

BAYLOR INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES OF RELIGION CASE STUDY

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH  
PRISONERS, THEIR FAMILIES, AND CHURCHES:

A CASE STUDY OF ANGEL TREE



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<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>MENTORING CHILDREN OF PRISONERS AND ANGEL TREE</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>ANGEL TREE IT STARTED WITH A GIFT</b>	<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angel Tree’s Hidden Assets</li> </ul>	
<b>HOW ANGEL TREE CHRISTMAS WORKS</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>COLLABORATION AND ANGEL TREE: THE VALUE PROPOSITION</b>	<b>19</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angel Tree And Its Volunteers</li> <li>• Church Coordinator</li> <li>• Area Coordinator</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Potential For Collaboration As Viewed From The Outside</li> <li>• Collaboration From The Prison Fellowship Side</li> <li>• Calvary Chapel Youth Mentoring Program: The Potential Of Collaboration</li> <li>• The Final Phase Of Collaboration: The “Community” Piece</li> <li>• Conclusion</li> </ul>	
<b>RECONNECTING AND RECONCILING FAMILIES</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>ANGEL TREE WITHIN PRISON FELLOWSHIP MINISTRIES: GOOD TO GREAT?</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</b>	<b>29</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angel Tree Is Reorganized</li> <li>• Extended Angel Tree: Moving Beyond Christmas</li> <li>• Angel Tree And Prison Chaplains</li> </ul>			

## BACKGROUND

Prison Fellowship (PF) was launched in 1976 by Chuck Colson, the former Nixon aide who had spent time in prison for his part in the Watergate scandal. Colson's religious conversion, documented in the autobiography *Born Again*, would dramatically change his life after release from prison. Indeed, Colson has spent the last 34 years trying to give other prisoners the same opportunity for radical change and freedom that he found. PF's mission is: "To seek the transformation of prisoners and their reconciliation to God, family, and community through the power and truth of Jesus Christ." PF pursues this mission through five programs:

**InnerChange Freedom Initiative** a values-based Christian prison and reentry program for inmates in order to help them transform their lives and re-enter society successfully.

**Justice Fellowship** works for reform through grassroots lobbying and interacting with federal and state government officials.

**Operation Starting Line** represents a partnership between PF and dozens of other Christian ministries to bring the transforming message of Jesus Christ to prisoners across the country through in-prison outreaches.

**Out4Life**, PF's newest initiative, seeks to develop a national reentry network to assist the 700,000 plus prisoners released each year in the United States to make a successful transition back to their families and communities.

**Angel Tree** partners with churches throughout the country in order to reach out to the children of inmates and their families in Christian love, initially through gifts at Christmas time but also extending throughout the year with the goal of developing relationships with the families of prisoners as well as providing children of prisoners with summer camp scholarships and mentoring relationships.

Collectively, these ministries are serving in \_\_ prisons worldwide, ministering to approximately \_\_ prisoners and their families each year. In the U.S. alone, PF is in \_\_ prisons and ministering to approximately \_\_ prisoners and their families annually through collaboration with about \_\_ churches and other prison ministries.

Therefore, Prison Fellowship—with its vast network of trained volunteers and churches—works both inside and outside of our nation's prisons to help reconcile incarcerated men and women to God, to their families, and to their communities.

Through its Angel Tree program, Prison Fellowship partners with thousands of churches to serve incarcerated parents and their families in the community—restoring broken bonds and protecting prisoners' children from falling prey to the generational cycle of crime. The need and the opportunity to serve an ever-increasing segment of the U. S. population — ex-prisoners, their children, and families — has never been greater.....

# ANGEL TREE – IT STARTED WITH A GIFT

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Angel Tree, the most visible and well-known of Prison Fellowship's programs, was officially birthed in 1982, but the seed for this ministry was actually planted 10 years earlier by a former prisoner. In 1972, Mary Kay Beard was in an Alabama women's prison serving a significant prison sentence for bank robbery. It was during her time in prison that she would turn to the Bible and would subsequently ask Jesus to change her life. It was about this time that she noticed some fellow inmates taking the toiletries given to them by local church groups and wrapping them as gifts for their own children. Beard would later explain how observing prisoners giving away these gifts was influential in her life:

*Most children wouldn't think much of such small gifts, but in prison there was such joy on their faces. It didn't really matter to them what they got; it was from 'Mama'!*

A few years after her release from prison, Beard accepted PF's challenge to oversee the ministry in Alabama, as a Christmas project for prisoners. Beginning on the day after Thanksgiving in 1982, a special 'angel tree' greeted shoppers, comprised of paper angels with the names of local prisoners' children. Shoppers were encouraged to purchase gifts for the children, which were later distributed by Mary Kay Beard and volunteers. Through that first Angel Tree program, 556 children of prisoners received gifts.

Since its launch in 1982, Angel Tree volunteers, churches and other partners have delivered more than 12 million gifts to children with an incarcerated parent. To grasp the magnitude of this achievement, one has to understand that before Angel Tree was launched, children of prisoners were literally not on anyone's radar. The government kept no records and so it was impossible to even know how many children of prisoners there were, let alone the collection of valuable data on this quickly growing population. Scholars had not studied children of prisoners or the enormous obstacles faced by this at-risk group. Practitioners as well as social service providers had simply overlooked them. It was almost as if children of prisoners did not exist.

We now know children of prisoners represent one of the most at-risk groups in America in terms of the likelihood of being incarcerated in the future. This startling realization is reason enough for developing intentional and systematic efforts to reach out to children of prisoners. And yet, no such efforts or plans were developed or even conceived until a simple effort was launched through Prison Fellowship in 1982 to target these children. In less than three decades, Angel Tree has become the impetus for literally hundreds of ministries across the country dedicated to serving children of prisoners. It is a remarkable achievement and a story worth telling and celebrating. However, it is a movement that must continue to grow and to develop in order to more effectively and comprehensively reach a group that, unfortunately, remains largely overlooked.

Each year approximately 250,000 inmates in over 1,500 prisons sign up for their children to receive Christmas gifts, which are delivered by volunteers from approximately 10,000 congregations. Beyond this remarkable achievement, a small but growing number of churches are beginning to consider how their congregation might incorporate prisoners' families into the life of the church, including mentoring programs. For example, Angel Tree churches and other supporting organizations have sponsored on average around 8,000 Angel Tree children for summer camp each of the last several years.



ANGEL TREE<sup>®</sup>



MOST CHILDREN WOULDN'T THINK MUCH OF SUCH SMALL GIFTS, BUT IN PRISON THERE WAS SUCH JOY ON THEIR FACES. IT DIDN'T REALLY MATTER TO THEM WHAT THEY GOT; IT WAS FROM 'MAMA'!



