 (C)	felicia.thorne@nccaa.net

Guidelines for Virtual Aftercare Ministry

A basic rule of Virtual Aftercare ministry is that a volunteer must follow Yokefellow policy when visiting with and ministering to those they serve. If a situation arises that is uncertain, find out the policy from the Local Coordinator or Yokefellow staff before acting. It is best to say, "I don't know, but I will find out what the policy is and get an answer for you." In short: "Ask if you do not know."

Yokefellow Guidelines for Virtual Aftercare Meetings

1. Volunteers, including the Local Coordinator and Backup Local Coordinator(s), must have completed a criminal background check, such as by attaining a blue card from a prison or comparable volunteer card from a local jail.
 - a. Volunteers with a criminal record may be approved to volunteer but must first disclose this information to Yokefellow staff.
2. Start and end meetings on time.
3. The Local Coordinator or Backup Local Coordinator will maintain an attendance log for every volunteer and returning citizen.
4. The Local Coordinator or Backup Local Coordinator will remove any participant who attempts to disrupt the meeting.
5. Attendees will be respectful of one another at all times.
6. Maintain appropriate boundaries.
 - a. Do not give attendees money.
 - b. Do not provide housing or transportation to attendees.
 - c. Do not provide attendees with personal contact information, such as your last name, address, or phone number.
 - d. Do not meet with attendees outside of Virtual Aftercare meetings.
 - e. Volunteers who give a returning citizen anything, other than offers for prayer, will no longer be permitted to volunteer with Yokefellow.
7. Do not debate with attendees.
8. Anything confidential that you learn should remain that way unless mandatory reporting laws apply. As a Yokefellow volunteer, you will want to share your experience of volunteering with friends, but be careful not to share any potentially confidential information.
9. Do not accept **anything** from attendees.

10. Do not contact families, lawyers, judges, or make phone calls for attendees.
11. Tell the Local Coordinator if you are having any problems.
12. Do not criticize other volunteers, attendees, or Yokefellow staff.
13. Do not believe everything that attendees tell you. Some tend to exaggerate and distort the facts.
14. Build a relationship of trust with the attendees. They may not know how to relate to others. Expect them to distrust you at first. Be patient. Trust will come in time.
15. Be yourself. Do not approach attendees as a psychiatrist, lawyer, or minister (unless you are one). Try to relate to them honestly and simply – “person to person.” This will make it easier for them to do so with you.
16. Remember that while we are friendly with those we serve, we are not their friends.

Safety Considerations

1. Local Coordinators should intervene immediately if an attendee becomes disruptive by sending the attendee to the Zoom waiting room.
2. Pay attention to whether a returning citizen appears overly interested in a volunteer.
3. Be on the lookout for a returning citizen following you online and take precautions to ensure your own safety as well as the safety of fellow volunteers.
4. Abide by all state legal reporting requirements.

Best Practices: What to Do

1. Be an example of truth, hope, honesty, and optimism to the returning citizen.
2. Be certain that what you tell a returning citizen is policy, the truth, etc.
3. Realize your limitations about how much help, support, and counsel you can bring to the returning citizen.
4. Learn the rules and regulations of Yokefellow and always follow them.
5. Be extremely careful how you receive and handle information that supposedly is “confidential.”
6. Accept returning citizens as they are.

7. Work at being a good listener, giving encouragement, respecting others' personal stories, offering hope, and being trustworthy.
8. Refer all legal questions (probation, parole, post-release) to the returning citizen's probation, parole, or post-release officer.
9. Dress appropriately, following the dress code.
10. Be ready to properly deal with flirting, romantic advances, and con games.

Avoid These Practices: What NOT to Do!

1. Making phone calls or delivering messages for returning citizens.
2. Accepting gifts from or engaging in any business deals with a returning citizen or his/her family.
3. Engaging in any "flirty" contact with a returning citizen which may arouse sexual emotions or be wrongly interpreted by others.
4. Discussing one returning citizen's problems or personal story with another returning citizen or volunteer.
5. Asking about the returning citizen's crime.
6. Giving money or other items to any returning citizen.
7. Making promises you cannot keep.
8. Sharing your own personal or church problems with a returning citizen.
9. Criticizing other churches, denominations, faiths, races, countries, or cultures.
10. Stressing any particular denomination's doctrines or practices that cause division or confusion.
11. Giving a returning citizen your personal information such as your last name, phone number, address, e-mail, etc.
12. Criticizing anyone.
13. Helping a returning citizen or his/her family with their rent, fuel, telephone, doctor bills, etc.
14. Loaning books, commentaries, Bibles, etc. to attendees.
15. Becoming involved in a returning citizen's probation issues or family problems.
16. Going to a returning citizen's house.

