

Guidelines for Volunteering Tennessee Department of Correction



**See Volunteer Service
Manual for Official
Guidelines**

Facts about Corrections in Tennessee

- There are 14 state prisons with approximately 20,000 incarcerated.
- 4,500 volunteers serve in these facilities and 90% are religious volunteers.

Two Categories of Volunteers

- Occasional Volunteers: No badge and enter on a memo up to maximum of 4 times per year.
- Regular Volunteers: Receive a badge and considered unpaid employee of the state.

Criminal System Facts

- ❖ 85-90% of criminal cases never go to trial. They are settled through plea-bargaining (Accept guilty plea to lesser offense and accept agreed-upon sentence).
- ❖ In probation, the sentence is suspended and placed on supervision in community.
- ❖ If sentenced, person goes to a state prison for classification and then sent to a prison for time-building.
- ❖ If an inmate makes parole, they will be released under supervision in the community. Generally, must serve at least 1/3 of sentence to be eligible.

Volunteer Qualifications

- Minimum 18 years of age.
- Former offenders must be approved by warden.
- Must be out of prison, off probation and parole for six-months before applying.
- Immediate relatives cannot volunteer in institution where inmate is housed.

Procedures to Volunteer

- ✓ Complete online application
- ✓ Turn in 3 letters of recommendation
- ✓ References and criminal background checked
- ✓ Interview and training by chaplain and local coordinator
- ✓ Photo identification and badge
- ✓ Assignment to a task with day and time
- ✓ Must be re-certified once a year

Dress Code

- Clothing must fit: not too tight or loose.
- No exposed midriffs, tank-tops or sleeveless shirts
- No steel-toed shoes, flip-flops.
- No shorts or short skirts (3 inches above knee)
- No spandex, no camouflage, no tattered clothes and no clothes with pictures, slogans, or symbols associated with gangs.
- No bandanas
- No excessive clothes

Medical Information

- Medically necessary medication is permitted with certain restrictions.
- Prosthesis, artificial limbs, pacemakers and defibrillators are allowed but doctor's note is needed.
- Avoid contact with blood or bodily fluids because of HIV and Hepatitis B.
- Recommend keeping bottle of hand-sanitizer in car and wash hands when leaving.

Entering Facility to Volunteer

- Arrive 15 minutes early for processing.
- Bring car key, I.D. badge, and approved items for the service (notes, Bible, communion), etc.
- Sign-in and present badge.
- Make sure left hand is stamped.
- Recognize that program can be cancelled at any time without notice due to emergencies.
- Don't argue with staff. Follow all requests and report problems later to coordinator.
- Sign-out when leaving.

Things to Remember

- Alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and firearms are prohibited on grounds of prison.
- You cannot leave a gun in your car even if you have a permit (unless law-enforcement)
- Only go to your designated area. Don't wander around prison.
- Don't bring in anything or take anything out.
- Only come during scheduled time.
- Materials brought in must be approved.

- Do bring your badge
- Give name and address of the church or organization you represent to inmates but not personal information.
- Stay only during your allotted time.
- Leave purses, wallets, phone in trunk of car.
- Stay with your group at all times.
- Resist doctrinal debates
- Report any inappropriate behavior or suicidal or homicidal threats to security.

Don'ts

- Don't discuss an inmate's problem with other inmates.
- Don't ask why they are incarcerated.
- Don't send or carry messages either written or verbal to inmates' friends and family.
- Don't enter into romantic or financial relationship with inmate.
- Don't be on an inmate's visiting list.

Don'ts

- Don't bring in gum, money, cigarettes, pictures or anything without permission.
- Don't give inmate anything without approval.
- Don't argue with correctional staff.
- Don't send gifts through the mail.
- Don't criticize institution to inmates.
- Don't make telephone calls for inmates.
- Don't criticize other religious groups.