## HOW ANGEL TREE CHRISTMAS WORKS

Many organizations provide gifts to disadvantaged children at Christmas time. But three things set Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree apart to make it much more than a gift-giving program:

1. *The gifts are given on behalf of the parent in prison*—not in the name of Angel Tree or any participating church or individual. Prisoners personally sign up for their children to be included in the program. So the children know these gifts come from Mom or Dad—who loves them and continues to think about them, even though they are in prison and may be far apart.
2. *In most cases, the gifts are delivered to the families in person by volunteers from local churches.* This personal connection opens doors for the church to have an ongoing ministry in the family members' lives—offering them a church home if they don't presently have one; addressing other needs the family may have; continuing to help strengthen bonds with the parent in prison.
3. *Angel Tree emphasizes the greatest Christmas gift of all—the love and grace of Jesus Christ.* Volunteers' direct gift deliveries—through home visits or church-sponsored Christmas parties—open doors to share the love, hope, and salvation of Christ more personally with the children and their caregivers.

The Angel Tree 'cycle' is as follows:

1. In late spring, Angel Tree sends prison chaplains promotional materials and applications so that prisoners can sign up for their children to receive gifts. In some prisons—in communities with a strong volunteer network—Angel Tree works with chaplains to host sign-up events in their facilities. This way volunteers are on hand to help prisoners fill out the forms completely and accurately. Volunteers also have an opportunity to share the love of Christ and pray with the prisoners.<sup>1</sup>
2. Completed applications are returned to Angel Tree by early September. Staff process the forms and assign families to partnering churches located in the same or nearby communities.
3. Volunteers from the church contact the children's caregivers to explain what Angel Tree is all about and get approval to provide gifts on the incarcerated parent's behalf. Caregivers also suggest specific gift ideas.
4. A few weeks before Christmas, participating churches display a Christmas tree decorated with paper angel ornaments (i.e., an Angel Tree). Each paper angel includes the name of a child and a gift wish. Each child will receive two gifts—a "fun" gift—a toy, game, sports equipment, etc.—and an item of clothing.

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<sup>1</sup> See Exhibit 1 for a sample Angel Tree letter to prison chaplains.

5. Church members are encouraged to select one or more names of children, purchase the gift, wrap it for Christmas, and attach the personal note from the incarcerated parent (included on the paper angel).
6. Church volunteers then deliver the gifts to the children—either through home visits or by means of a church-hosted Christmas party. As a gift from the participating church, an age-appropriate Gospel booklet is usually included with the gifts for each child, to explain the true meaning of Christmas.<sup>2</sup>

All this is accomplished by an astonishingly small national Angel Tree team, plus 11 staff who make up the Angel Tree Support Center. These support specialists, spread throughout the U.S., and working out of their homes, are on call daily to help make sure the needs of chaplains, churches, volunteers, and caregivers are promptly and adequately addressed.

### ANGEL TREE AND ITS VOLUNTEERS

From its inception, Angel Tree has been heavily dependent on volunteer efforts to accomplish the intensively logistical process whereby a prisoner is enabled to provide a gift for their child(ren) for Christmas. The two most important volunteer roles that are critical to the successful operation of Angel Tree are: 1) the Church Coordinator; and 2) the Area Coordinator.

### CHURCH COORDINATOR

Every church that registers to participate in Angel Tree has a volunteer within that church designated as the Church Coordinator, who serves as the lead contact person responsible for directing a team of volunteers at their church. In October of each year, the Church Coordinator receives the assigned list of children, along with

caregiver information. The Church Coordinator and their church Angel Tree team then telephones or writes to each child's caregiver to confirm the prisoner's gift suggestions or determine another type of appropriate gift. Church members select tags off of an 'Angel Tree' prepared by the ministry team, each of which indicates a child's name and the particular gift. The Church Coordinator then assures that the gifts are personally delivered to the child before Christmas, ideally by the individuals that purchased the gift, usually associated with the presentation of the gospel and including related materials. Given the demands of this position, Angel Tree remarkably retains 80% of its Church Coordinators from year to year.

### AREA COORDINATOR

The Area Coordinators, many of whom began their involvement with Angel Tree as a Church Coordinator, constitute a critical bridge between Angel Tree staff and the participating churches. Historically, these Area Coordinators worked alongside of PF field staff on everything from recruiting churches to serving as a liaison for church coordinators within a particular locale to coordinating fund-raising events for activities related to Angel Tree. These Area Coordinators have usually been involved with Angel Tree for at least five years, with some involved for as many as 20 years.

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<sup>2</sup> See Exhibit 2 for a more detailed list of activities required to Operate Angel Tree.



## RECONNECTING AND RECONCILING FAMILIES

***FATHER TO THE FATHERLESS,  
DEFENDER OF WIDOWS – THIS IS GOD,  
WHOSE DWELLING IS HOLY. GOD  
PLACES THE LONELY IN FAMILIES; HE  
SETS THE PRISONERS FREE AND GIVES  
THEM JOY...PSALM 68:5-6***

Angel Tree is popularly known as a Christmas gift-giving program to prisoners' children – and there can be no argument that this observation is accurate. However, to assume that this is the central goal and end of the Angel Tree effort would be woefully inaccurate. Angel Tree has always been so much more than presenting gifts – even more than seeking an opportunity to share a message of Christian hope with these children. At its core, Angel Tree is about reconciling families that have been pulled apart by crime and prison. Angel Tree creates opportunities to strengthen bonds that have been frayed, heal bonds that have been broken, and perhaps even restore bonds that have not existed for a long time.<sup>3</sup>

Decades of empirical research confirm what common sense has always suggested, that is, strong and intact families matter in many important and consequential ways, including reducing the likelihood of criminal activity as well as promoting pro-social behavior. Thus, improving family ties can help ex-prisoners to remain crime-free and lead productive lives.

*When I got out of prison 35 years ago, I was immediately welcomed by a loving wife who stood with me throughout Watergate and by Christian brothers who had supported and disciplined me in my new Christian life. Because of this, I was able to adjust to the*

*hurdles of being an ex-con. The tragedy is that over half the prisoners released today end up back in prison because they don't have that kind of support. – Chuck Colson*

At Christmas, Angel Tree gifts are given on behalf of the incarcerated parents who signed up their children. So while local churches graciously and generously provide the gifts, they are presented as being from their Mom or Dad – and often come with a personalized note written by the incarcerated parent. And it is this powerful distinction that can make such a powerful difference.

