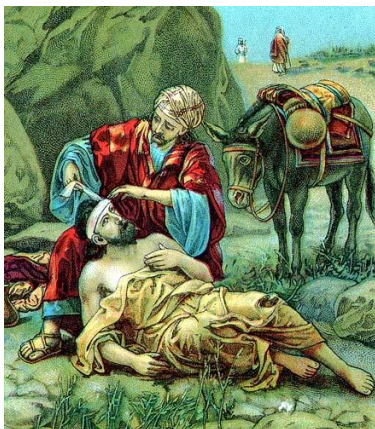


# I cry out,

## Survey of what the person who has committed a sexual sin asks of the church.



March 25, 2013

No matter what their faith, churches open themselves up to those who have repented and/or desire to grow in their faith. They provide resources like church services, bible studies, pastoral counseling, etc. This is true unless the man has committed a sexual crime. Most churches fear being involved with a 'sex offender.' How can the church safely reach out to these men?

This report is the result of a survey sent to 539 people who had committed a sexual crime in the United States. The focus was on how they could see the church helping them. It is broken down into the following four sections.

### **Section 1 The why and how of the survey and this report**

### **Section 2 Survey results**

### **Section 3 Conclusions**

### **Section 4 How the church can help**

First of all, the Church must protect the children. It is important to realize that there are sex offenders out there who are dangerous and we need protection from them. There are also sex offenders who have no desire to change or care less about God. These are not the men that this report focuses on. It is the repentant man with limited support and a desire to change and with realization that God must be part of the process.

## **Section 1 the why and how of the survey and this report**

Most churches have been very limited in addressing the issue of those who committed a sexual offense. Their actions have been defensive and protective. They look the other way. Compare this to the people that approached Jesus seeking His help- the bleeding woman in Mathew 9 or the blind beggar in Luke 18 or the leper in Mark 1. Helping others was what Jesus did on a daily basis. He touched the untouchable. If Jesus was there for the needy in his day, should not the church be there for the needy today. One of the greatest need groups is the repentant man who committed a sexual crime and is trying to find his way back into society.

This report is based upon a survey of men who had committed a sexual crime. The response rate was very high- 18 Percent. Typically one expects a 2-3% response to this type of survey. To me this shows that there is a voice crying to be heard. The Church should listen. Just as Jesus listened and responded to the crying voices in his day.

Why was this survey done? For about thirty years there has been a concern with how we protect society from the sexual offender. This started with the media publicizing a few high profile cases. The politicians jumped on board and enacted laws and set up containment systems. The definition of a sex offender expanded. In the last fifteen years there has been much empirical evidence on the value of the various programs that were established. Some of these programs are effective and some are not effective. Also new approaches to treatment have been developed. Slowly all of this is working into the system. This is good. What no one has looked at is the question of what is the church's role in this area, what can they do. When I say church here, it refers to the Christian church (Catholic, Protestant or Messianic Jew). It also refers to the church in general, not any one specific church. This survey was to solicit the sex offender's input on how the church can help.

Why the church is not more involved? I offer the following answers: (1) Lack of understanding of sex offenders in general. (2) Failure to differentiate the various types of sex offenders (Sexually Violent Predator from

pornography, Repentant from unrepentant). (3) Fear of lawsuits or parishioners leaving. Numbers one and two as you can see is due to lack of valid education by the Churches. Number three is the church seeing their role to sex offenders only as providing a service in a building and no more. David Benner in "Care of Souls" in discussing the moral issues of life said, " At one time the church played this role. Unfortunately, its role has been serious limited by virtue of the marginalized place it now occupies in a secular world. In 2009 I spent time in Arizona attempting to start Circles of Support and Accountability there. I spoke with Pastors or Priests in fifty different churches with only one willing to participate. I heard answers like: 'The sex offender does not want help.' 'Those that want to come to my church are just looking for potential victims.' 'I've got one who comes to my church. Can you work with him, so he doesn't come here anymore?' To overcome these opinions I prepared this survey which was sent to men across the country who had committed a sexual offense.

How was this survey done? The survey was 14 questions. (See Appendix) I was seeking a minimum of fifty responses in order to draw valid conclusions. I would have preferred many more, but was limited by funding. I provided all the expenses myself. I sent out a sample of 200 to validate this assumption and to critique the survey. The majority of the initial recipients were not in prison. From this sample I made a few minor changes to the survey, and sent it to 339 additional people. The later 339 went more heavily to those in prison as that appeared to be where I was getting the best response. I sent to sex offenders in 17 states. I selected states where the data was best available. For example, (1) ease of finding name, location, and crime, (2) ability to identify by their level of crime, or (3) find incarcerated inmates. In all cases I provided a cover letter and a self-addressed stamped returned envelope. I had all responses sent to a P.O. Box I rented. I focused on men between the ages of 25 and 55. I tried to cover all races and nationalities as well as all types of sexual crimes. I say males, but the last twenty-five surveys were sent to females to see if they had anything unique to add. The survey was prepared so as not to identify who responded. In most cases, I was able to identify the state from the post mark on the returned envelope.

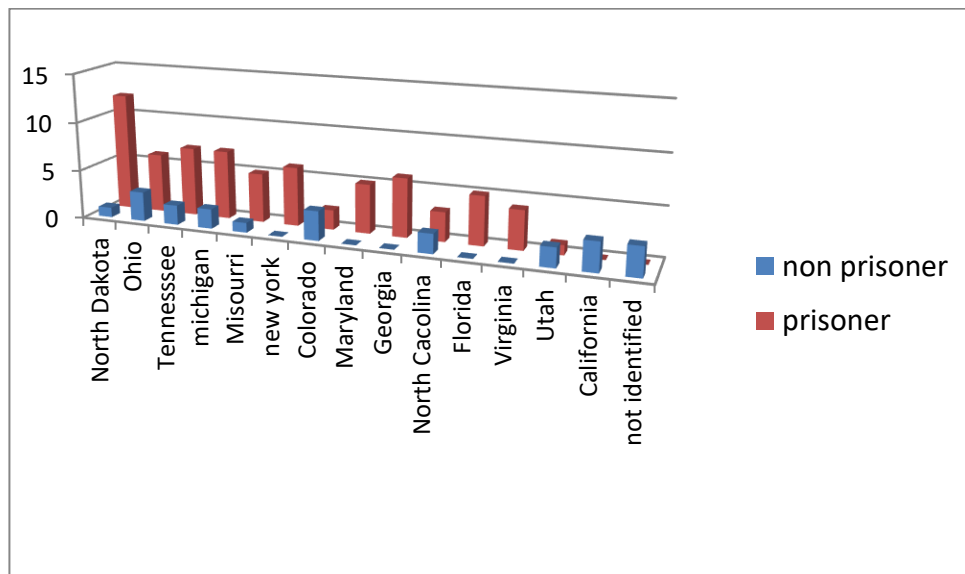
## **Section 2 Survey results.**

The results of the survey show a strong crying out by those who committed a sexual offense. One way we see this is in the 19% response versus the 3% which is typical for this type of survey. Those responding were heavily Christian (84%) and had adequate time to reflect since committing the crime on average eleven years prior to answering the survey. There has been a strong growth in their spirituality since committing their crime. Their biggest needs were jobs and a place to live. Yet what they asked of the church was to help educate the community about the truth of sex offending and provide support for them. Support was not financial but spiritual and emotional (For example to help them forgive themselves for what they did.) Most that had support found it in the family, yet the family of origin is where negative tendencies can be learned. Few on the outside relate to church as support. Many in prison recognize church inside the prison walls as support. They had not heard of the Circles of Support and Accountability Program, but wished to join one.

539 letters were sent out. Thirty-three came back as no longer at this address. All were from men not in prison. So net there were 504 potential responses. 282 were to men in prison and 222 were to men not in prison. All the names were taken from the sex offender registry of the various states.

**Specific general results were as follows:**

- 91 responses or a 19 percent response rate was received. Everything I read, said to expect a 3% maximum response. Why six times this amount? Proof that there is a large group crying out for help. Responses were 24% from those in prison and 10% from that not in prison. Why the difference? I believe those in prison are the more serious offenders. These men have more time to reflect on their crime, hence more eager to help prevent similar crimes from occurring. I also know that some prisons do not allow stamped envelopes to be sent to inmates. They may pass the letter and survey on without the stamped envelope. In those case the inmate can still reply to me using his own envelope and stamp. Some may throw away the whole thing. Therefore the real response rate from prisons would be greater than 24%.
- Results by state were as per figure 1 below:



**Figure 1 Response by state**

Surveys were sent to three states, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma, for which I got no responses. I am not sure what this means as I could find no correlation to explain it. In California there were no surveys sent to men in prison as information was not available. Why there was a difference in return rates in different states prisons, I also could not explain. Example was North Dakotas was 41%. It is possible more got through to inmates in this state versus others where certain prisons may not allow surveys or stamped envelopes.

- Not every person who responded answered every question
- The average age of the respondents (all ages added together and then the sum divided by the number of resonances) was 41. The mean (one half on each side) age of the person reporting was also 41. The average and mean age at time of crime was 30 and 30. On average the offenders are responding about eleven years after they committed the crime. This should have given them ample time to see how the system works and to reflect on what they did. See figure 2below.

