



# Preliminary Evaluation of VADOC Faith-Based Programs

## Introduction

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Prisons today are operated as places of transformation. Institutional programming educates and trains offenders so that they might live productive lives once they re-enter society. In addition to educational, vocational, cognitive, and substance abuse programs, prisons provide faith-based programs to their offenders.

GraceInside is a privately funded Virginia prison chaplain service, serving the Virginia Department of Corrections' (VADOC) incarcerated offenders since 1920. The mission of the organization is "to pro-

vide full-time chaplains in all of Virginia's state adult and juvenile prison facilities". In recent years, the role of GraceInside has expanded beyond providing chaplains to VADOC facilities. The organization now coordinates and administers the residential faith-based programming to offenders at two VADOC facilities. Although faith-based programs are widespread across the United States, few states have empirically evaluated their programs to see if they actually are reducing recidivism. A preliminary and a brief evaluation were completed in 2012 and 2014, respectively. This follow-up evaluation aims to further explore the faith-based programming as data fully matures and provide an outcome evaluation on its effectiveness.

## Programs in Virginia

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For the past nine years, GraceInside has been partnering with VADOC to provide the residential faith-based programming to confined offenders in Virginia. This program is offered free of cost to the agency. In 2008, James River Correctional Center (JRCC) became the first facility in Virginia to offer faith-based programming. This residential program covered areas related to substance abuse education, victim-impact awareness, life-skills development, cognitive skill development, educational attainment, community reentry, religious instruction, and moral development.

Participation in the program is voluntary, but those incarcerated for murder or rape/sexual assault are not eligible to apply. The program only accepted offenders who were about 18 months away from their release to the Metro Richmond area. This eligibility criteria has

since been relaxed. Because only twenty offenders at each facility may participate in the program at a time, not all eligible offenders are selected. Those eligible are interviewed, and the applicants deemed most committed to a moral lifestyle are chosen. Participants of the program are required to attend at least 90% of the program's scheduled meetings. The program rosters were provided by GraceInside.

Faith-based programming in Virginia expanded in 2010 to female offenders at Central Virginia Correctional Unit for women (CVCU). In 2011 JRCC closed, and its program was moved to Deep Meadow Correctional Center (DMCC). In 2013, the program at CVCU was moved to Virginia Correctional Center for Women (VCCW). The programming in VCCW ended in December 2015.

## What Are Other States Doing?

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In a 2005 survey, the National Institute of Corrections Information Center (NICIC) found that 20 states had residential faith-based programming in at least one of their institutions (NICIC 2006). Virginia was not included among these 20 states because its first faith-based program did not start until three years after the survey was conducted—in 2008. Although many states offer faith-based programming, not all take the same approach.



### Florida

Over the past several years, the Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) has been operating a volunteer-staffed faith- and character-based initiative in 11 of its prisons. Inmates of all faiths are eligible to voluntarily participate, though the FDOC admits that offering programming to a religiously diverse population is a challenge. The program operates prison-wide in four of its 11 facilities. In a 2009 assessment of this initiative, researchers found that the programming was having a positive effect on institutional adjustment and security. They, however, did not see the programming having an effect on recidivism. (Source: Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability)



### Louisiana

Louisiana offers faith-based programming to its confined offenders in several different ways. First, each Louisiana institution has a chaplain working with volunteers to provide religious programming on a daily basis. Three facilities in the state house faith and character-based dormitory (FCBD) programs. These residential programs are aimed at strengthening personal faith and beliefs through mentoring. The New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's "Angola Campus" at Louisiana State Penitentiary is, perhaps, unlike any other faith-based program in the nation. The seminary offers two college level degree programs: a two-year associate's degree in pastoral ministries and a four-year bachelor's degree in theology. About ninety offenders are enrolled at the Angola Campus at any given time. Some graduates of these programs are transferred to other institutions where they work under the chaplain to strengthen that facility's religious programming. (Source: Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections).