17. Accepting the returning citizen's view of things (crime story, family, education, etc.) as being the whole truth.
18. Doing anything you wonder about without first discussing it with the Local Coordinator.

Dress Code for Volunteers

Failure to follow this dress code can result in being removed from the Zoom meeting.

1. No shorts (male or female).
2. No dresses or skirts above mid-thigh.
3. No bare feet.
4. No "see-through" shirts without an undershirt.
5. No garment displaying a mid-rib or stomach area.
6. No tank tops.
7. No dresses or blouses that are excessively low cut.
8. No sleeveless dresses/blouses without appropriate underclothes.
9. No skin-tight clothing.
10. Other apparel, if judged by the Local Coordinator, to be inappropriate for a Yokefellow meeting.

Yokefellow Virtual Aftercare Meetings

Yokefellow Virtual Aftercare meetings take place weekly on the same day each week. As Yokefellow volunteers meet with those they serve week after week and month after month, attendees learn that volunteers truly care about them. By receiving this love, returning citizens learn that God cares about them. Consistency is the key to communicating God's love to returning citizens.

Overview

The Concept: To help returning citizens yoke with Jesus Christ in their effort to turn their lives around.

The Method: Volunteers meet with returning citizens on Zoom weekly for an evening of prayer and small group discussions. If needed, attendees are placed in breakout rooms at a ratio of one volunteer with two to four returning citizens to discuss a given topic or an individual's concern. One rule applies: *when one person is talking, everyone else listens*. Although each person is encouraged to speak, this is not mandatory. Sometimes silence is reflective. (However, be mindful that prolonged silence can be disconcerting for attendees who join the Zoom meeting by landline – they may fear they have been disconnected.)

The Objective: To give returning citizens a chance to talk about themselves and their concerns to someone without fear of being judged. Sharing and listening to fellow returning citizens can be therapeutic. Encourage returning citizens to be the best they can be, to exercise their minds as well as their bodies, and to pray.

The Volunteers: Christian volunteers come from many denominations. This requires that they leave their denominational agendas at the door when entering the meeting. Any questions from returning citizens pertaining to dogma, rules/practices, or various Christian ideologies are best left to personal clergy for clarification. Remember, Jesus Christ is non-denominational. Effective listening skills are a gift from God. It is difficult to learn anything when you are talking.

The Goal: The goal of Yokefellow is to help reduce recidivism. The rate of recidivism of inmates in North Carolina after two years of release is around 48%.⁴ We believe that Virtual Aftercare ministry can help lower this statistic by encouraging attendees to seriously consider spiritual renewal.

⁴ https://www.ncleg.gov/documentsites/committees/JointAppropriationsJPS/2017%20Session/2017-03-09%20Recidivism%20Reentry/002_SPAC_Adult%20Recidivism_Presentation_2017_03_09.pdf

Structure

Yokefellow Virtual Aftercare meetings have the following structure:

1. Devotional moment of greeting and prayer
2. Informal time to welcome new participants and set up small groups for sharing
3. Sharing & listening time (bulk of meeting) in breakout rooms for returning citizens to talk about whatever they wish
4. Closing prayer

Icebreaker Topics for the Beginning of a Meeting

Consider using the following icebreaker topics at the beginning of the sharing session to get the conversation started:

1. I came to this meeting tonight because _____.
2. One good thing I have learned since being released is _____.
3. My favorite relative is _____. Why?
4. I wish my dad (or primary guardian) had told me _____ while I was growing up.
5. My mom (taught) (did not teach) me very much while growing up. Explain.
6. How many buddies & friends have you seen since your release? If none, why?
7. Buddies are temporary; friends are forever. True or False? Why?
8. What is the difference between a friend and a buddy?
9. Who was my best friend while we were growing up? Why?
10. I (loved) (hated) school. Why?
11. I (did) (did not) go to church while growing up. Why?
12. Being incarcerated changed my life. True or False. Why?
13. My favorite school teacher was _____. Why?
14. My favorite role model is _____. Why?
15. Is Michael Jordan a good role model? Why?
16. My favorite sport is _____. Why?
17. The USA is a (good) (bad) country to live in and raise a family. Why?
18. I (believe) (do not believe) in capital punishment. Why?
19. I (like) (dislike) former inmates because _____.
20. My plan now that I am released is to _____. Why?