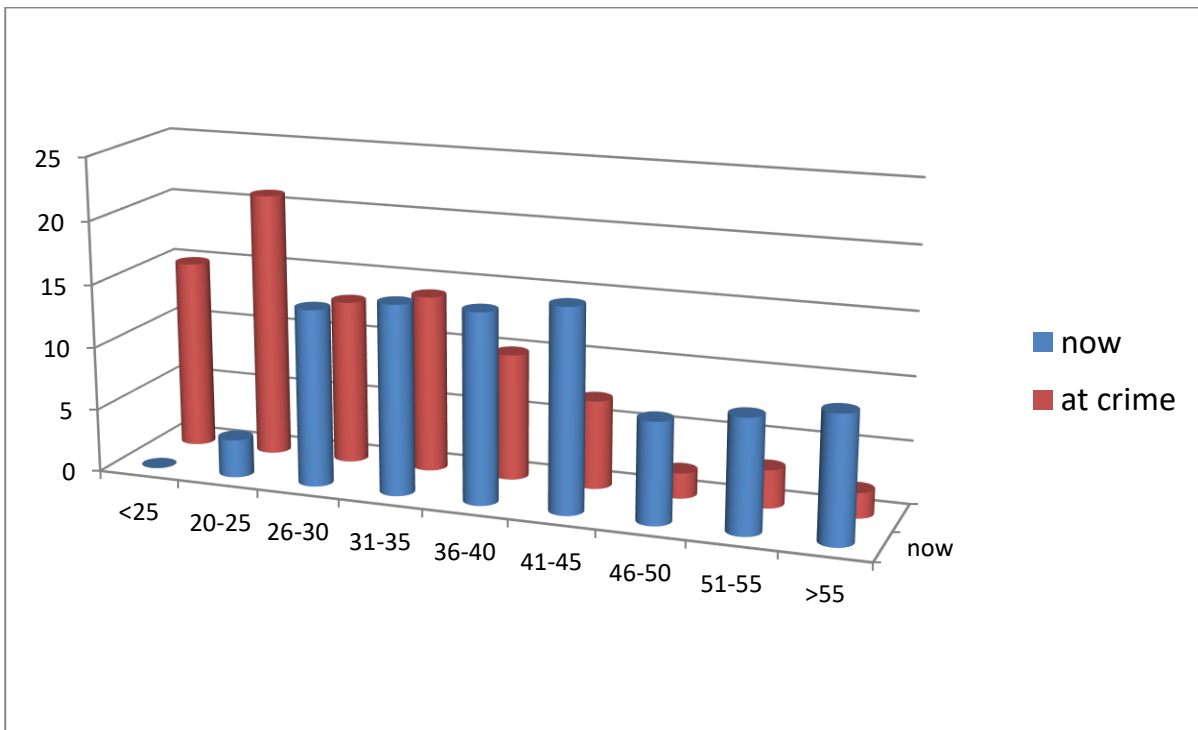


Figure 2 Age at time of crime and now

We see two ages grouping where most crimes were committed.

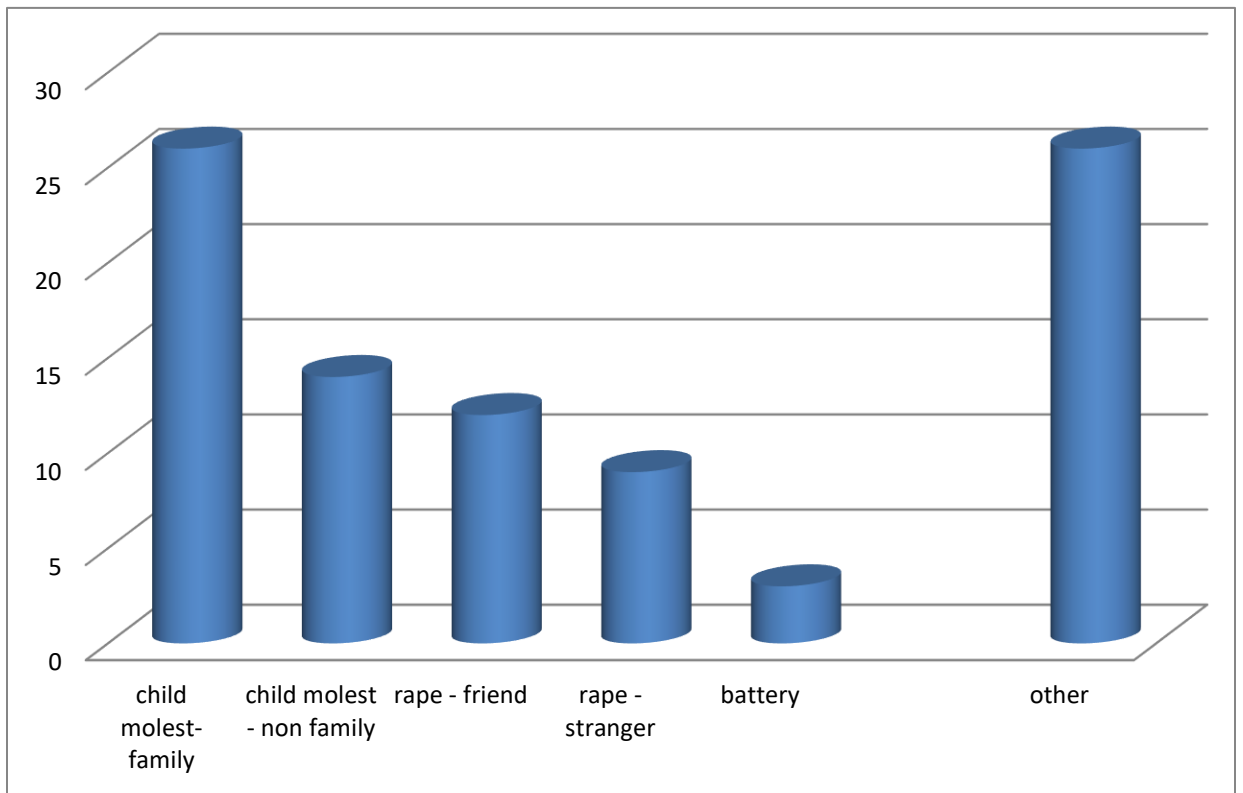
The under 25 year olds I believe often represents the young unmarried under the influence of drugs or alcohol who either push too far with females because they think their buddies are. Another common incident involves young males with an underage girl with her parent's approval. These are called 'Romeo and Juliet' type cases. One day they break up and he gets accused in retaliation. Finally in recent years we have seen a growth in internet crimes such as 'sexting'.

31 to 35 years olds are another interesting group. Many males grow up, get married and have successful careers, but never understood intimacy. Sometime in their early thirties, they spend time with a neighbor's child or a niece/nephew. Before they realized, fun play has turned sexual.

Historically, age has been a significant factor in reduction of crime. This is true for those who committed a sexual crime.



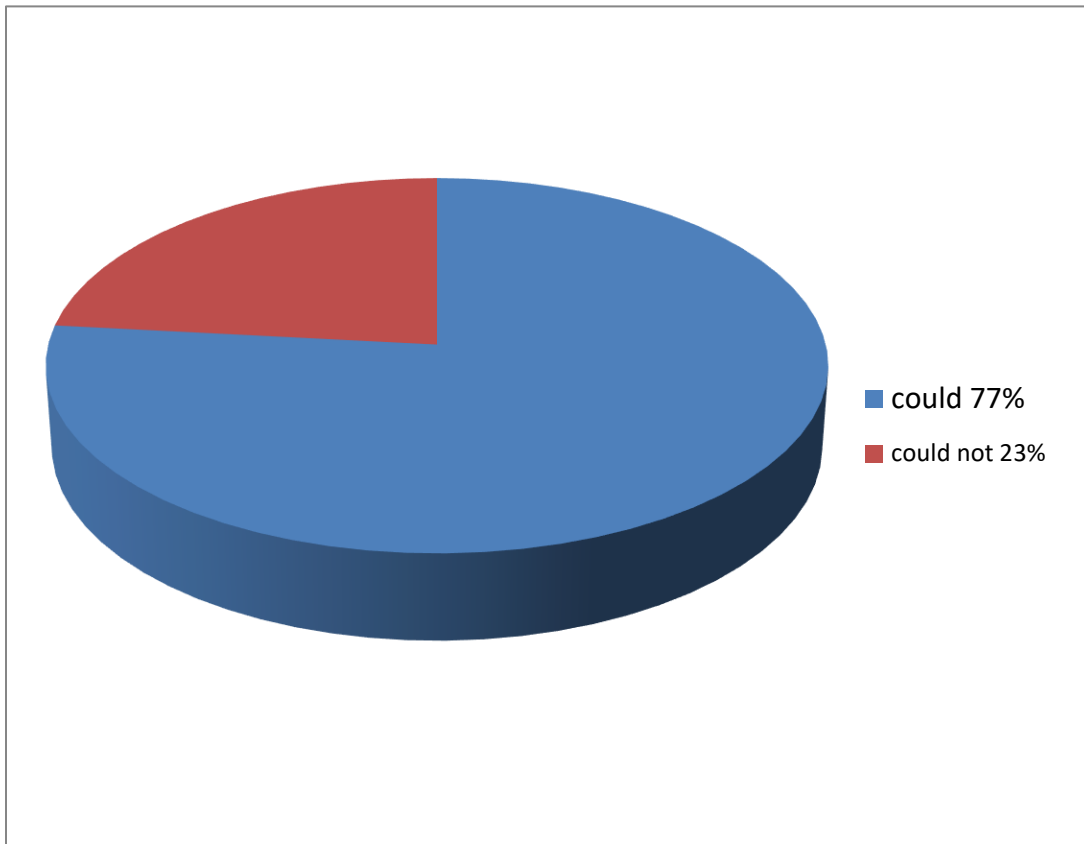
- The crimes broke down as per figure 3 below:



**Figure 3 Crime by offence**

Other includes: internet, pornography, exposure, slap waitress on butt, etc.