### Minnesota

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (MnDOC) started offering the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) administered by Prison Fellowship (PF) since 2002. The program is open to 40 male offenders who are within 18 to 24 months of their release date. All participants, therefore, must have a sentence of at least 18 months. As it is in Texas, the IFI is divided into three phases—the first two while the participant is in prison and the third beginning at release. In the phase 1, participants live together in the same unit of prison for the first twelve months. The curriculum involves introducing the core values, reentry and addiction issues, chemical dependency education, and relapse prevention, and teaching cognitive skills. Along the way, the lessons encourage participants to take responsibility for their criminal behavior. Phase 2 lasts for a minimum of six months. During Phase 2, each participant has a chance to set up reentry goals and also has the chance to be paired with a mentor from the community. The third phase is 12-month reentry phase helping participants to build pro-social relationships within the community. The MnDOC completed an outcome evaluation using retrospective quasi-experimental design with propensity score matching method. The evaluation compares re-arrest, re-conviction, re-incarceration, and technical violation among 366 participants and the pair-matched 366 non-participants who were eligible but did not participate. Both groups of participants and non-participants were released

## What Are Other States Doing? *(continued . . .)*

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from Minnesota prisons between 2003 and 2009. The average follow-up period was a little more than three years. Results indicated that IFI reduced the risk of re-offending by 26% for re-arrest, 35% for re-conviction, and 40% for new offense re-incarceration, especially among those who received a continuum of mentoring care following release to the community, but did not impact re-incarceration for a technical violation revocation. The study concluded that faith-based programs can be beneficial in reducing recidivism, but only if they utilize evidence-based practices that target each participant's criminogenic needs. Since the costs of IFI are privately funded and the programming depends mainly on volunteers, Duwe and Johnson (2013) conducted a cost-benefit analysis on the same IFI program by examining recidivism and post-release employment. The cost-benefit analysis indicated the IFI produced an estimated \$3 million benefit during the first six years of program operation, most of this benefit comes from costs avoided as a result of decreased recidivism. (Source: Minnesota Department of Corrections, Duwe and King 2012, and Duwe and Johnson 2013)



### **Texas**

In April 1997, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) became the first state correctional agency to implement the PF-sponsored IFI when it began the program in one of its units near Houston. PF funded the program with private dollars. The program accepted offenders who were 16 to 24 months from parole, and continued to offer 6 to 12 months of aftercare while the offender was on parole. The IFI works in three phases. The first phase provides a spiritual and moral foundation for the program. Phase Two tests the inmate's values in real-life setting to prepare him for life back in the community. The final phase occurs during the first 6 to 12 months of the offender's parole. This phase involves helping to assimilate an offender back into the community by developing relationships with family, co-workers, and local churches. The program strives to develop social support by matching a mentor for each participant while still incarcerated. Recent analysis suggests that IFI graduates in Texas are "significantly less likely to be arrested or incarcerated" in the two-year period following release from prison. In-depth interviews with inmates and former inmates identified several factors resulted in lower recidivism rates, such as a life-changing religious conversion and the active role of faith-motivated mentors. The latter factor was the most essential factor related with lower recidivism rates. The current IFI programming includes substance abuse education, victim impact awareness, life-skills development, cognitive skill development, educational attainment, community reentry, religious instruction, and moral development. (Sources: Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council, Byron R. Johnson 2012, and Grant Duwe and Byron R. Johnson 2013)

# Literature Review

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Churches and other religious institutions have long recognized the need for ministries in prisons. According to one researcher, the first faith-based prison program began in 1488 and was sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church. In America, the Quakers greatly influenced prison reform, as did the Black Muslim movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Zimmer 2005).

Though religion has long been assumed to be beneficial to a prisoner's re-entry, this hypothesis has only recently been empirically tested. Some studies suggest that religiosity deters people from social ills (such as drug abuse or violence) regardless of whether that individual is in prison (Kerley, Matthews, and Blanchard 2005) or in the community (Jang 2008). The tendency for religion (regardless of the sect) to instill positive values and alter deviant behavior makes faith-based programming a viable option for today's prisons (Zimmer 2005).

Many studies of faith-based programs have recently been conducted with varied objectives, samples, analyses, and conclusions. One report examined the degree to which faith and spirituality are present in faith-based programming, and concluded that programs greatly differ in the extent to which they incorporate faith (Willison 2011). The study also found significant differences in the characteristics among programs that teach principles from the same faith (i.e. Christianity). Another study discovered that the religious involvement of prisoners (measured by frequency of attending religious service or a faith-based program) in one South Carolina maximum security facility was extremely varied (O'Connor 2002). Multiple studies found that there was a negative relationship between an offender's religious involvement and the number of disciplinary infractions he had while in prison (O'Connor 2002, Clear 2002).