21. I (believe) (do not believe) in God. Why?
22. Prison life (helped) (did not help) make me a better person? Why?
23. Things that have helped change my behavior for the best are _____. Why?

Sharing & Listening

Sharing & listening time accounts for the bulk of the meeting time and takes place in small groups in Zoom breakout rooms, ideally with a 1:2-4 volunteer-to-returning citizen ratio. Returning citizens should do most of the talking, with volunteers speaking only enough to communicate that they are listening, to encourage continued discussions, and to redirect negative discussions.

As volunteers listen to returning citizens with focused attention, this communicates that the attendees have value. The Christian worldview is that God created people with value; sin separated us from God; and then Jesus rescued us and restored us into relationship with God. Many attendees never learned that they have value, which erects a barrier to receiving Jesus as Savior and being restored in relationship with God. Listening with focused attention communicates that returning citizens have value, paving the way to receiving Jesus as Savior and establishing a relationship with God.

What Yokefellow is NOT

Because the focus of Yokefellow's ministry is communicating (through listening) that attendees have value, Virtual Aftercare meetings do not engage in other types of Christian activities, such as preaching the gospel or Bible study. (Yokefellow ministry is, by nature, relational evangelism. If a returning citizen initiates the topic, volunteers are encouraged to share the gospel and lead the returning citizen to Christ.) While these activities are good practices, they fall outside the scope of Yokefellow's ministry and should not take place in a Virtual Aftercare meeting. Volunteers who are interested in leading a Bible study for those who have been released from prison or holding meetings that are evangelistic in nature should reach out to other Christian ministries that engage in these activities. Virtual Aftercare meetings should not deviate from the sharing & listening structure as defined above.

Importance of Listening

The role of the volunteer is to listen and guide the table discussion – “preaching Christ always and using words if necessary” (quote by St. Francis of Assisi). The discussion can be initiated by the introduction of a topic or by addressing a special concern of a returning citizen. A topic can be a subject taken from a Bible reading, or it can be of a general nature. Volunteers come from all Christian denominations, and the attendees come from various beliefs and religions (or no religion). Hearing different religious disciplines can and will frustrate people; therefore, volunteers are asked to **leave your agendas at the door** when entering the Zoom meeting. Please avoid arguments involving doctrines such as the rapture, forms of baptism, the dispensations, different forms of Christian religions, etc.

Why a listening ministry? A listening ministry allows the attendees to talk and relieve the frustration and pain in their lives, and it may induce a positive change in their behavior. All attendees have something to say: they just need someone to listen to them lovingly, without judgment or interruption. A Yokefellow volunteer does not give advice unless asked, and even then, it may be best to refer the returning citizen to a pastor. Whenever we can, volunteers should encourage returning citizens to be the best they can be. Encourage them to exercise their minds as well as their bodies.

What are we supposed to listen for? We listen for truth expressed by an emotion, such as mad, sad, glad, or scared. We all express ourselves through one of these emotions by what we say or in our actions. Knowing where someone is coming from helps us to be caring, loving, and encouraging.

Developing 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 400-1,000 words per minute. It is easy to let our minds wander while others are talking.

We can learn to be good listeners. Using our ears is a matter of attention and practice.

- 1) Maintain good eye contact.
- 2) Be natural and comfortable.
- 3) Refuse to be judgmental. Be accepting of others.
- 4) Learn to keep your wheels idle while the person is talking. Don't give answers to questions that are not being asked. We do not need to apply scripture to every problem. Keep your experiences to yourself, at least until there is an appropriate time to share. Let the person release his or her feelings first.