As Joseph, an inmate in California explains:

*My children mean the world to me, and to be able to receive a gift from beyond these walls would mean so much to my little boys, and a great deal to me. I also know the gift of love is greater than any gift that can be given, a gift to hold onto and cherish. I want my sons to know that no matter where I'm at in this world, my love is always with them.*

A Missouri grandmother, caring for her two grandsons because both of their parents were absent, described how receiving an Angel Tree gift from their incarcerated father was the highlight of Christmas day.

*The children were going through a very hurting time in their little lives. I will never forget that Christmas when all of the gifts were being passed out. I saved the gift from their dad for last. I wish that you could have seen the excitement and joy in their eyes and faces when they*

<sup>3</sup> Several of the accounts are reprinted from PFM's 2007-2008 Annual Report.

*received that gift from dad. They were just five and six years old at that time and had not gotten a gift from mom or dad in two years. That gift took the shine off of everyone else's gifts, even Santa's. Thank you so much.*

From the perspective of a child, Angel Tree can truly be transformative... Rosalie was 14 when her incarcerated dad signed up for her to receive Christmas gifts through Angel Tree. "I appreciated them so much" referring to the family that delivered the gifts to her. "It was the first time in my life that my dad was able to get me something for Christmas." This family would subsequently invite Rosalie to church, where she would become involved in a variety of youth activities. "Eventually God got my heart, and I accepted Jesus – the greatest gift of all!"

David, a single parent incarcerated in Mississippi, writes: "It has been a really tough two years in prison, with five more years to complete. The guilt that weighs on my conscience is almost always overwhelming...and it is especially hard through the holidays." For many prisoners who happen to be parents, guilt is a constant. Inmates worry about their kids being raised in the same disadvantaged communities and perhaps making the same mistakes and also ending up in prison, or worse. Angel Tree is a ministry that seeks to address the guilt these parents experience in prison, but from a spiritual perspective.

An incarcerated parent's absence usually puts an added financial burden on the ones left behind. Without Angel Tree, some children and caregivers would literally have no Christmas

celebration at all. Consider this statement made by an inmate in Arizona named Cicero, "Thank you so much for what you did for my family this past Christmas. They had no food and you fed them. My son was so happy to get presents. He said he and his sisters wouldn't have gotten any presents had it not been for you."

Yes, it starts with a gift, but the goal of Angel Tree goes well beyond the gift itself. More importantly, it provides the opportunity for connection or reconnection between a parent and their child. Angel Tree helps to open relationship

doors that had previously been shut out of hurt and even a sense of betrayal. Prison certainly provides the time for prisoners to consider those they have hurt. Though rarely acknowledged, families of the incarcerated also pay a very high price for the crimes committed by family members. This is, of course, a major part of the complicated problem of families impacted

by incarceration and the intergenerational cycle of incarceration.

Although overly simplistic, it is nonetheless true that most inmates end up in prison because they have made a series of very bad decisions. Among the flaws shared by many prison inmates, is the fact that many have rarely exhibited self-control in their lives. They did not consider the consequences of their actions or how these poor decisions would so dramatically harm their own families. In fact, some observers have argued that families of prisoners should themselves be considered as a separate category of crime victims; those family members who are left in the community to confront the many hardships and realities of having a family member incarcerated.

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**Angel Tree helps give prisoners a way to start over with family members – a chance to say "I'm sorry" and to make amends. Research is helping researchers and practitioners recognize that it is unlikely prisoners can experience authentic rehabilitation without first experiencing a turning point that represents a dramatic shift in the way offenders think and act. Scholars like to call this cognitive restructuring, while people of faith like to call it something different – a spiritual transformation or conversion experience.**

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Consider this comment from a California prisoner named James, “I just wanted to thank you all so very much! Last year my son’s mother wrote me for the first time since I’ve been in prison, which has been about six years. She thanked me for thinking about our son around Christmas. I could not have done it by myself, if it was not for all of you.”

James, a prisoner in Illinois thanked Angel Tree for “being kind enough to send my daughter Christmas gifts every year. You have been truly instrumental in helping me strengthen my relationship with her.”

One of the sad realities is that many inmates are in prison for the second, third, or fourth time. For example, Johnny, a prisoner in California, acknowledges that Angel Tree has supported him through two generations. “I have been in prison most of my adult life. And throughout the years your organization has always been there for my family when I was not able.” Johnny’s oldest daughter now has a child of her own, but for the first four years of the little boy’s life, “my daughter wouldn’t come visit me or allow me to meet my grandson.” Johnny would write Angel Tree staff to see if they might intervene on his behalf and could help him connect with his grandson. “You went the extra mile and expressed to my daughter all I had written in my letter. And last year I was blessed to meet my grandson and was able to spend time with my daughter.” Johnny would subsequently reconnect with his daughter and go to receive regular visits from both his daughter and grandson.



ANGEL TREE<sup>®</sup>



MY CHILDREN MEAN THE WORLD TO ME, AND TO BE ABLE TO RECEIVE A GIFT FROM BEYOND THESE WALLS WOULD MEAN SO MUCH TO MY LITTLE BOYS, AND A GREAT DEAL TO ME. I ALSO KNOW THE GIFT OF LOVE IS GREATER THAN ANY GIFT THAT CAN BE GIVEN, A GIFT TO HOLD ONTO AND CHERISH.



## ANGEL TREE WITHIN PRISON FELLOWSHIP MINISTRIES: GOOD TO GREAT?

Angel Tree is the most visible and well-known of all the PF ministries, and thus serves an important role for the organization's overall sustainability and fundraising efforts. However, it has also demanded a considerable amount of time and effort from PF field staff, particularly between September and December. Overall, Angel Tree comprises an interesting combination of massive logistical efforts and face-to-face relationship-building at multiple levels, from PF staff relationships with prison chaplains, church volunteer relationships with families of the prisoner, and relationships amongst PF staff, Area Coordinators, and Church Coordinators. In fact, many of the logistical demands associated with operating the Angel Tree program are for the very purpose of retaining a personalized approach, allowing for prisoners to select the gifts for their children, and making particular effort to deliver the gifts personally to the family. These personal, relationship-intensive aspects of Angel Tree are indispensable for the program to have the impact it has, not only for the prisoner and their family, but also for the volunteers to get up close and personal in their efforts to serve and minister. As Quinn Law, Area Coordinator for three counties in Pennsylvania, explained:

*Angel Tree does its work on multiple levels. First, Angel Tree is a conduit that helps connect families to one another and to Christ. Second, it connects volunteers to those families in love through service. Third, it connects churches together in serving their community.*

Law has assembled a network of over 40 churches across this three county area that together serve more than 3,000 children of prisoners annually.