Most research regarding faith-based programs evaluated the success of these programs by looking at recidivism. Some studies found that faith-based program participants were less likely to recidivate (Duwe and King 2013, Johnson 2012, Trusty and Eisenberg 2003). Other studies found the positive effects to be minimal or modest (Kerley, Matthews, and Schulz 2005; Johnson 1994; Johnson 2004). Though one study noted that faith-based programs have financial costs and require significant community involvement (Trusty and Eisenberg 2003), none of these studies found faith-based programming to have more costs than benefits. Duwe and Johnson (2013) conducted a cost-benefit analysis study and concluded that the IFI at the MnDOC produced an estimated \$3 million benefit during the first six years of program operation, most of this benefit came from costs avoided as a result of decreased recidivism.

Some literature suggests that program participants are not a representative sample of a prison's population. Several scholars argue that program participants are less likely to recidivate not because of the program's influence, but because they volunteered for the program, thereby showing their motivation and will to reform themselves (Camp 2006). A law professor stated that the most serious methodological issue related to faith-based studies is the self-selection problem. The studies with quasi-experimental design are more sophisticated than other study designs, however propensity scores still do not solve the self-selection problem because 'motivation to change' is unobservable. He also argued a religious program is better than nothing, it could be related to the program offering treatment resources (such as mentors and counselors) and not related to the religious content of the program. In order to eliminate the self-selection problem, he suggests to compare voluntary participants with the offenders who volunteered for the program but were rejected (Volokh 2011). Another study refutes this claim, though, citing that IFI graduates are much less likely to recidivate than IFI participants who do not complete the program (Johnson 2012).

Dodson, Cabage, and Klenowski (2011) assessed the effectiveness of faith-based programs for reducing recidivism using an evidence-based evaluation that is the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS). The SMS is one of the most widely accepted tools for assessing scholarly works in criminology. The evaluation included four multivariate quasi-experimental design studies; two of them were longitudinal. The evaluation results indicated that faith-based programs “work” to reduce recidivism. However, the results are mitigated by the fact that the methods of some research studies are relatively weak. The most serious flaw found in faith-based studies was that researcher failed to measure religious attachment, which is an essential component that explains the nature of faith-based programs. Some researchers argue that those individuals with strong social networks would be less likely to be involved in criminal behavior.

# Methodology

To evaluate the effectiveness of the VADOC’s faith-based program, all of the offenders were included who participated in a faith-based program and subsequently were released prior to January 30, 2012. This date was chosen because it allowed for a two-year follow-up of all of the released participants for the 2014 evaluation.

This participant group comprised 65 individuals. They included 41 program graduates and 24 participants who did not graduate, either because they were transferred to another program, moved to a new facility, or were dismissed from the program for violating that program’s requirements.

These 65 participants were matched to a control group of 65 non-participating offenders. Each offender in the control group had the same gender and race as a matching offender in the participant group. The matched pairs also shared the same crime type and release type. The difference in their ages at release was no more than four years. Their sentences were within 18 months of each other. Their total number of SR incarcerations was within one incarceration.

In order to discover re-arrest and re-conviction rates over different periods of time, criminal histories were collected from the Virginia State Police in August 2014 for the offenders in both participant and control groups. VirginiaCORIS data in middle January 2017 was used to determine re-incarceration rates for both groups up to 36-month follow-up. Sub-group analysis was also performed. For the participants, the rates were compared between graduates and non-graduates. The rates were also compared between graduates and their paired controls. A chi-squared test was performed to examine the difference of rates. An alpha level of 0.05 was used for all tests.

## Offender Characteristics

Offenders in the control group had similar characteristics to offenders in the participant group. Because a female institution is currently one of two facilities in Virginia that houses a faith-based program, the gender ratio in the faith-based program is not representative of the prison population as a whole. About one-third of the program participants studied were female. Though similar in age with the participant group, the control group was slightly older. There were 53 black offenders and 12 white offenders in each group. Offenders serving sentences for violent crimes represented 43% of all offenders studied. The crime type for 38% of each group was non-violent and the remaining 18% were sentenced for drug crimes. Most (85%) of the offenders in each group were released on direct discharge. The remaining 15% were released on mandatory parole. The participant group, overall, had slightly longer sentences (with