- 5) Listen creatively. Instead of focusing on your own interests, ask about the interests of others (see Philippians 2:4).
- 6) Give the person plenty of time to feel, think, and carefully choose his or her words.
- 7) Repeat back what the person tells you to make sure you understand his or her feelings clearly.
- 8) Practice, practice, practice.

Deepening the Conversation by Reflecting Feelings

At Yokefellow meetings, the attendees guide the topic of the conversation while the volunteers actively listen. Volunteers can help deepen the conversation by summarizing what the attendee said and reflecting their feelings. Examples of ways to do this include...

- “What I am hearing you saying is [brief summary of what the attendee shared].”
- “It sounds like that made you angry.”
- “I would imagine that was frightening.”
- “I can see how that could make you feel sad.”

Brief summaries of what was said communicate that you have, in fact, been listening to what the person said. Reflecting feelings validates those emotions and invites attendees to go deeper, such as by expressing the underlying pain that is driving the anger.

Redirecting the Conversation

As a general rule, the attendees guide the topic of the conversation while the volunteers actively listen. However, volunteers should not permit a Yokefellow meeting to turn into a complaint session, which is not constructive for the attendees or the volunteers. Negative conversations can be a way to avoid facing painful emotions and are draining rather than constructive. Instead, volunteers should use questions to redirect the conversation toward the person’s feelings. For example, if someone is complaining about the difficulties of finding a job, ask how this makes him or her feel. The purpose of a Yokefellow meeting is for the attendees to experience “feeling heard,” not to complain.

Being the Living Word to People with Prison Backgrounds

Because Yokefellow is a Christian ministry, it can be tempting to incorporate discussions about the Bible into the conversations. Be mindful that Yokefellow is a *listening* ministry, not a Bible study. The role of a Yokefellow volunteer is not to explain the Bible to attendees. Instead, your role is to listen to whatever is burdening an attendee's heart. If someone is interested in having discussions about the Bible, Bible studies are available through local churches. Volunteers should protect the sacred space of listening so that a Yokefellow meeting does not turn into a Bible study.

When Jesus talked with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-26), he did not carry a Torah with him. He was the Living Word and demonstrated who God is through his kindness to and acceptance of her. He provided an excellent example of being love in action as he applied God's Word to his interaction with her. Rather than opening a Bible to share what the Bible has to say, *be* the Bible to the attendees by applying it to the way you relate to them.

Building a Yokefellow Relationship

(Written and Presented at a Yokefellow Annual Meeting in October 1996,
by David N. Canady – adapted for Virtual Aftercare ministry)

The Yokefellow goal is that “each person will know and experience a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.” Therefore, our efforts and energies are to assist returning citizens in developing this right relationship with God. As volunteers, our focus is on building relationships with others, and through this relationship of sharing and caring, we prepare the way for the ultimate experience of a person with the eternal God.

In Yokefellow meetings, it is common for attendees to raise questions about the Bible. They may take the form of questions regarding doctrine. One may ask, “What is your doctrine of authority, of sanctification, of the Holy Spirit and inspiration,” in addition to countless other questions. Clearly the answer to these questions is vital and important. However, for the volunteer, it is important to move beyond the teaching of doctrine and even a debate on the personal meaning of the question asked. A Yokefellow volunteer may respond to a question regarding a doctrine in the following way, “Why is this question important to you? How does this doctrine touch your life?” In asking questions like these, the focus is returned to the returning citizen, to assist him or her in struggling through and coming to a place of clarity and understanding for themselves.

The basic question that we need to ask ourselves is: “How do we establish a Yokefellow relationship?” It is important to note that a Yokefellow relationship is not primarily a teacher/student relationship. It is not primarily a counselor/client relationship. It is not primarily an authority/dependent relationship. Instead, it is the development of a caring, sharing, and mutual relationship. In order to answer this question of how we establish a Yokefellow relationship, it is important to come into this relationship with certain approaches.

The **first** approach is a caring attitude. It is important to know that whatever one brings to the Yokefellow relationship, the most important piece is care. It has been said of attendees that they do not care what you know until they know that you care.