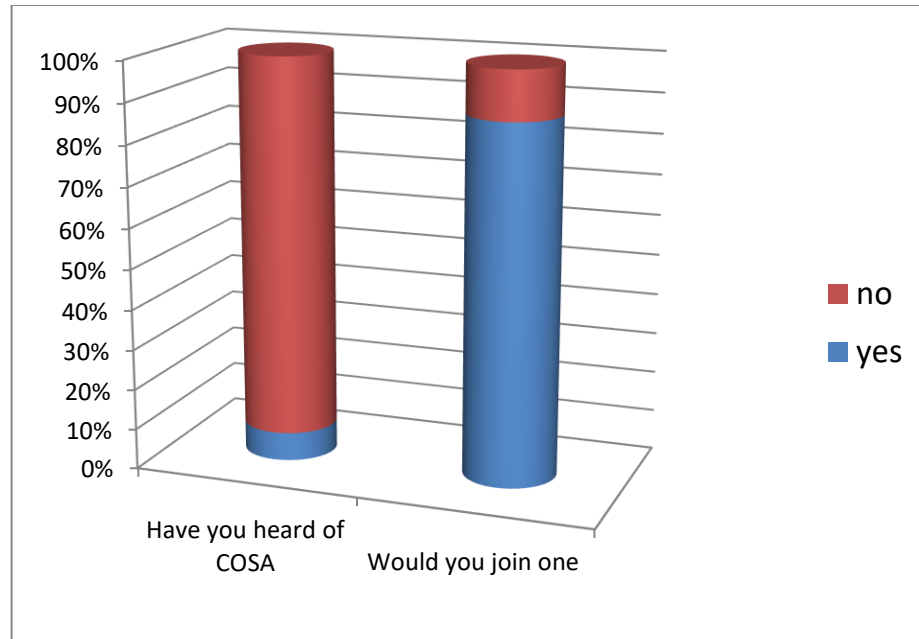
- All the men must take some form of state approved therapy treatment. Mostly this is in a group setting. Traditionally this has been behavior modification. Recently, strength based approaches such as Good Lives Model are being used. The question of ability to discuss their particular faith beliefs in therapy/treatment was added for the last 300 surveys sent. Results are shown in figure 4.



**Figure 4 Can you discuss religion in therapy?**

The no's, representing 23% of the respondents, were from North Dakota, New York, and Colorado. Why would a therapist not allow a person's faith beliefs to be part of any recovery discussion? I believe that this is something that the Sex Offender Management Board and the churches in these three states should look into. Is this statewide or just in a certain area? Is it right for a therapist to say, "If you mention God in this session, I will throw you out of class, which puts you back in prison"?

- To the question of "Had you heard of Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) and would you join one if it was available, the following was received.



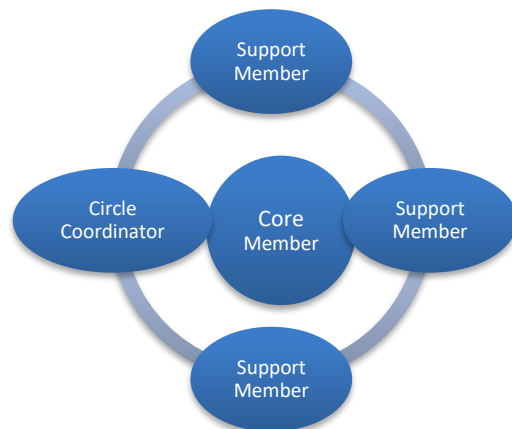
**Figure 5 Have you heard of COSA and would you join one?**

COSA is faith based non-judicial program where two to five mature men from the community meet once per week for one hour with someone who has committed a sexual crime and has limited support. They walk with the man as he tries to re-enter society. All discussions are kept totally confidential. One of the COSA members is the “Circle Coordinator” who coordinates and is the contact point for other members of the circle. He or she will call and facilitate meetings and be the contact person for the core member’s Parole or Probation Officer.

The COSA support members enter into and sign a covenant with the core member that establishes agreed upon acceptable norms of behavior and associations for the core member and clarifies expectations to be met by the circle of volunteers. The key elements of the covenant for the Core Member include his sharing his relapse plan, agreeing to openness and honesty with the COSA, abiding by the consensus of the circle, respecting confidentiality of personal information, and adhering to parole requirements. Initially, the COSA meets as a group to (a) understand the Core Member and how to hold him accountable and (b) to help him get settled (a process of 6-10 weeks). The COSA then meets weekly with the Core Member. Periodic COSA “pre-meetings” assure that the members have consensus and speak with one voice. No member is to lend money to the Core Member under any circumstances. Periodically, the COSA meets to “celebrate” some event with the Core Member. The COSA continually reviews questions such as:

- What skills like budgeting or housekeeping can we help him with?
- Is he spending his time wisely?
- Is he living up to the covenant and parole requirements?
- What are his fears?
- Does he understand the relationship between his behavior and consequences?
- What are the areas he needs help with (obtaining an I.D., using a check book, etc.)

COSA support members are not the Core Member’s therapists. He has a professional therapist appointed by the Department of Corrections. COSA members are encouraged to pray, do Bible studies and be spiritually supportive to help the Core Member grow in faith. If COSA support members have concerns they should contact the Circle Coordinator. They are reminded they are here to help another person but not at the expense of those things that are dear to them personally. But the backdrop of the entire program is modeling one’s convictions. Actions speak louder than words. COSA Support Members would do well to always remember that the life-style persons convicted of a sexual offense are forced to live, deeply impacts their sense of self-worth, producing doubts about their deserving not only the love of others, but also the love of God. The mentor-mentee relationship may be the path by which any such doubt is given its proper and positive answer—“Yes, you are deserving and you are loved!” As author Hugh Prather, so succinctly said, “You are a shining member of the family of God, and I will wait patiently for this truthful vision to come honestly to your mind.”

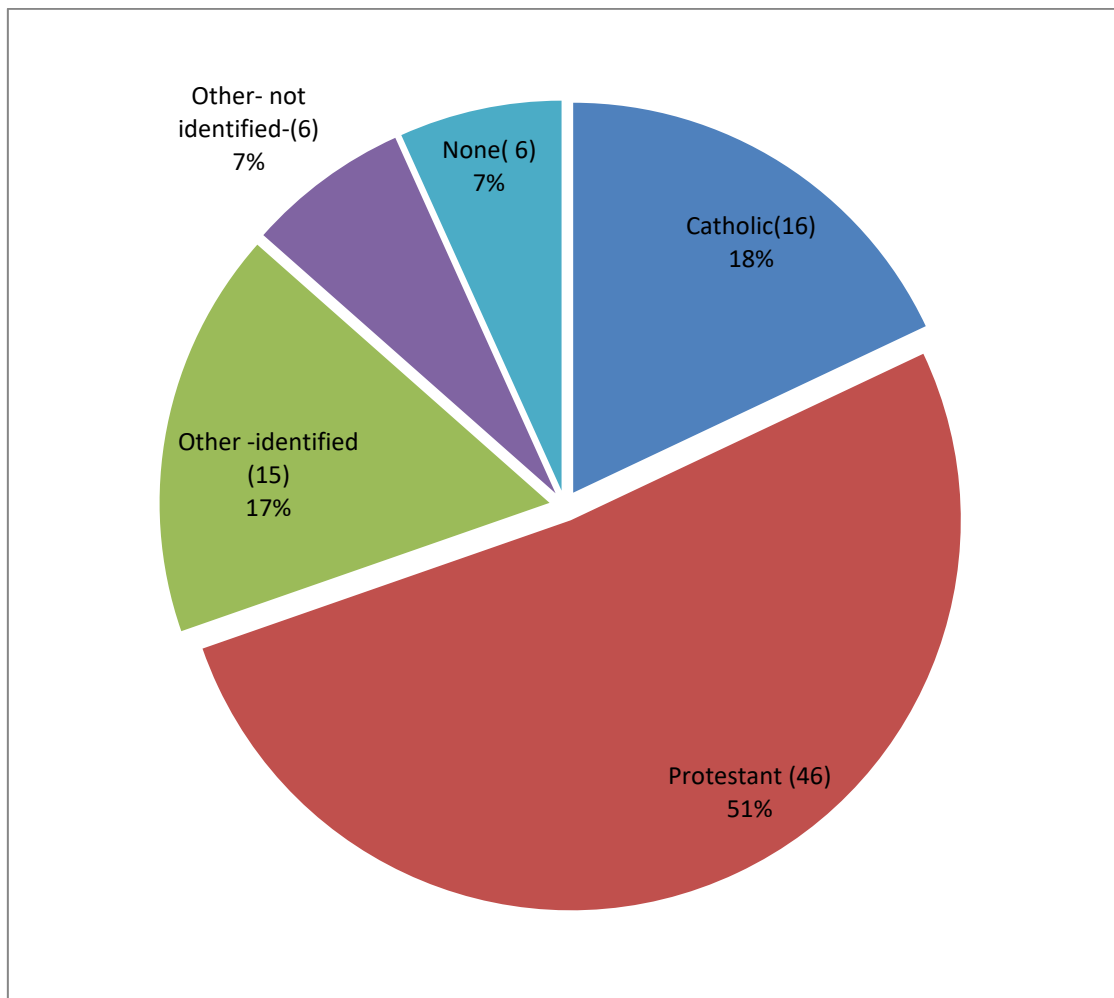


This program is statistically one of the most successful programs and has proven to reduce recidivism by 35%. It has been run successfully throughout Canada by a combination of the Mennonite church with the Department of Corrections. It is currently very

active in 6 other English speaking countries with the church as the driving force. Its implementation in the USA is minimal. Overwhelmingly the data shows that the men desire this kind of help. It can be done outside the church building.