		Participants		Controls	
		#	%	#	%
Gender	Male	43	66%	43	66%
	Female	22	34%	22	34%
Age Groups	Under 25	10	15%	10	15%
	25-40	36	55%	32	49%
	41 and Older	19	29%	23	35%
Race	White	12	18%	12	18%
	Black	53	82%	53	82%
Crime Type <sup>1</sup>	Violent	28	43%	28	43%
	Non-Violent	25	38%	25	38%
	Drug	12	18%	12	18%
Release Type	Direct Discharge	55	85%	55	85%
	Mandatory Parole	10	15%	10	15%
Total Sentence	Under 4 Years	22	34%	26	40%
	4-9 Years	31	48%	27	42%
	10-14 Years	0	0%	0	0%
	15 Years or More	12	18%	12	18%
Number of SR Incarcerations	One	36	55%	30	46%
	More Than One	29	45%	35	54%

<sup>1</sup>Crime type of an offender’s current most serious offense.



an average of 89 months) than the control group (with an average of 86 months). More of the offenders in the control group had multiple incarcerations than those in the participant group.

## Outcomes

### Participants vs. Controls

The 3-year re-incarceration rate is our gold standard to measure recidivism, but it was too early to apply this measure in 2014. Therefore, both re-arrest and re-conviction rates were used for the preliminary evaluation in 2014. Now, re-incarceration rate is updated since both participants and control groups have an adequate follow-up time. In 2014 evaluation, preliminary data reveals that re-arrest rates were consistently lower among program participants than they

were among non-participants in the control group. Over time, the difference of re-arrest rates between participants and the controls started to shrink. Statistical testing showed the difference was only significant within 6 months (8% of program participants compared to 20% of the non-participants in the control group). Within twelve months of release, the re-arrest rates grew to 22% among the participants and 35% among the non-participants in the control group. Within eighteen months, 32% of the participants were re-arrested, compared to 40% of the non-participants in the control group. Within 24 months, the re-arrest rates grew to 43% among the participants and 51% among the non-participants in the control group.

Because some releases may be arrested but not convicted for an offense, the re-conviction and re-incarceration rates for these offenders were also calculated because they serve as better indicators of adjudicated criminal behavior. Fifteen percent of the participants were re-convicted of an offense within twelve months of release. This compares to 28% of the non-participants in the control group. Only 3 participants (5%) were re-incarcerated within twelve months, compared to 2 non-participants in the control group (3%). Within 24 and 36 months follow-up, re-incarceration rates were equivalent between participants and control group; both of groups had 14% re-incarceration rates within 24 months and 20% re-incarceration rates within 36 months.

### Graduates vs. Participating Non-Graduates

Of the 41 program graduates, 3 (7%) were re-arrested within six months, compared to 2 (8%) of the participating non-graduates. Within twelve months, 4 (10%) of the graduates were re-arrested, compared to 10 (42%)

Re-arrest	Participants (N=65)		Controls (N=65)		P-values
	#	%	#	%	
<b>within 6 months</b>	5	8%	13	20%	0.0422*
<b>within 12 months</b>	14	22%	23	35%	0.0802
<b>within 18 months</b>	21	32%	26	40%	0.3614
<b>within 24 months</b>	28	43%	33	51%	0.3796
<b>Re-conviction</b>					
<b>within 12 months</b>	10	15%	18	28%	0.0879
<b>Re-incarceration</b>					
<b>within 12 months</b>	3	5%	2	3%	0.6483
<b>within 24 months</b>	9	14%	9	14%	1.0000
<b>within 36 months</b>	13	20%	13	20%	0.5945

\* P < 0.05

## Outcomes *(continued . . .)*

of the participating non-graduates. Within 18 months, 9 (22%) of the graduates were re-arrested, compared to 12 (50%) of the participating non-graduates. Within 24 months, 13 (32%) of the graduates were re-arrested, compared to 15 (63%) of the participating non-graduates. Of the 41 graduates, 3 (7%) were re-convicted within twelve months, compared to 7 (29%) of the 24 participating non-graduates. Although none of the graduates were re-incarcerated within twelve months, 3 (13%) of the participating non-graduates were re-incarcerated. Within 24 months, 2 (5%) of graduates were re-incarcerated, compared to 7 (29%) of the participating non-graduates. Within 36 months, 5 (12%) of graduates were re-incarcerated, compared to 8 (33%) of the participating non-graduates. The tests found statistically significant differences in the 12-month, 18-month, and 24-month re-arrest rates, 12-month re-conviction rate, and also in the 12-month, 24-month, and 36-month re-incarceration rates .