The **second** approach that one brings is an attitude that I am a fellow pilgrim on the journey of life. This is an attitude that I meet the other person as a person. It is an attitude that we are yoked together to pull together and to work together on life’s problems and troubles, as well as sharing in life’s joys and victories. It is an attitude expressed in the old adage “there but by the grace of God, go I.” It is the attitude Jesus calls us to have in his “Sermon on the Mount” as he talked about removing the log from your eye before you begin to try to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye (Matt. 7:1-5). In this passage of scripture, it is important to note that an individual comes to a place in his life where he is working on taking out the log from his own eye. This means that he does not come in a judgmental way and does not view himself as better than, in control of, or authoritarian. It is clearly a process of being yoked together to face and to work through the difficulties that each person goes through.

The **third** approach is knowing that your involvement is for the sake of Christ. Since we belong to him, whatever we are about is for his sake. In this attitude, one finds freedom, for we see ourselves as an instrument of his peace and as loving for his sake. This is crucial in ministering to returning citizens, for at times it is clear that we relate to persons who are unlovable, and they test our patience and love.

In the **fourth** approach, we need to bring an attitude that we cannot fix everything. There are life problems which we overcome. However, there are problems that we continue to work on, as well as others that continue to present themselves in relationships. We need not carry the burden of guilt whenever we expect to have everything fixed and straightened out, for this is unrealistic for ourselves and for those with whom we relate.

Closely related to these four approaches are the realities that need to be present to base a Yokefellow relationship upon. The following areas are noted:

- 1) Respect
- 2) Appreciation for the other
- 3) Compassion
- 4) Willingness to have such a relationship
- 5) Trust
- 6) Bring something to the relationship to give: it is imperative that we constantly be sensitive to self-care so that as we come to a Yokefellow relationship, we are able to bring something rather than expect our needs to be met.

How do we establish a Yokefellow relationship? In the simplest terms, we speak, and we listen. In any relationship, communication is essential, and that means having both a sender and a receiver of messages.

First, let us talk about **active listening**. Active listening is to understand the other person. This kind of listening is often described as *empathy*. This is an effort to understand what the other person is feeling, thinking, and experiencing. The old adage of “walking a mile in another person’s shoes” is a proper understanding of empathy. Listening is never easy. John Powell, a Catholic priest, points out that when we truly listen, we get outside of ourselves for we move into the life of the other person.

Not only do we listen, but we speak or respond. It is important that our responses are appropriate for the situation. Our responses need to reveal that we are in touch with the reality that the other person is presenting. How often have relationships been hampered or kept superficial by responses that are inappropriate? It is important in our responding that we reply out of honesty, which is wrapped in love. The words from the New Testament are “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

It is also important that we ask appropriate questions. Moreover, we need not be afraid of hard questions that we may be asked. There are appropriate responses to hard questions. First, one might say, "I don't know." When one does not know the answer, it is honest and helpful to state, "I don't know." One may follow this by saying, "I will find the answer out for you and bring it back next week." Should you promise such an answer, it is crucial that you follow through with your promise. A second response might be, "That's a very good question. Let me reflect on it for a minute and as I do, could you give me what your ideas are about the questions?" One might respond by saying, "In asking that question, I gather that you have been thinking about it. Could you share with the group what your thoughts are?" Another response might be to open this question up to the other group members and ask what their thoughts are. When a person asks me what makes prison ministry so meaningful, my response is:

"First, I believe persons are called to prison ministry. I believe that a call is basic for us to deal with the struggles and the realness that shows itself in prison ministry. Secondly, the meaning that I find in prison ministry, has to do with inmates who are hungry for the gospel. It has been my experience that inmates who become hungry for the gospel are the hungriest of all the persons I know for spiritual matters."

One example of the process I follow in relating to returning citizens is to ask the question, "How is your spiritual life?" Once this question has been asked, it has been my experience that many are quick to respond, for they expect the religious volunteers to listen. When discussing spiritual matters with attendees, it has become my practice to ask if they would like to pray before we separate. Approximately 98% of those asked indicated that they would like to pray. My follow-up question is, "Would you like to pray first and let me close?" About 80-85% indicate that they would like to pray, and this gives me an opportunity to express to the other 15% what prayer means and how one prays. As I pray with the attendees and they voice their concerns to God, I feel that I am on "holy ground." In this context of the attendees praying, it is my clear feeling that I am greatly privileged and blessed to have a part in assisting this individual to come into this ultimate and personal relationship with the eternal God.