### ANGEL TREE IS REORGANIZED

While PF recognized the benefits of Angel Tree, in terms of the work it does and the visibility it

provides, there was also concern over the demands on PF field staff, which had to try to balance their Angel Tree responsibilities with those of the other PF ministries, particularly the in-prison programs. In 2009, the bulk of the Angel Tree responsibilities was removed from the field offices and centralized through PF headquarters in Landsdowne, VA. PF consolidated most of the Angel Tree functions into eleven staff, called Angel Tree Specialists, and each having responsibility for program operations in anywhere from 3-5 states, distributed evenly base caseload. Although these specialists were located throughout the country, they all reported to a small national Angel Tree team, consisting of a National Director, Operations Director, Project Specialist and Relationship Specialist.

While the reorganization into a team of dedicated staff did allow for some program stream-lining and other efficiencies, it also posed new challenges for aspects of the Angel Tree program that benefitted from the local, more personal presence of PF staff, such as recruiting new churches to participate in Angel Tree. Close to 60% of Angel Tree churches responding to an annual survey by PF indicated that they became involved with the program through meeting/speaking with a PF staff member, mostly face-to-face. In this respect, the Angel Tree reorganization raised questions as to how the program was to continue to recruit new churches to participate. As one Angel Tree Specialist explained:

*Recruitment requires face-to-face interaction and relationship-building. In our new role, with responsibility over multiple states, the best we can hope to do is to retain the relationships with the churches we already have.*

A number of Church Coordinators also voiced concern over the multiple state caseload that their designated Specialist was now responsible for, and anticipated a less personal interaction than they would have in comparison to the previous model. This also shifted the responsibility for new church recruitment to the remaining PF field staff and Area Coordinators. As Karen Beauford, Manager for Angel Tree Projects, summarized:

*The Church Coordinator is central to the success of the Angel Tree program, both in terms of the execution of the program to the quality of the experience for the volunteers in that church. What we have learned is the first year experience for the Coordinator is a key determinant for whether that church will become a long-term partner. I think our biggest challenge from the reorganization is for the specialists to find a way to retain and maintain our cadre of about 60 Area Coordinators nationwide, which we need to re-build and fortify in order that Angel Tree can maintain the local, relationship-based flavor essential to our success.*

Some Area Coordinators are concerned with the impact of the reorganization, particularly in terms of the diminished local presence of PF with regards to the Angel Tree program.

As Quinn Law, Area Coordinator in Pennsylvania, explained:

*I think the reorganization is detrimental to the future success of Angel Tree. I began my volunteering with Angel Tree working along-*

*side of PF field staff visiting churches and prisons. Field staff can open some doors and make connections that I can't on my own. I have a three county area that I am responsible for, and I don't even get gas money to cover my travel expenses. I am motivated by Angel Tree and what it can do, but I am concerned that this reorganization translates into less support from PF, and more reliance on volunteers like me, and we're already over-taxed.*

## EXTENDED ANGEL TREE: MOVING BEYOND CHRISTMAS

We know that the Angel Tree Christmas program has an important impact and provides a powerful witness, but it also has significant value in setting the stage for a church's further involvement into prison ministries and/or extending relationships with prisoner's children and family beyond Christmas. While the gift for the child of a prisoner is the specific intent of Angel Tree, it is the opportunity for ongoing relationship with prisoners and their families that is the broader purpose served by the program. Angel Tree Christmas provides churches a rewarding, short-term, low-risk exposure to serving and supporting an oft-forgotten segment of our society.

The means by which Angel Tree 'draws' churches and volunteers into the world of prison-related ministry is further supported by research commissioned by PF about the Angel Tree program. In this research, church coordinators were asked to suggest improvements for Angel Tree, and whether they thought this would be a major or minor improvement to the program. To follow are some of the key suggestions for making major improvements in Angel Tree:

- 60 percent of those surveyed agreed the church should provide an easier way for them to keep in touch with the children's families all year.
- 59 percent of respondents felt it should be made easier to contact the child's caregiver.

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The top two suggested improvements point to a need and a desire to extend and expand relationships' with the families beyond the Christmas event. Furthermore, PF's own annual survey of church coordinators also indicates that close to half of Angel Tree churches want to know more about how they could minister to Angel Tree children year-round. In response, PF has developed information and resources for Angel Tree churches on ways in which they could extend their involvement with Angel Tree children beyond Christmas.

Stephanie Byrd, Area Coordinator for the Fort Worth region in Texas and Angel Tree volunteer since the early 1990s, described how she helped Angel Tree churches in her region to extend their involvement beyond Christmas:

*About four or five years ago, my husband and I became aware, through the Angel Tree staff, of funding camp scholarships as a way to extend our involvement with the Angel Tree kids. We partnered with a local Christian summer camp, who allotted us a week of camp dedicated to Angel Tree kids. The first year we raised enough money to send about 25 kids to camp, through our network of about forty churches in the Fort Worth region, and last year we raised enough for fifty summer camp scholarships. This year we hope to raise \$45,000 in order to send 150 Angel Tree kids.*

For other churches, the Angel Tree experience led them to develop more prison-based ministries. As James Jenkins, Church Coordinator for Bible Way Temple in Washington DC, described:

*Participating in the Angel Tree program opened the door for us to begin ministries in four prisons, as well as a Bible study for female juveniles. Angel Tree made it easy to get started, and from there we could see the needs that we felt led to meet through our church.*

The Shiloh Baptist Church in Alexandria, VA, launched a video visitation ministry to connect prisoners with their families as an outgrowth of their experience with the Angel Tree program.

## ANGEL TREE AND PRISON CHAPLAINS

The same market research report also queried prison chaplain's participating in the Angel Tree program for suggested improvements to the program. The primary area for suggested improvement concerns the communication back to the prisoners regarding whether or not their children received gifts through Angel Tree.

- 52 percent of chaplains surveyed indicated the need for feedback on how many kids were delivered gifts from among the prisoners you work with.

This finding is of particular concern, given the fact that the original vision behind Angel Tree was to minister to the prisoner through the program.