**Specific spiritual results were as follows:**

Their spiritual belief broke down as per figure 6:



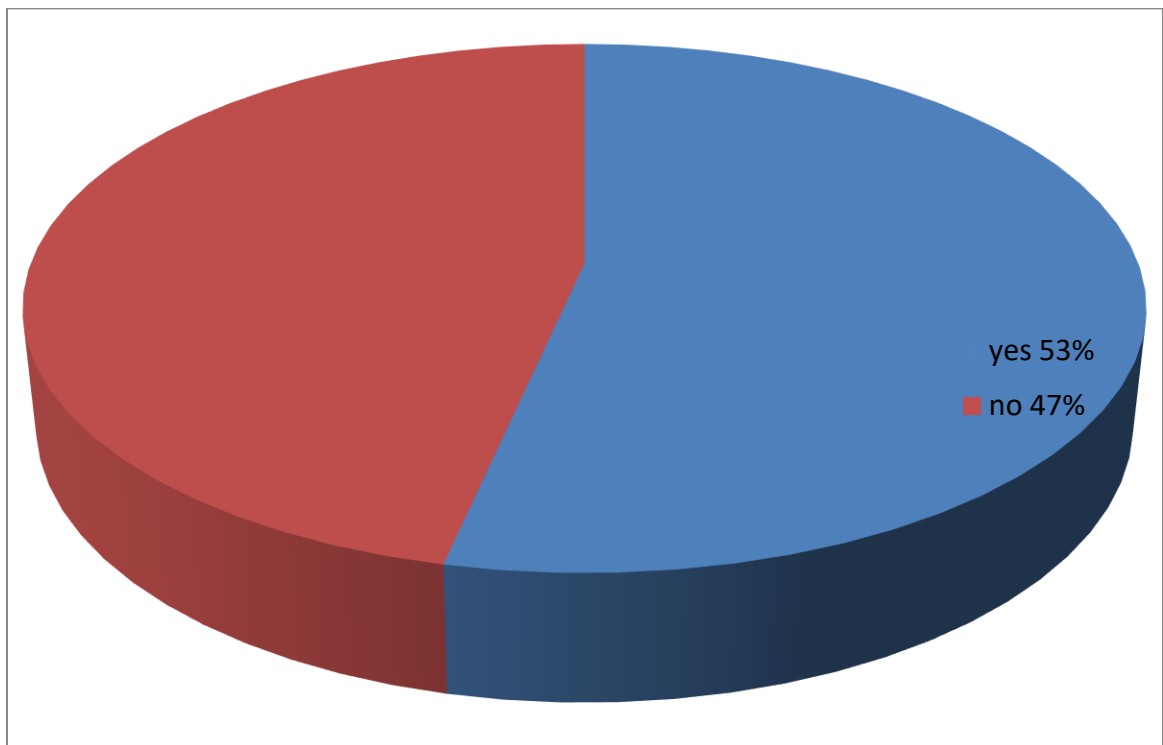
**Figure 6 Spiritual belief**

There was no way of knowing anyone's specific belief when the survey was sent out.

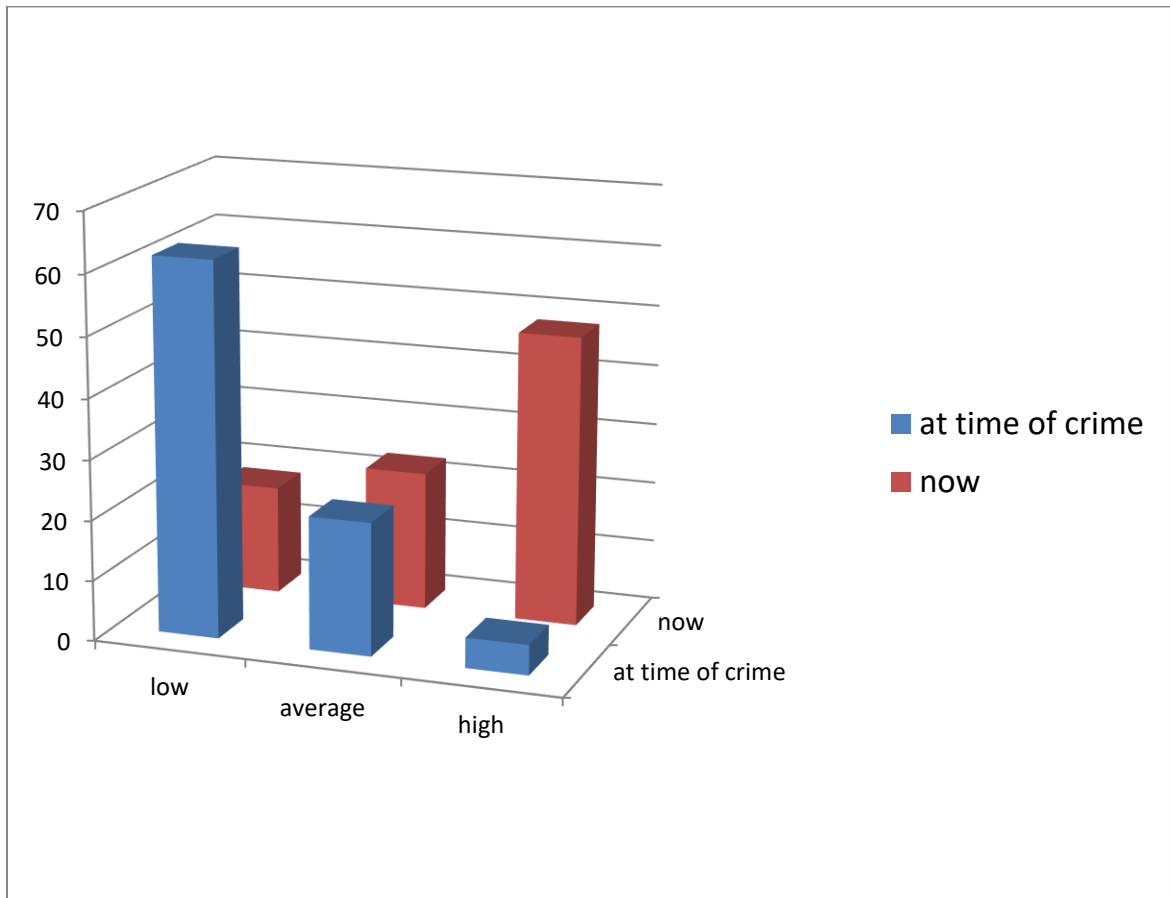
The other –identified included Muslim, higher power, 7<sup>th</sup> day Adventist, Jew, New Age, Wiccan, Native American, Man of God, Mormon, higher Spirit, and Messianic Jew. Many of the other not identified I believe based upon their response to the questions, would call themselves “Christian” [Catholic, Protestant, and Messianic Jew]. Therefore 84% of the offenders responding felt that they were Christian. We can therefore conclude that this survey is heavily Christian based.

Originally I hoped to see if there were differences between the various faith groups (Christian vs. Muslim vs. Mormon). This was not achieved as I received so little response from other than Christians.

- Figures 7 and 8 shows the answers to the questions on spiritual belief as child, at time of crime and now.