How You Can Support Yokefellow

In addition to volunteering weekly on Zoom, you can support Yokefellow in the following ways.

Keep Your Contact Information Current

As a Yokefellow volunteer, you will receive periodic mailings from the Yokefellow State office, such as the quarterly newsletter, invitations to regional and statewide meetings, and other important announcements. To ensure you receive these mailings, the Yokefellow State office needs current contact information, including your full mailing address as well as your active email address, if applicable. Please send contact information changes to the Staff at info@yokefellowprisonministry.org or call 336-740-0392. Also, notify your Local Coordinator of changes.

To be good stewards of ministry funds, the Yokefellow State office will send your information via email if you have an email address on file, which saves the cost of supplies and postage. Please only provide an email address that you access regularly. Volunteers without email addresses on file will receive paper mailings.

Please also notify both your Local Coordinator and the Executive Director if you resign as a volunteer or need to change your status to temporarily inactive (plan to miss at least one month of meetings). Those on temporarily inactive status will continue to receive mailings. If you step down from attending meetings, consider volunteering as a prayer warrior. Contact the Executive Director at info@yokefellowprisonministry.org or call 336-740-0392 to learn more about this important arm of ministry.

Encourage Others to Support Yokefellow

As a volunteer, your enthusiasm is contagious! Encourage the people in your life to join you in Yokefellow ministry, such as through prayer, donations, or volunteering. Note that Yokefellow will joyfully accept in-kind (non-monetary) donations.

Thank You!

Once again, thank you for all you do as a volunteer for Yokefellow! The Board of Directors, Staff, and Local Coordinators greatly appreciate all of the time and energy you put into serving in this capacity.

If you have any questions about this manual or Yokefellow policies in general, please email the Yokefellow Staff at info@yokefellowprisonministry.org or call 336-740-0392. Remember that you are not alone – your Local Coordinator as well as the Yokefellow Staff are available to support you as we all work together to grow this ministry and follow where God is leading.

Appendix: Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina Volunteer Application Packet Virtual Aftercare Ministry

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with Yokefellow Prison Ministry of N.C., Inc. We appreciate your interest and look forward to learning more about you.

All volunteers with Yokefellow Prison Ministry are required to submit a completed volunteer application packet to the Yokefellow Prison Ministry office before they will be approved to volunteer with a local Yokefellow group. The volunteer application packet includes the following documents:

- **Volunteer Application Form** – Completed, signed, and dated by the applicant and submitted to the Yokefellow Prison Ministry office

- **Proof of Completed Background Check** – Include a copy of your “blue card” issued by a local prison or equivalent volunteer card issued by a local jail.

- **Letter of Good Standing** – Completed, signed, and dated by someone who can verify the applicant’s good standing in the Christian faith, such as a pastor, Bible study leader, or equivalent and submitted directly to the Yokefellow Prison Ministry office

- **Two Letters of Recommendation** – Completed, signed, and dated by two non-family members and submitted directly to the Yokefellow Prison Ministry office

The Volunteer Application Form, proof of completed background check, Letter of Good Standing, and Letters of Recommendation should be submitted to the Yokefellow Prison Ministry office using one of the following methods:

- **Email:** info@yokefellowprisonministry.org
- **Fax:** 336-370-6321
- **Mail:** P.O. Box 38964, Greensboro, NC 27438

Call (336) 740-0392 with questions about the volunteer application process. To learn more about the ministry, visit our website at <http://www.yokefellowprisonministry.org>.

Thank you again for your interest!

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Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina Volunteer Application Form for Virtual Aftercare Ministry

This form should be completed, signed, and dated by the **applicant** and then submitted to the Yokefellow Prison Ministry office using one of the following methods:

- **Email:** info@yokefellowprisonministry.org
- **Fax:** 336-370-6321
- **Mail:** P.O. Box 38964, Greensboro, NC 27438

Call (336) 740-0392 with questions about completing this form.