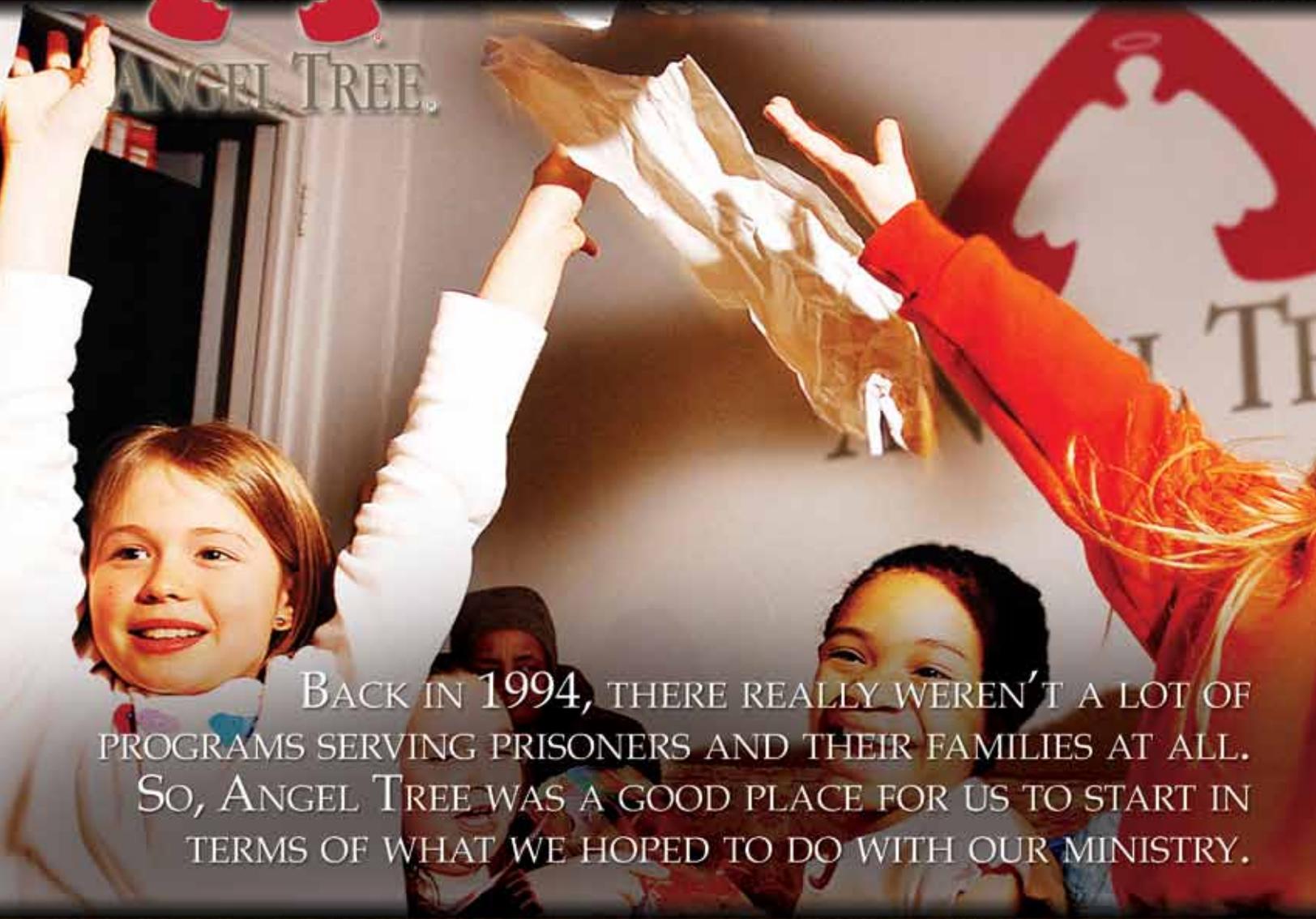
As David Lawson, Senior Vice President for PF, described:

*There is a concern that Angel Tree has drifted somewhat from its original mission of being a form of ministry to the prisoner, and helping to maintain a connection to their family. Angel Tree has come to be seen and known more for what it does, and provides, for the children of the prisoner, often with little knowledge or awareness of the family member behind bars.*

Here is an interesting question to ask any correctional staff member or objective and frequent observer of American prisons: Would you please identify the most important correctional employee responsible for keeping our prisons running smoothly? Almost certainly the most frequent answer would be the Warden. But based on 25 years worth of personal interviews and observations, it would seem that chaplains would run a close second to wardens for being recognized as the most important correctional employee. Chaplains not only minister to inmates, they minister to staff as well as volunteers. As Angel Tree strengthens the communication lines with chaplains (both full-time and volunteer) this should have an important and positive effect on multiple PF programs, and especially Angel Tree.



ANGEL TREE.



BACK IN 1994, THERE REALLY WEREN'T A LOT OF PROGRAMS SERVING PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES AT ALL. SO, ANGEL TREE WAS A GOOD PLACE FOR US TO START IN TERMS OF WHAT WE HOPED TO DO WITH OUR MINISTRY.



## MENTORING CHILDREN OF PRISONERS AND ANGEL TREE

One of the most significant and pertinent developments taking place alongside around the same time Angel Tree was peaking, at least in terms of numbers of children served and the number of participating churches, was the growing visibility of programs. Perhaps the most significant potential for extending and leveraging the Angel Tree program is in the area of mentoring children of prisoners.

In 2003, President Bush announced in the State of the Union Address his plan to roll out a new program aimed at children with incarcerated parents:

*Tonight I ask Congress and the American people to focus the spirit of service and the resources of government on the needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens: boys and girls trying to grow up without guidance and attention, and children who have to go through a prison gate to be hugged by their mom or dad.*

Beginning in 2003, the federal government began investing in mentoring programs that targeted children of prisoners. This investment was buttressed by numerous studies showing the disproportionately high percentage of these children following their incarcerated parent(s) into a life of delinquency and ultimately criminality. It has been estimated that close to 2 million children of prisoners are seven times more likely than their peers to eventually end up in prison. President Bush was describing the need to interrupt the cycle of incarceration by linking these vulnerable young people to mentors. From previous evidence based research the administration knew that vulnerable youth who had a mentor were significantly less likely to have substance abuse issues and more likely to attend school. They believed that we could interrupt the negative cycle of incarceration through the involvement of a caring adult in the life of these children.

At the time the President announced his intentions, there were few programs targeting these vulnerable youth across the nation. Wintley Phipps started a program in the District of Columbia called the US Dream Academy which provided after school program for youth with incarcerated parents. Another and perhaps most notable among the mentoring children of prisoners programs was the Amachi program, originally developed in Philadelphia through a coalition of 42 Pastors and their congregations and the creative partnership of the local chapter of Big Brothers Big Sisters, Public-Private Ventures a non-profit social policy think tank located in Philadelphia), and initially funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

The three most significant challenges for these programs were: 1) Getting access to correctional institutions, including prison chaplains, to identify and communicate with inmates who wanted to have a mentor matched with their child; 2) Connecting with the children and caregivers on the outside open to mentoring services; and 3) A pool of mentors willing and able to commit to at least one hour per week in a one-on-one mentoring relationship with the child for a year.