### *Graduates vs. Paired Controls*

When the 41 graduates are compared with their 41 paired controls, the graduates continue to have the lower recidivism rates. Graduates consistently had lower re-arrest rates than their paired controls. The difference of re-arrest rates varied across 24-months follow-up period. The significant difference only occurred within 12 months. The 12-month re-conviction rate among the graduates was 7% compared to 32% re-conviction rate among the graduates' paired controls. The difference was a statistically significant. No graduates and only one paired control was re-incarcerated within 12 months. Two (5%) graduates and 4 (10%) paired controls were re-incarcerated within 24-months; 5 (12%) graduates and 6 (15%) paired controls were re-incarcerated within 36-months. Graduates consistently had lower re-incarceration rates than their paired controls across 36-months follow-up period, but no differences reached a significant level .

	Graduates (N=41)		Non-graduates (N=24)		P-values
	#	%	#	%	
<b>Re-arrest</b>					
<b>within 6 months</b>	3	7%	2	8%	0.8820
<b>within 12 months</b>	4	10%	10	42%	0.0025**
<b>within 18 months</b>	9	22%	12	50%	0.0196*
<b>within 24 months</b>	13	32%	15	63%	0.0155*

<b>Re-conviction</b>					
<b>within 12 months</b>	3	7%	7	29%	0.0185*

<b>Re-incarceration</b>					
<b>within 12 months</b>	0	0%	3	13%	0.0205*
<b>within 24 months</b>	2	5%	7	29%	0.0062**
<b>within 36 months</b>	5	12%	8	33%	0.0398*

\* P < 0.05 \*\* P < 0.01

	Graduates (N=41)		Controls (N=41)		P-values
	#	%	#	%	
<b>Re-arrest</b>					
<b>within 6 months</b>	3	7%	8	20%	0.1052
<b>within 12 months</b>	4	10%	15	37%	0.0040**
<b>within 18 months</b>	9	22%	16	39%	0.0931
<b>within 24 months</b>	13	32%	19	46%	0.1744

<b>Re-conviction</b>					
<b>within 12 months</b>	3	7%	13	32%	0.0053**

<b>Re-incarceration</b>					
<b>within 12 months</b>	0	0%	1	2%	0.3143
<b>within 24 months</b>	2	5%	4	10%	0.3964
<b>within 36 months</b>	5	12%	6	15%	0.7459

\*\* p < 0.01



# Preliminary Recommendations

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The VADOC should collect data on all offenders who have ever applied to a faith-based program in Virginia, including those volunteers who were eventually not enrolled to the faith-based program. By doing this, the impact of self-selection and age effect could be tested. Secondly, these groups should continue to be studied and reported regularly so the outcome measures may be expanded to include longer follow-up periods as data fully matures. Then, if the programs are found to be effective, the VADOC should consider expanding the program to populations with special reentry challenges such as geriatric offenders, violent offenders, or offenders with mental health issues.

## Where Are They Now?

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At the end of December 2016, among 41 faith-based graduates in the participant group, three (7%) were incarcerated in either a state prison or a local/regional jail, six (15%) were being supervised in the community, and 32 (78%) were at liberty. Of the 24 faith-based participants who did not graduate, eight (33%) were incarcerated in either a state prison or a local/regional jail, six (25%) were being supervised in the community, and ten (42%) were at liberty. Of the 65 offenders in the control group, 15 (23%) were incarcerated in either a state prison or a local/regional jail, 16 (25%) were under community supervision, and 34 (52%) were at liberty.

	<b>Graduates</b>	<b>Non-graduates</b>	<b>Controls</b>
Incarcerated	3	8	15
Community Supervision	6	6	16
At Liberty	32	10	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>65</b>

## Future Study

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VADOC plans to continue to study a faith-based program over the coming years. First, the agency will continue to follow those offenders represented in this study to determine their long term outcomes. In addition, newer program participants will be studied in a similar way. VADOC will also collect data on all offenders who apply to the programs to help determine if the desire to participate in the program (and modify their behavior) serves as the impetus for change, or if the program itself is responsible for that change. Limitation of the study is that measures of re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration only took place in Virginia. In addition, we will have a sample size limitation for female population since female programming ended in December 2015.

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## Virginia Department of Corrections

Tama S. Celi, Ph.D.  
Chief, Research, Policy and Planning

Yan Jin, M.S.  
Manager, Evaluation Unit

Alexander P. Miller, MPP  
Senior Analyst, Statistical Analysis &  
Forecast Unit

Phone: 804-887-8248  
Tama.Celi@vadoc.virginia.gov

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