**Figure 7** Were you raised in a spiritual environment?



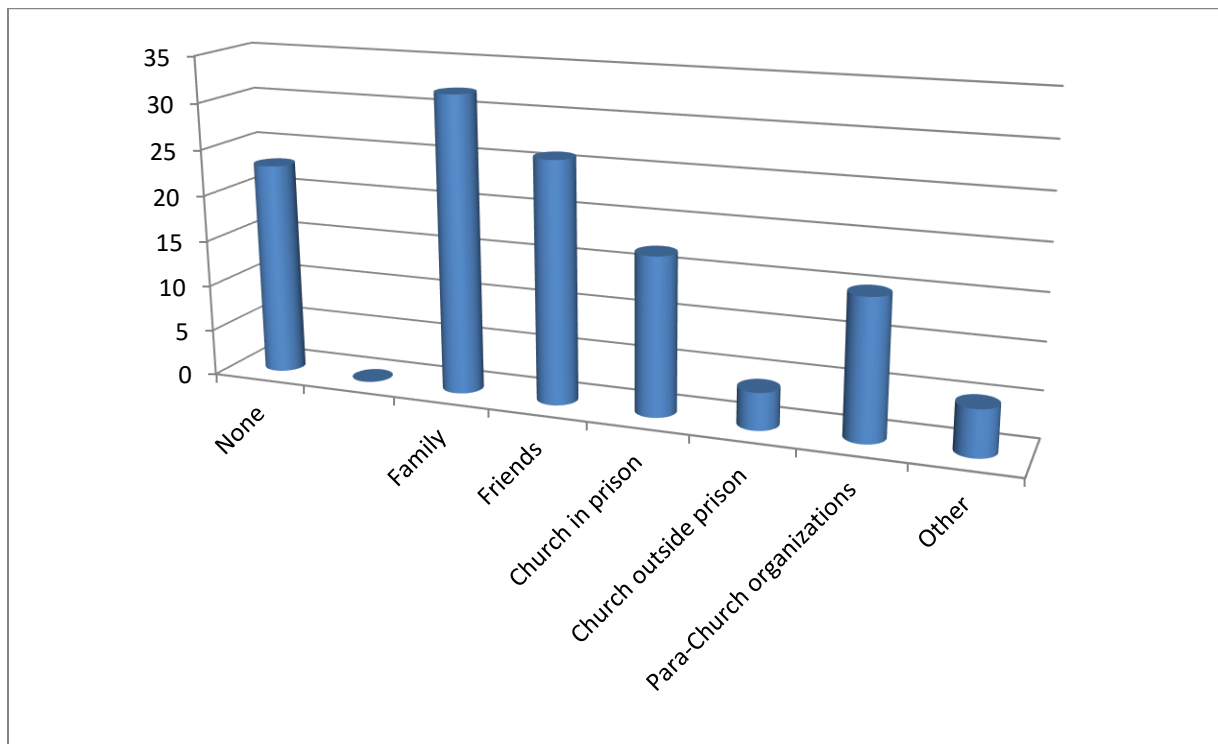
**Figure 8 Spiritual belief at time of crime and today**

47 were raised spiritually but fell away to where only 27 had high or average belief at time of crime. This is not too surprising. Falling away from religion leads to living in the world, hence committing crimes will follow.

Look at how the men have grown in faith since committing their crime 11 years ago? Somebody, somewhere, somehow has changed these men. It had to be the Holy Spirit, but what vehicle did he use. As we can see in some of the data that follows, it was family and friends. Sadly it was not something that the church provided. If the church got involved in any way, this increase would be more dramatic. Family support is great, but it is often in the family of origin where

many tendencies are learned. The church, with education, can provide more balanced support.

- Figure 9 reflects where their spiritual support is today. Several had more than one sources of their spiritual support.



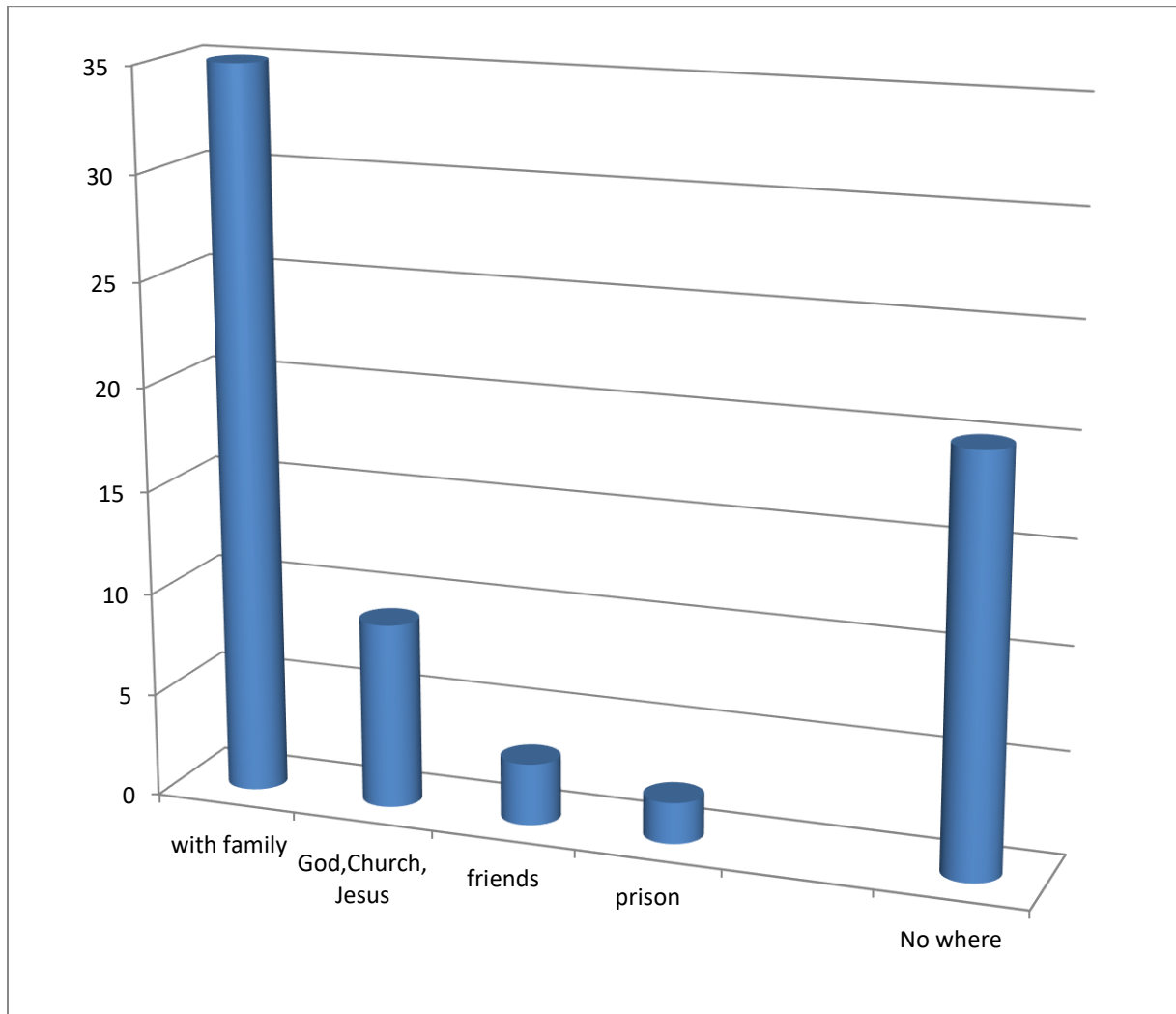
**Figure 9 Where is your spiritual today?**

Points are of interest:

1. Of the 23 who said they had no spiritual support, 15 said they were Christian. Looks like a big audience needing to be addressed
2. The number one support is the family. This is intimate family.
3. Catholics saw the 'church' less as support than did Protestants or other beliefs. Only 17% for Catholics versus 29% for Protestants and 28% for other religions used the Church as one of their supports.



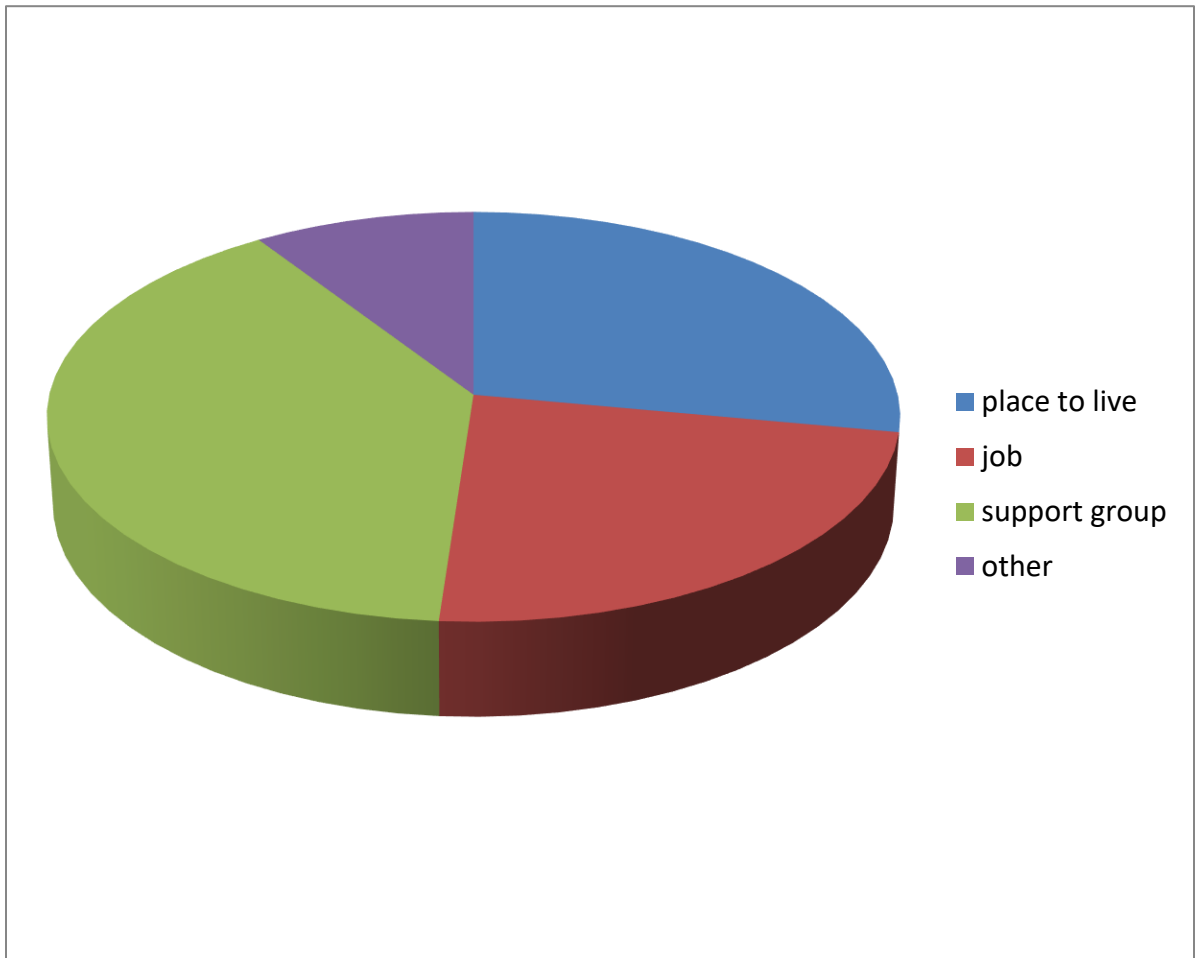
- Answer to the question-Where is a safe place for you? I summarized various comments under the following categories in figure 10.