### ANGEL TREE'S HIDDEN ASSETS

As this was going on, PF was grappling internally over the future strategic direction and purpose of Angel Tree. In terms of scope and numbers, the Angel Tree program peaked around 2004, when 564,000 children of approximately 333,000 prisoners were served through a network of over 13,000 churches and other organizations. In 2009, Angel Tree served over 362,000 children of around 205,000 prisoners, served personally through a network of 7,500 churches and other organizations. Although overall numbers had decreased, there was also an increas-

ing number of Angel Tree churches expanding beyond Christmas, mostly with the support and resources provided by PF, but others simply out of their own desire to expand into other prison-based ministries.

Historically, PF is widely regarded and admired by co-laboring, prison ministry peers, both in their in-prison programs and their work through Angel Tree. However, PF also had a reputation as being somewhat insular in its program development and operations, opting to grow programs in-house more so than through collaborative efforts and partnerships with other organizations doing related work in prisons and communities. Up until around 2006, most of PF's collaborative efforts centered around joint product and materials development, as opposed to joint/collaborative service provision efforts. Beginning in 2007, PF promoted Larry Tucker, who had been with PF since 2003, into a newly-created role as Director of Partnerships, which punctuated PF's decided effort to become more collaborative as a means of pursuing its mission. As David Lawson from Prison Fellowship described:

*Our increasing attention and effort towards more partnering and collaborating marked an important shift from an organizational model, where we would typically build a program internally each time we saw an unmet need within our mission, to more of an association model, where we seek and engage partners and collaborators that share some of our goals and has a particular skill or expertise that we do not.*




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*Tonight I ask Congress and the American people to focus the spirit of service and the resources of government on the needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens: boys and girls trying to grow up without guidance and attention, and children who have to go through a prison gate to be hugged by their mom or dad.*

*- President George W. Bush*

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## COLLABORATION AND ANGEL TREE: THE VALUE PROPOSITION

There was considerable discussion of Angel Tree in this context, especially with regards to what and where the true value of the program lay. For Lawson, it was clear:

*I think Angel Tree is largely an un-tapped resource. While the personal delivery of gifts to the children is obviously its central activity, I think the real assets of the Angel Tree program is the vast network of churches, volunteers, and relationships with families with a parent in jail, and the potential for leveraging that network to impact those children and families beyond what is achieved through Christmas gifts and summer camps.*

Tucker echoed this sentiment:

*There are three main assets that Angel Tree brings to the table. First, Angel Tree has created a network of churches. Second, it has a network of relationships between those churches and the children. Third, it has a network of prison chaplains and other key stakeholders within the correctional community, which in turn provides access to prisoners with children on the outside.*

With these kinds of assets, Angel Tree was a particularly ideal candidate for programs involved with mentoring children of prisoners.

### THE POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION AS VIEWED FROM THE OUTSIDE

The aforementioned potential and value that Angel Tree represented did not go unnoticed to potential

collaborative "suitors," especially among Mentoring Children of Prisoners grantees. In fact, some of these organizations, such as Big Brother/Big Sister Lone Star (BBBSTX), the largest BBBS chapter in the United States serving the Northern Texas region, had been "courting" Angel Tree as far back as 2006. Olivia Eudaly, Executive Vice President – Government Relations for Big Brothers Big Sisters Lone Star and State Executive Director of the Texas Association of Big Brothers Big Sisters/Ama-chi Texas, described her early and persistent efforts to develop a collaboration with PF and her organization:

*Shortly after we received statewide funds to mentor children of prisoners, and as I learned the crucial keys to the success of taking such a program to scale, I knew that we had to find a way to collaborate with them. I had been involved with Angel Tree through my church, so I knew about how the program worked. And I believed in the program's core mission and principles. I finally got a meeting with Arlene [Andersen<sup>4</sup>] and I walked in and said to her 'You need us and we need you, and I'm not leaving here until we work through our respective 'non-negotiables' and figure out how to make this collaboration happen.*

Soon afterwards, Lone Star BBBSTX and PF had signed an MOU, which has now been in place for the past three years.

Other, such as Georgalu Swoboda from BBBSA of Central Missouri connected with Angel Tree via a different path, as she explained:

<sup>4</sup> Former Angel Tree National Director.

*We received our first federal Mentoring Children of Prisoners grant six years ago. We were encouraged to include faith-based organizations in our efforts to recruit mentors by the technical assistance providers funded through the US Department of Health and Human Services. We were initially hesitant over signing an MOU with Prison Fellowship because of their requirement that the mentors be Christian, but once we reviewed our mentor applications we realized that a majority of our mentors were people of faith. We were already meeting the criteria. Many of the families permitted the mentor to take the child to church, so we didn't need to be concerned over issues of promoting religion.*

### **COLLABORATION FROM THE PRISON FELLOWSHIP SIDE**

Potential collaborators were carefully vetted and screened on the PF side, before they would commit to signing an MOU<sup>5</sup>. As Tucker explained:

*We were approached by a number of organizations that were submitting Mentoring Children of Prisoner grants and simply wanted us to furnish a letter of commitment to help make their proposal look better. Once we indicated what was required in order to gain our trust to provide lists of Angel Tree children and Angel Tree churches, a lot of these organizations fell by the wayside. The remaining organizations were carefully reviewed, with an examination of whether PF had any history working with the organization, and their overall reputation and programmatic track record in mentoring, and particularly in mentoring children of prisoners.*

The essence of these MOUs entailed PF providing a listing of Angel Tree churches to the mentoring organization, and a “heads up” letter with both the Angel Tree and mentoring organization’s logo, is sent to those churches subject to

that particular MOU. The mentoring organization then follows up with each Church Coordinator to determine whether their church would like to expand their Christmas Angel Tree program with mentoring some of those same children.

If yes, the mentoring organization then works with the Church Coordinator to contact both the prisoner (via the prison chaplain) and the child’s caregiver for participation in the mentoring program (see Exhibit 3 for a sample letter). Finally, the MOU requires the youth mentoring organization to submit a quarterly report to PF with the following measures:

- The number of Angel Tree children for whom they received permission from the imprisoned parent and the caregiver to match with a mentor;
- The demographics of the children to be matched (i.e., race, gender, age, etc.);
- The number of children ready to be matched with a mentor;
- The number of children successfully matched; and
- The number of Angel Tree churches providing mentors.

### **CALVARY CHAPEL YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAM: THE POTENTIAL OF COLLABORATION**

Kathy Lee, who has been involved with Angel Tree for the past 20 years, serves as the Church Coordinator for Calvary Chapel in Florida. For Lee and her program, the extension of Angel Tree Christmas to youth mentoring was a natural progression, and gave an opportunity for their volunteers to further their relationship with the children and families. Lee and Calvary Chapel were assisted in this extension of

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum of Understanding.

