

## A Partnership Between Healing Communities and The United Methodist General Board of Church & Society



### Healing Communities

Healing Communities is a framework for ministry to men and women returning from or at risk of incarceration, their families and the larger community. Healing Communities challenges congregations through mobilization of its existing resources to become “Stations of Hope” for persons affected by the criminal-justice system. Resources that are helpful in ministries among those impacted by the criminal-justice system include the formal and informal networks of congregational life, and the Christian themes of forgiving, healing, redemption, reconciliation and justice.

Healing Communities identifies basic components of action for congregations. Each action is built on existing strengths, all located within the existing mission and ministry structure of the local church.

#### Primary components of Healing Communities

- **Stigma Reduction and a Welcoming, Supportive Atmosphere.**  
Healing Communities brings the issue of incarceration and recovery to new visibility in congregations. The aim is to heighten awareness surrounding reentry, help families reduce the sense of stigma and shame over having incarcerated loved ones, and create a welcoming environment for returning citizens.
- **Formal & Informal Support.**  
Congregations will be a source of strength for the family of the incarcerated and/or at risk persons through pastoral counseling and providing a support group to walk with the family through the incarceration of their loved one and their return home. Special emphasis will be given to supporting children of the incarcerated through mentoring and supportive services to grandparents and other elderly relatives serving as caregivers. Preparation will be made for the incarcerated person’s return to the community and congregation.
- **Volunteering.**  
Congregations will be exposed to life-skill development programs in jails and prisons, and will be encouraged to provide volunteers for these efforts. While many jails and prisons have churches that come in and provide worship services and Bible studies, their chaplains often cite other needs that are equally as pressing. “I have a long waiting list of churches that want to do worship services,” declared one long-time chaplain in Ohio. “What I need are volunteers who will help with life skills: how do you balance a check book, get a driver’s license, read a bus schedule. We need tutors to help with reading and writing, and mentors for good parenting skills.”
- **Mentoring.**  
A valuable component of Healing Communities is volunteers serving as mentors to both youths and adults. These mentors are dedicated individuals willing to walk with and coach youths and even adults, some of whom are returning home to a world very different from the one they left. Using the Amachi model, mentors are expected to listen to, encourage, support and assist their mentees as they go through difficult times and face certain challenges.  
The emphasis of the program is that mentors spend time with mentees/clients that have been impacted by incarceration; whether it be directly, such as one of their parents or family members; or indirectly, such as their community or neighborhood that has a higher-than-normal rate of incarceration.
- **Network of referrals**  
Congregations will be introduced to and connected with resources available in the community for persons impacted by incarceration.
- **Advocacy & Mobilization.**  
Based on the incarnational relationships congregations have with those directly impacted by the criminal-justice system, these congregations are the primary voices needed to be heard on public-policy issues at the state and federal levels dealing with criminal-justice reform efforts. Through additional training from the General Board of Church & Society, Healing Communities will build movements among United Methodist congregations committed to seeing an end to mass incarceration and the creation of a genuinely fair, just criminal-justice system.

Healing Community congregations will build teams with other congregations in their conference and community and work with United Methodists from all over to build an effective, powerful movement to change the criminal-justice system at both the state and federal levels.

**If you are interested in your congregation becoming a Healing Community, contact  
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