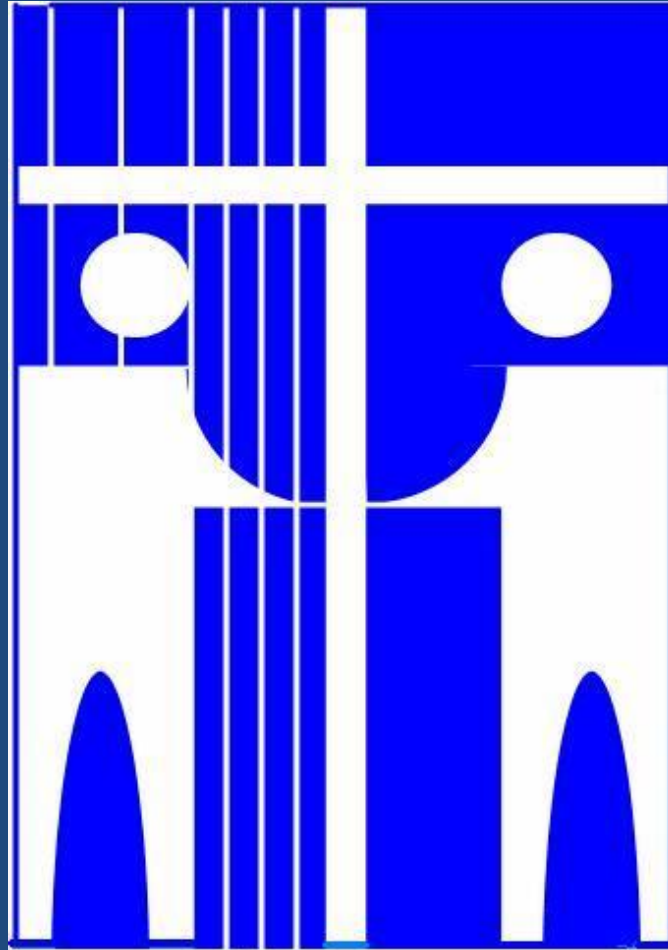
Manipulation

- Definition: To manage or control artfully, often in a shrewd or unfair way. To con.
- Inmates often view people as a means to an end, objects to be used.
- If inmates actions are questionable, ask someone for advice.
- Confront manipulative behavior.

Emergency Situations

- Hostile: Talk calmly to inmate and avoid being argumentative. Move into view of staff.
- Inmate Fight: Never intervene. Find staff.
- Riot: Don't intervene. Stay where you are and wait for staff to arrive.
- Fire: Follow escape routes
- Hostage: Follow instructions of captor. Don't be a hero. Wait for staff to arrive. If you hear shooting, hit the floor.

Ministry Guidelines



Pen-Pal Guidelines

- You must be at least 18 to be a Pen-Pal with a Christian inmate.
- Females should be pen-pals with females and males should write to males (Opposite sex pen-pals often lead to romantic overtures).
- Use the church address or a post-office box, not home address.
- You can use your own name if you feel comfortable or you can use a pseudonym.
- Try to write at least once or twice a month.

Do's

- When in doubt, contact the prison office at 615-870-1126 or email: office@tnprisonministry.org
- Be a Christian friend to inmates. Share your faith with inmates.
- Be dependable. Be patient. Be honest. Be a good listener.
- Do be trustworthy when someone shares with you personal or confidential information. Try to encourage and give hope.
- Do be aware of con games.

Don'ts

- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Nothing is to be given to the inmates. Absolutely nothing.
- No telephone numbers other than the church or the TN Prison ministry are to be given to the inmates.
- Don't give money to an inmate.
- Don't ask why a person is or has been in prison.
- Don't criticize staff, or an institution.
- Don't enter any personal or business transactions with prisoners. It could be a FELONY and you could be prosecuted.
- Don't contact judges or family members for them. If they request this, contact your coordinator or the prison office for any necessary visits.
- Don't enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. This is considered contraband.
- Don't send personal pictures to inmates.

Thanks!

- If you are interested in learning more about volunteering in the prisons or jails, contact the office by phone 615-870-1126 or email at office@tnprisonministry.org