<sup>6</sup> Their program also provides youth mentoring to other children that are not a part of their Angel Tree program.

their program by the Christian Association of Youth Mentoring (CAYM), who was referred to Lee and Calvary Chapel by means of the MOU they signed with PF. Lee was both pleased and impressed with the support and guidance CAYM provided them:

*I had previously gone through training provided by Prison Fellowship on youth mentoring, which was helpful but not sufficient for me to be comfortable moving forwards. There are so many technical and legal issues associated with setting up a youth mentoring program, which required more extensive training and ‘hand holding.’ CAYM helped fill this gap, with an initial two day training, resources and other support, including training of trainers, that helped us move beyond Angel Tree Christmas to a more substantial and sustained ministry and relationship with some of the Angel Tree children.*

Calvary’s youth mentoring program has now been in operation for three years, and currently has 27 active matches involving Angel Tree children <sup>6</sup>, with 7 matched for less than a year; 12 matched for at least one year; and the other 8 matched with a mentor got two or more years. Lee reflected on the road she and her church travelled over the past few years:

*I think Angel Tree runs its Christmas program very efficiently, and in a very organized manner. I also think it was the right move from Prison Fellowship to collaborate with CAYM, who was then able to guide us through all the things you need for this more intensive level of ministry. Angel Tree Christmas was a great low-risk, low-*

*commitment way to draw people into this type of personal, relationship-based ministry. Once they had that initial taste from the Christmas program, they were interested in furthering their commitment. I don’t think we would have been able to successfully launch this mentoring effort without the bridging role Angel Tree served by bringing church volunteers into this level of ministry.*

Calvary Chapel anticipates that they will eventually be able to provide mentoring services to about 10-15% of the 200 children served through their Angel Tree Christmas program. The limitations on the number of children is governed partly by the amount of responsibility Lee already has, partly by the number of mentors she believes they can recruit, and partly by the difficulty getting the caregiver’s to complete the required information and to give permission. Table 1 below provides projections on the potential number of children that could be served through PF/Angel Tree collaborations with youth mentoring organizations and Angel Tree churches.

Based on Table 1, PF could foster anywhere between 9,050 and 13,575 new mentoring relationships for children of prisoners through their collaboration efforts.

Tucker reflected on the collaborative process PF has set in motion, in terms of both its impact and implications for the Angel Tree program specifically and for Prison Fellowship Ministries as a whole:

TABLE 1: ESTIMATES FOR NUMBERS OF ANGEL TREE CHILDREN RECEIVING MENTORING SERVICES

	2010 ESTIMATED TOTALS	ESTIMATED # OF CHURCHES INTERESTED IN YOUTH MENTORING (25%)	IF INTERESTED AT CHURCHES WITH MENTORING PROGRAMS REACHED 10% OF CHILDREN WITH YOUTH MENTORING	IF INTERESTED AT CHURCHES WITH MENTORING PROGRAMS REACHED 15% OF CHILDREN WITH YOUTH MENTORING
# of Angel Tree Churches	7,500	1,875	1,875	1,875
# of Children Prisoners	362,000	90,500	9,050	13,575

The 25% estimate is based on the assumption that slightly more than half of the 48% of all Angel Tree churches that indicated an interest in expanding beyond Angel Tree Christmas would establish a youth mentoring program.

*I think the type of collaborations we have set in motion with Angel Tree, as well as elsewhere among other PF programs, are indicative of an important shift in philosophy, where we understand the greater potential for leveraging the assets and social networks we have, over trying to do it all ourselves. We are finding that careful, well-designed collaborations are a way for us to further our overall mission of fostering prisoners' reconciliation to God, their families, and their community.*

**THE FINAL PHASE OF COLLABORATION: THE “COMMUNITY” PIECE**

While the efforts at establishing MOUs with mentoring children of prisoners providers is an important step for increasing church involvement in prison ministries, it does not cover all of the needs of these families. There is also a community piece, whereby PF also collaborates with community-based ministries whose aim is to ‘embrace’ the entire family in ministry. One program that typifies this community-based component is Mercy Heart Ministries in Fort Worth, Texas.

Mercy Heart Ministries is a ministry developed through the Glenview Baptist Church in Fort Worth, a suburban church of about 4,000 members. Mercy Heart was launched in February of 1995; only two months after Glenview participated in the Angel Tree program for the first time. The mission for Mercy Heart is to work with at-risk families and children of inmates, and, as Mercy Heart executive director Roger Hollar explained, Angel Tree was one of the only programs serving prisoners and their families:

*Back in 1994, there really weren't a lot of programs serving prisoners and their families at all. So, Angel Tree was a good place for us to start in terms of what we hoped to do with our ministry.*

In the first year, Mercy Heart served 75 children through the Angel Tree program. The goal of Mercy Heart was to take those relationships with Angel Tree families, along with other high-risk families, in order to provide year-round ministry and support to these families, primarily through mentoring, support and prayer groups. As Hollar explained, it was slow going during the initial years:



*I thought the clinics were a great fit in terms of PF and Angel Tree, since I knew they were looking for ways to extend churches' relationship with the families beyond Christmas. We are now at the point where we have a manual to go with the training on the Mercy Heart model, and Angel Tree is a great starting point for churches seeking to extend their ministry year round.*

*Initially, we only got about 4 of the 35 Angel Tree families to participate in our weekly ministry program. We knew that we needed a more welcoming, less intimidating setting than our large church, so we formed a partnership with a Four Square Gospel church located in the community where many of the families lived. We*

*kept making phone calls and sending letters telling people about what we're about, and slowly but surely the number of families participating in the ministry began to grow.*

Hollar and Glenview Church, along with Mercy Heart use their Angel Tree Christmas party as an opportunity to introduce their ministry, in an effort to reach more families. By 2008, the Angel Tree program itself grew to about 300 children. Hollar was encouraged to introduce and extend the Mercy Heart ministry model to other churches, and received funds from the Southern Baptists of Texas denomination to do so. Hollar conducted about 15-20 awareness clinics throughout Texas and beyond (from 2006-2008), providing churches with a step-by-step process for establishing their own Mercy Heart program.

In addition, Hollar also got the attention of the Dallas Prison Fellowship staff, which also saw the program as very similar to PF's goals for helping prisoners and their families. The local PF office provided Hollar with a listing of Angel Tree churches and families throughout the state, which Hollar then added to his invite list for Mercy Heart clinics he was holding in particular cities. The families' lists were used to explain the need to churches attending. As Hollar explained:

*I thought the clinics were a great fit in terms of PF and Angel Tree, since I knew they were looking for ways to extend churches' relationship with the families beyond Christmas. We are now at the point where we have a manual to go with the training on the Mercy Heart model, and Angel Tree is a great starting point for churches seeking to extend their ministry year round.*

Unfortunately, when PF consolidated its Angel Tree staff in Virginia in 2008, Hollar was no longer able to access the list of Angel Tree churches. He has not been successful in negotiating an MOU with PF to make his clinic and training available to Angel Tree churches. Nor has he been successful in being able to negotiate a plan to help non-Angel Tree churches involved with families without their waiting months to actually participate in Angel Tree.