**Figure 10 Where is a safe place for you today?**

Again we see the family as a place. Why not in the arms of the Father or with Christian brothers? Also, one third have no place to call safe. Can we not welcome them into the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy – Romans 14: 17? Again remember that over 80% of the men who responded said they were Christian.

- Biggest problem answers included:



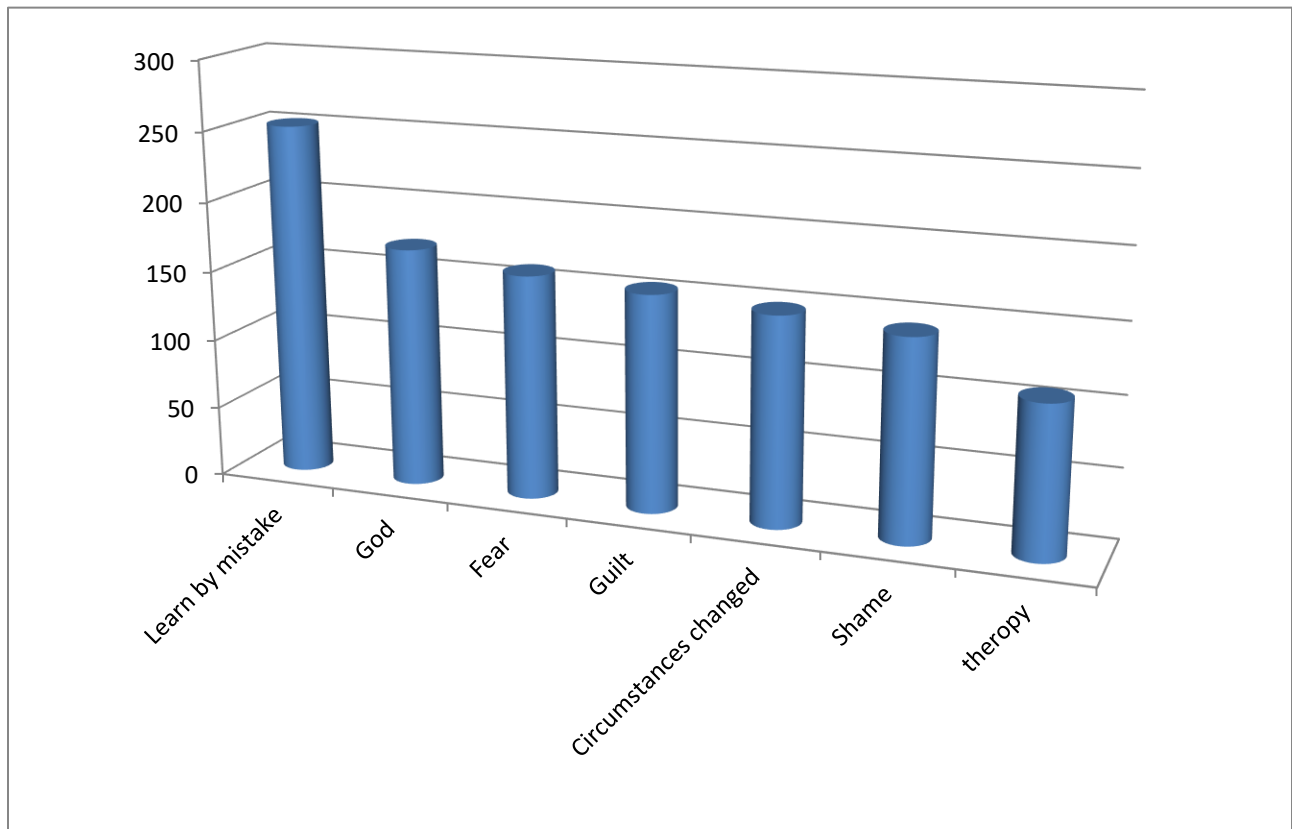
**Figure 11 What is the biggest problem you face?**

One-half of their biggest problem is one of basic survival- a place to live or a job.

They also realize that they can't do it on their own. The most recognized problem is need of some kind of support group.

The other includes shame, people don't trust sex offenders, fear of future, get my GED, forgive myself, etc.

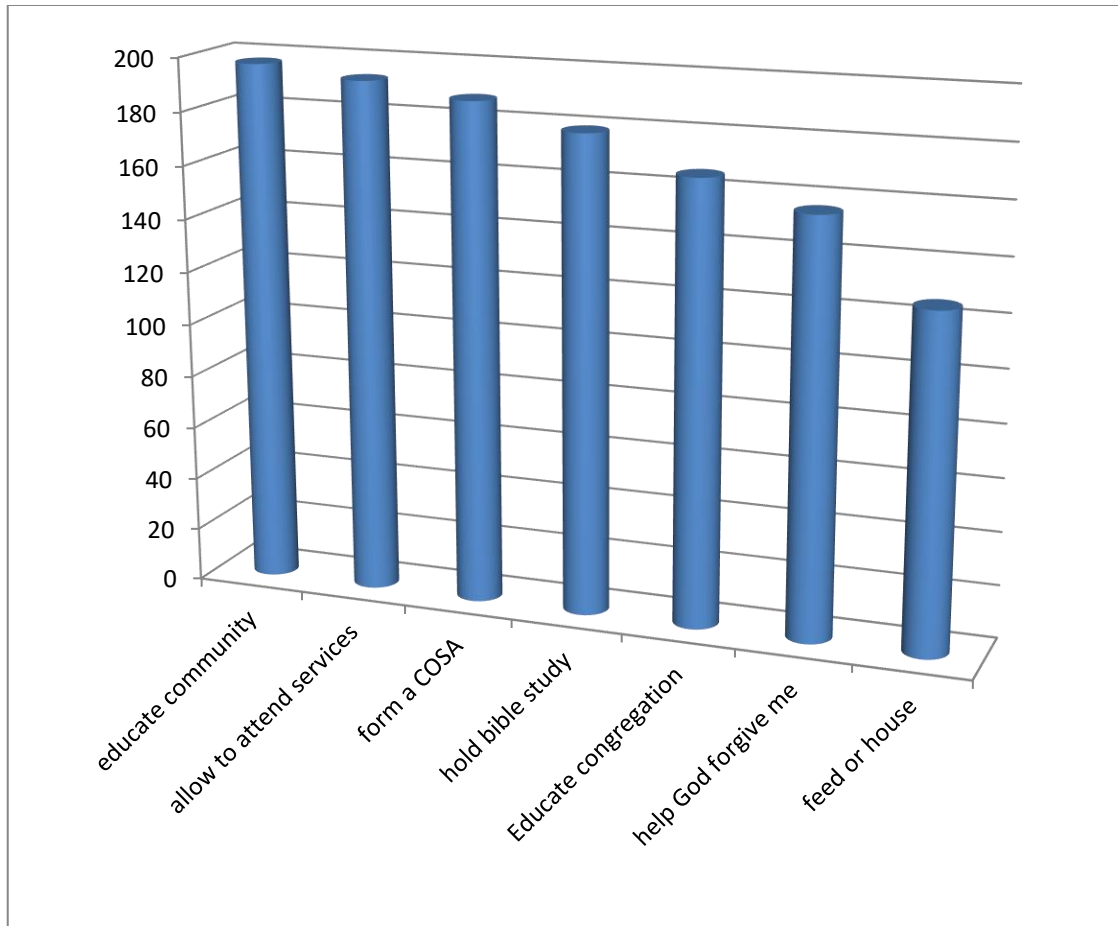
- In response to “Why not re-offend”, we got the following (see figure 11): They could vote for which ever applied and rank them from 1 to 5 with 5 the highest. The following chart is the summary of all the votes received.



**Figure 12 Why not re-offend?**

Again we see change through their own thinking. Some are negative [fear, shame, and guilt]. Some say things are different now [learn, circumstances], but is this realistic thinking. True change must be positive and internal where God is key. How do they get this if we exile them?

- So how can church help. I asked this question and got the following results. See figure 13. Again the men could rank there response from 1-5 with 5 being the most important.