Basic Information

Full Name: _____

Address: _____

(City) _____ (State) _____ (Zip Code) _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Male: _____ Female: _____

Do you have any medical conditions or disabilities that may restrict your volunteer services? If yes, please specify. _____

Have you ever been incarcerated? If yes, how long ago? _____

Emergency Contact Information:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Volunteer Interest

Why are you interested in volunteering with a Christian prison ministry? _____

On which day(s) of the week are you interested in volunteering? _____

Have you ever volunteered with a prison or aftercare ministry or do you have other related experience? If yes, share details. _____

Yokefellow Prison Ministry is a Christian interdenominational and racially-diverse ministry. Do you have any concerns about volunteering for a ministry with this focus? If yes, please share your concerns. _____

To be approved as a volunteer, applicants must complete training for Yokefellow Prison Ministry. To complete this training, you may choose to attend one of the live training sessions offered in different parts of the state throughout the year or to complete the training online. You will be required to complete a background. Applicants will be unable to volunteer for Yokefellow Prison Ministry until the training and background check are completed.

I have read and understand the information provided in this volunteer application form and agree that I will not attempt to volunteer in Virtual Aftercare ministry for Yokefellow until I have completed all training requirements. I certify to the best of my knowledge and belief that all statements in this volunteer application form are true, correct, complete, and made in good faith.

Applicant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina Letter of Good Standing

For the Applicant

Because Yokefellow Prison Ministry of N.C., Inc. is a Christian ministry, volunteers are required to be active within the Body of Christ, such as with a church or ministry, before applying to volunteer. Call (336) 740-0392 with questions about this policy.

Complete the following information and then give this completed form to the leader of your local group for submission to Yokefellow.

Applicant's Name: _____

Church or Group Name: _____

How long have you been active in this local church or group? _____

For the Pastor or Group Leader

The above-named applicant has applied to volunteer with Yokefellow Prison Ministry of N.C., Inc., which is a Christian interdenominational and racial-diverse prison ministry. To learn more about this ministry, please visit the website at yokefellowprisonministry.org.

Because Yokefellow is a Christian ministry, volunteers are required to be active within the Body of Christ, such as with a church or ministry. Please write a letter of good standing on behalf of the above-named applicant. In this letter, address how long the applicant has been active in your local church or group, whether you believe the applicant would be a good fit for a prison ministry, and why you believe this. Sign and date the letter and then submit the letter and this form directly to the Yokefellow Prison Ministry office using one of the following methods:

- **Email:** info@yokefellowprisonministry.org
- **Fax:** 336-370-6321
- **Mail:** P.O. Box 38964, Greensboro, NC 27438

Call (336) 740-0392 with questions about completing and submitting a letter of good standing.

Your letter of good standing will be kept confidential. Because the applicant will be interacting with people who have been incarcerated, Yokefellow needs to ensure that the applicant is a good fit for this ministry. Please be candid to assist Yokefellow in making this assessment. Thank you for taking the time to complete a letter of good standing on behalf of the applicant.

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Yokefellow Prison Ministry of North Carolina Letter of Recommendation for Virtual Aftercare Ministry

For the Applicant

Yokefellow Prison Ministry requires two letters of recommendation from non-family members before an applicant may be approved to volunteer for Yokefellow. References must have known you for at least six months. Call (336) 740-0392 with questions about this policy.

Complete the following information and then give this completed form to two references for submission to Yokefellow.

Applicant's Name: _____

Reference's Name: _____

How long have you known each other? _____

For the Reference

The above-named applicant has applied to volunteer with Yokefellow Prison Ministry, which is a Christian interdenominational and racially-diverse ministry. To learn more about this ministry, please visit the website at yokefellowprisonministry.org.

Because the applicant will be interacting with people who have been incarcerated, volunteers are required to submit two letters of recommendation from non-family members who have known them for at least six months. Please write a letter of recommendation on behalf of the above-named applicant and address how long you have known the applicant, whether you believe the applicant would be a good fit for ministry to someone who has been in prison and why you believe this. Sign and date the letter and then submit the letter and this form directly to the Yokefellow Prison Ministry office using one of the following methods:

- **Email:** info@yokefellowprisonministry.org
- **Fax:** 336-370-6321
- **Mail:** P.O. Box 38964, Greensboro, NC 27438

Call (336) 740-0392 with questions about completing and submitting your letter.

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Building Trusting Relationships
Listening • Caring • Encouraging

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