**Figure 13 How the church can help?**

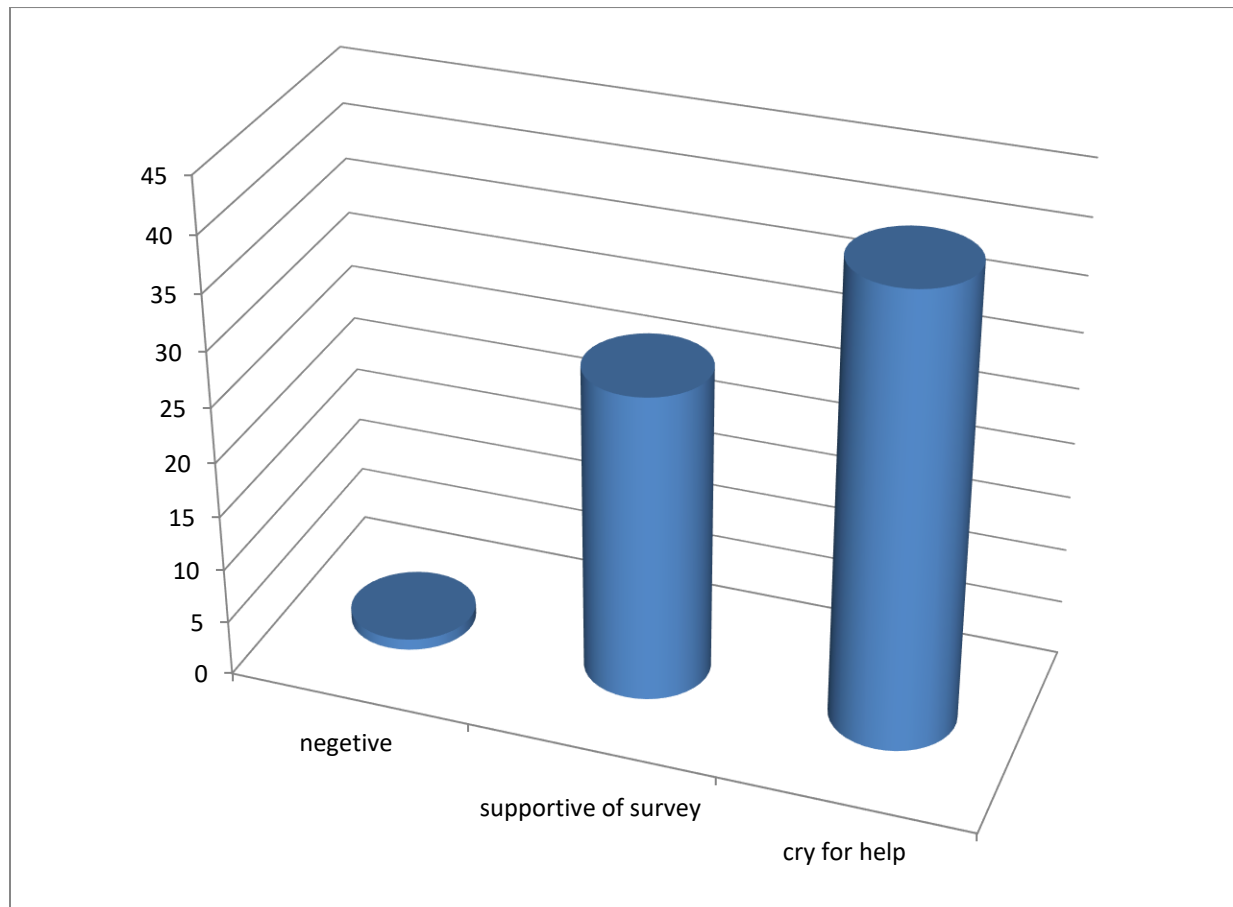
There is a lot that can be learned by these responses. I do not see them looking for a hand out. I do see them looking for the church to provide a level playing field (educate community) and to bring Christian support around them (COSA, forgive, etc.).

Till one receives forgiveness for what he did from another human, it is difficult to experience God's forgiveness.

Catholics responded more to the 'God to forgive me' answer at 69% versus Protestants at 57%.

## Other comments

59 or 65 % added some comment which ranged from two lines to four hand written pages. I grouped the comments under the following categories. Note that some men responded in more than one category.



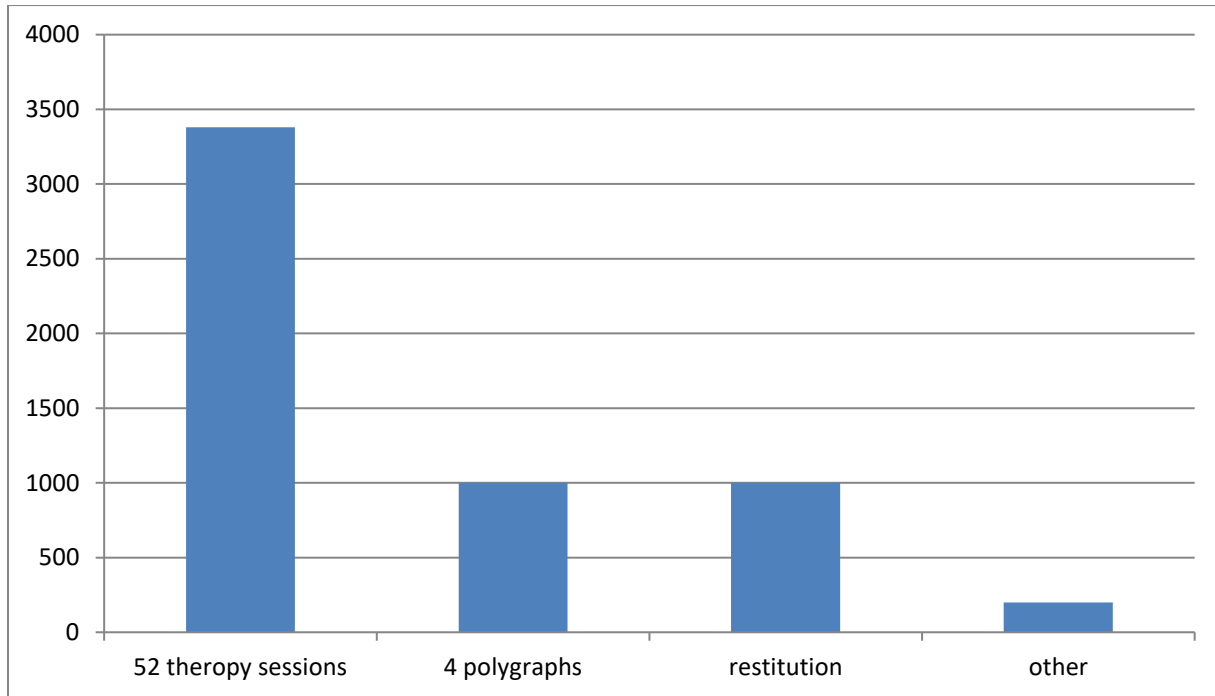
**Figure 14 Other comments**

It was nice to see that one quarter of the men took time to write words of encouragement to me. This speaks highly of the quality of their heart.

Their cries for help were similar to their biggest problem chart on page 16. It is true that 4 of the cries for help were actually just minimizing their responsibility in their situation. Thirty three were real. The cry of the oppressed is a spiritual cry. A cry for a Redeemer who will bring 'justice.' We see in throughout the Psalms of the Old Testament

**Information not in survey:**

Cost unique to a sex offender on parole or probation that others do not incur typically average \$5,700 / year can be seen in figure 15.



**Figure 15 Annual incremental cost to those who commented a sexual crime**

Restitution is repayment of court cost usually spread over around 8 years plus fees for being a sex offender.

A failed polygraph or non-payment for therapy can result in doubling of therapy sessions.

Inability to meet this cost can put an offender back in prison. This is at the discretion of the parole officer, polygrapher and therapist.

- **Correlations:**

There was limited identified correlation between items such as type of crime, age, spiritual belief, spiritual growth, want from church etc. What was interesting is the following:

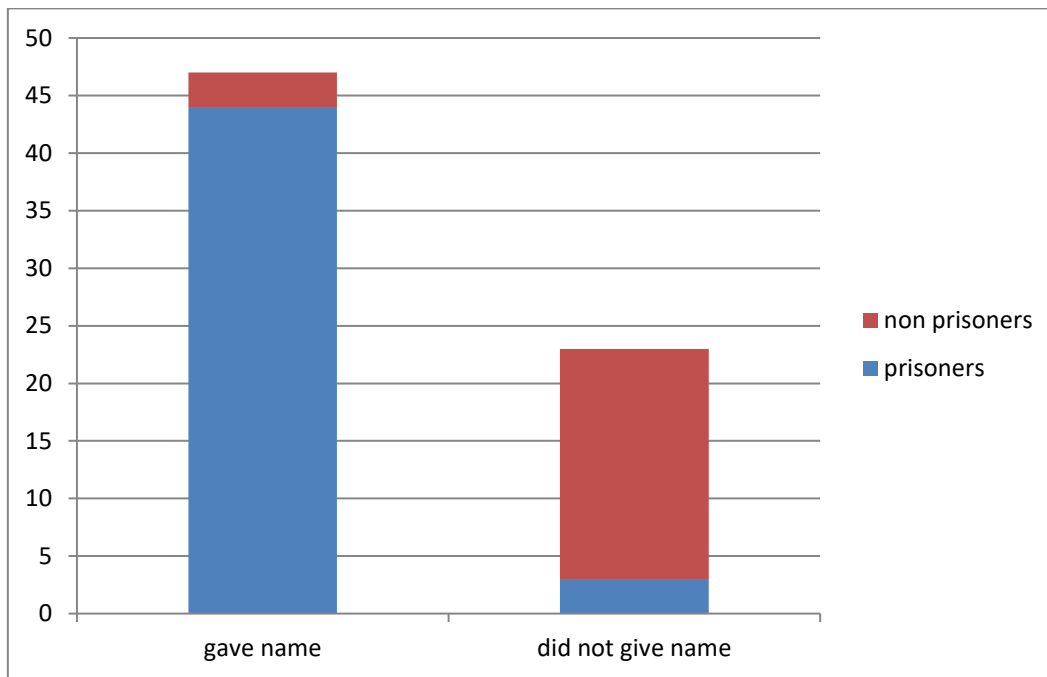


Figure 16

- The non-prisoner is afraid of retaliation if he is discovered to be a sex offender, so he tries to stay hidden. Retaliation could be losing their job, loss of housing, or physical/mental assaults. The prisoner realizes how hard it will be for him when he is released. He is seeking any kind of help and therefore gladly gives his name, so that help can find him.
- There were 21 men who put God's forgiveness as the first or second most important thing the church could do for them. It is interesting that 13 of these men said that their spiritual strength today was 'strong'. To me this means it is strong in their head than in their heart.
- Of the 19 who said 'Church' as a response to spiritual support, three were not in prison. Therefore of the 23 offenders who responded and are not in prison, 20 do not feel that the church is a source of spiritual support to them. Sixteen were in prison. Church to them therefore is something provided in the prison such as a chaplain taught service or a program by an outside group who comes in regularly or periodically

- The survey was sent to 18 women, all in prison. Five responded. Although female sex offenders represent a very small portion of the total sex offender population, we should realize that there are some and by the 28% response rate. They are also reaching out for help.

### **Other comments:**

- **Support was a key word in the survey responses.** The cry for support came through very strong. What the survey lacked was a detail definition of what 'support' was to them.

I do not believe it was for financial help. There was not one word on this in their comments. Also I do not see this in the men I work with in my program in Colorado.

I do not feel they were asking for accountability. The system (therapist, parole officers, etc.) provide this in many ways.

There was evidence in their comments that some were asking for spiritual help. As a whole, they have grown spiritually, yet as stated before they often get very little individual mentoring and their spirituality is more in their head than their heart. Particularly in prison, they have lots of time to read the bible and memorize scripture, but little help in applying what they read.

There is evidence in their comments that they seek someone to walk with them in their struggles. Struggles being how the world sees them and how they see themselves. I find this very much so in the men I work with - the desire for a mature spiritual man in their life that they can talk to openly and honestly.

Isolation increases the chance of re-offending.

- **Fear was a second underlining key word.** 'Fear' started with the media publicizing a few particularly violent sexual crimes. From there it spread to:

- Fear by the offender:
  - Rejection by family, the community, and God.
  - Securing a livable income
  - Retaliation



-False reporting which may send him back to prison

Ways to overcome-find someone he can trust to be able to talk with

- Fear by the Church:

- Law suits

- Lost members

- Bad publicity

Ways to overcome – do informally outside the church building

- Fear by a person from the church who participates:

- Differentiating the master manipulator from the repentant man

- Personal dangers

Ways to overcome – set boundaries. Do not act as taxi, bank or  
Psychologist

Ways to overcome- meet in an outside place, not your home

Ways to overcome- training

- Fear by the Community

- Dirty old man in the park

Ways to overcome- Education of facts

***Operating out of faith versus fear leads to love.***

### **Section 3 Conclusions**

Yes there are a lot of sex offenders out there who are dangerous and that we must protect our communities from. But society wrongly puts them all in one category. When in fact, there are many categories.

The repentant sex offender today faces unique and often unfair issues.

There are two distinct groups of repentant sex offenders – those in prison and that outside prison. Which one do I choose to get involved with? Be aware that some men not in prison today, may have been in prison in the past.

There are many ways to get involved. Realize however that this can be a difficult area. Therefore select one area and start there. Most recommended here involve direct one on one contact with a man. Once you do this, you will see the depths of each man's struggles. One man may be all you can handle and all God is asking of you.

This is a universal problem in this country. It goes across state borders and specific religious beliefs.

There are areas that no one is stepping up in to help the repentant man. This opens opportunities for the church.

To me the survey shows a lot of men trying to get past there sinful act and to grow in their identity as a child of God. They are open to any way that this can happen. Sadly little of this has come from the church. How do we change this? How do we hate the sin but love the sinner?

Realize that by default; in not taking a proactive stance, we support the media version versus teaching the biblical version of how these men should be treated.

## **Section 4 How the church can help.**

Based upon this survey, I found at least five specific actions the church could lead. Note none of these involves bringing a sex offender into the church building. Each action is geared to helping a specific group of people.

### ➤ **Educating the general public**

Surprising was the offenders seeing one of the church's main roles to educate the community. Not just their congregations, but the community as whole. There are a lot of false beliefs about a sex offender out there. Someone must step up with the truth. The church could be a vehicle for open discussions which show both the risk in a sex offender, but also the misinformation. This could be done in periodic meetings and discussion groups open to both the congregation as well as the community.

### ➤ **The sex offender before he committed a crime**

The recidivism rate for those who committed a sexual crime is 3.5% in the first three years per the United States Department of Justice Bureau of Statistics. It grows to a maximum of 20% in 20 years. Far from the 75 percent that most would guess. So for committing a new crime after being caught, the system does a good job of minimizing recidivism. But who is working with men so they don't commit the initial crime. This is where the church has a key role. It needs to provide small groups where men with sexual problems can meet together to overcome their desires before acting out on them. A few churches have these meetings where the issue is pornography. We need more doing this and also covering more issues.

### ➤ **The sex offender not in prison**

Circles of Support and Accountability is a program to primarily protect the community, as well help the ex. offender reintegrate in a safe way back into the community. It has been proven to be one of the op ways to reduce recidivism. And guess what, it can be done by the church, but not in the church building and in a controlled manner. As we see in the survey results that follow, sex offenders are screaming for this kind of help. The church should facilitate the forming a COSA program.

A second idea, as done by a church in Colorado Springs, is to twice monthly on a Sunday afternoon when the church is empty, have a 'Place of Hope'. A two hour meeting for anyone who had committed a sexual offense. It can include open discussions, a guest speaker, or anything where the men feel they belong.

➤ **The sex offender in Prison**

First realize that sex offenders are treated differently in prison in different states. In some like Colorado and Arizona they are kept together in one prison. In most other states they are sprinkled throughout all the prisons in the system. In these states, the sex offender often, in fear of his life, may be telling the other inmates that their crime was something other than sexual. The best way to find who would be a good person to contact is through the prison chaplain. Feel free to call a local prison and ask for the chaplain. Then start writing someone he suggests and even possible visiting him periodically. He may be able to attend church services in prison, but he does not get the unique disciplining that he needs. As prison costs rise, the chaplaincy program funding decreases. Fewer chaplains to deal with more inmates, so no 'one on one' time. So the man may have no one who he can speak openly to on his issues. Make sure you find out about and follow all prison rules, such as no sending in hard cover books.

➤ **All sex offenders**

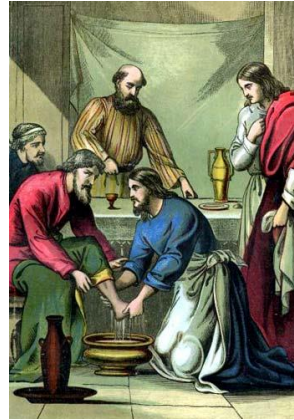
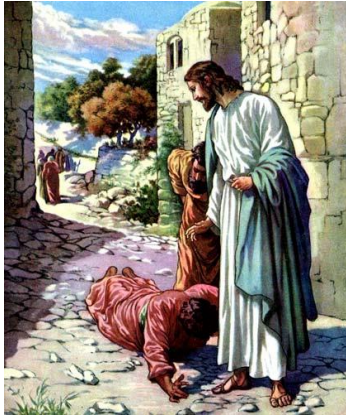
Surprising to me was that so many offenders responded by saying that they want forgiveness for their crime. Let the church sit down and figure out with some of these men why they carry so much guilt. Jesus released those he came in contact with who repented. How can we do the same today?

Guidelines for implementation of any program should include the following:

1. Pray over this.
2. Sex offenders more than any group tend to fall into two opposite groups with few in the grey area. The problem is that this distinction is not always

easily distinguished. Many negative ones are extremely intelligent and plan their action as a long term campaign. We hire them as youth leaders. They hide in our pews, schools, and neighborhoods as the good guys. The repentant man on the other hand may be more forthcoming about his past, but he is the one we single out to be isolated.

3. Encourage programs in your church, but do not force it on the church. Plant the seed in the right places and let it grow.
4. Women can have a role, but monitor this closely.
5. Talk with other pastors/priests. What are they doing? What can you do together?
6. Step forth bravely.



You cannot take Social Justice out of the Kingdom. You can belief in Jesus without Social Justice, but you cannot follow Him without it.

***Feel free to contact the writer on any questions, for additional copies, or if you desire to become involved in any solutions.***

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