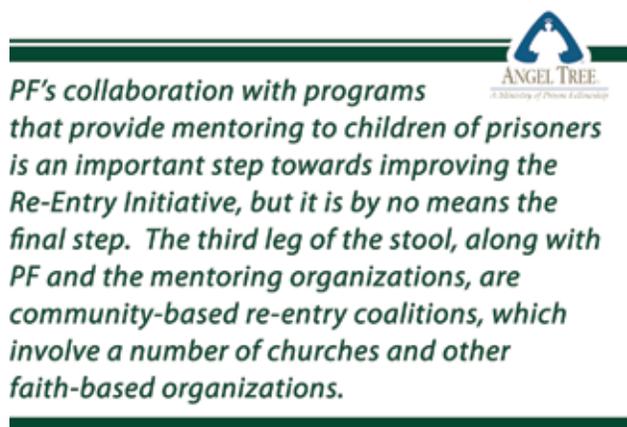
As Kelley Purselley, former PF regional staff person and now also involved in community-based ministry to families of the incarcerated in the Dallas-Fort Worth region, explains:

*PF's collaboration with programs that provide mentoring to children of prisoners is an important step towards improving the Re-Entry Initiative, but it is by no means the final step. The third leg of the stool, along with PF and the mentoring organizations, are community-based re-entry coalitions, which involve a number of*

*churches and other faith-based organizations. While mentoring programs can help with the children of prisoners, they can't offer any support to the mother, and for the family as a whole that is struggling to hold everything together while the father is in prison. PF needs to share its lists of Angel Tree children with these coalitions, whose aim is to wrap themselves in ministry around the whole family and keep it strong. Currently, PF is only sharing list of Angel Tree churches, but the problem is most Angel Tree churches are not interested in year-round or re-entry ministry and consequently many families go un-served. Therefore, those community organizations committed to serving the inmate and their families are unable to develop a comprehensive coordinated effort to minister to inmates and their families, and a healthy and strong family has been found to be the critical factor for the successful return of the father to the community, so he doesn't return to prison.*

Purselley's comments reflect both the opportunities and challenges

that Prison Fellowship is attempting to address as it develops and continues to reshape a strategy for continuing to grow Angel Tree well into the next century. All indications are that these plans will feature creative and aggressive strategies whereby Prison Fellowship both embraces and executes MOUs with wide-ranging mentoring and community-based programs. In this way, Angel Tree will be a catalytic force for mobilizing unprecedented growth in a ministry that remains well-positioned to be a much needed national leader. Indeed, who better to spearhead a movement that takes seriously a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to partnerships whereby prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families are served?





ANGEL TREE<sup>®</sup>

ANGEL TREE<sup>®</sup>

ANGEL TREE IS A REMINDER THAT IMPORTANT GRASS-ROOTS MOVEMENTS ARE STILL POSSIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY. IN LESS THAN THREE DECADES, ANGEL TREE HAS BECOME THE IMPETUS FOR LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF MINISTRIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY DEDICATED TO SERVING CHILDREN OF PRISONERS.

## CONCLUSION

In his award-winning book, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark, one of the world's leading sociologists, poses this penetrating question – “How did a tiny obscure messianic movement from the edge of the Roman Empire dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization?” Stark's brilliant book is dedicated to answering this one question and is must reading for anyone interested in the spectacular growth of Christianity. Simply stated, Stark contends the early Church encouraged behaviors that would cause their numbers to swell in unprecedented ways. This small obscure group of leaders advocated looking after orphans and widows, encouraged marital fidelity, and taught followers to be other-minded and, as a result, not to overlook or neglect the very least among them.

It is not hyperbole to suggest that the Angel Tree story is a contemporary example of what Stark discovered when documenting the history of the early church. Angel Tree volunteers, churches and other partners have delivered more than 12 million gifts to children with an incarcerated parent. Angel Tree has made prominent a viable intervention for a problem no other group or agency had previously even acknowledged, much less targeted. Thanks to Angel Tree, practitioners, social service providers, scholars, and decision-makers can no longer overlook children of prisoners and the importance of restoring families impacted by incarceration.

Angel Tree is a reminder that important grass-roots movements are still possible in contemporary society. In less than three decades, Angel Tree has become the impetus for literally hundreds of ministries across the country dedicated to serving children of prisoners. It is true that Angel Tree has had a remarkable impact in a very short period of time. It is also true, however, that the need for Angel Tree ministry is more pressing now than ever. This year and for the foreseeable future, some 700,000 prisoners will be leaving prison and returning to communities and their families across the country. In order to meet the daunting needs our society faces, the Angel Tree movement must continue to grow and to develop in order to more effectively and comprehensively reach the children of prisoners and their families.

## EXHIBIT 1: THE PRISON CHAPLAIN LETTER



44180 Riverside Parkway  
Lansdowne, VA 20176  
1.800.55.ANGEL  
[www.angeltree.org](http://www.angeltree.org)

Dear Chaplain,

Thank you for participating in the Angel Tree® program. We realize that you have many program opportunities to consider, and we appreciate your support as it is foundational to Angel Tree's success.

Our desire is to touch the life of every prisoner's child at Christmastime and beyond through year-round ministry. At times we are unable to achieve this goal because the local volunteers cannot reach the family with the information that the inmate has provided, the listed caregiver does not respond, the Participation Form is not signed, or in some cases volunteers are not available in a particular area.

***As you distribute your applications, please encourage the prisoners in your facility to provide as much contact information as possible.*** A current and complete address and phone number are essential to assigning the children and assisting the volunteers in locating the children. A new resource that we are offering is the In-Prison Sign-Up Kit for Angel Tree Christmas. This kit can help you streamline your sign-up process through volunteer leadership near your facility. Call 1-800-55-ANGEL to find out how to get connected, or read more about this resource at [www.angeltree.org/angeltree-resources/resources-for-chaplains](http://www.angeltree.org/angeltree-resources/resources-for-chaplains).

Our eligibility guidelines require that only children who are natural, adopted, or legal stepchildren of prisoners may participate. Each year we receive applications from aunts, uncles, grandparents, and family friends requesting gifts for children. While every child enjoys receiving gifts, our mission is clearly directed toward serving children of prisoners. Additionally, we have revised the gift guide included in your resource kit. This year, the prisoner will select the toy option for his or her child, and the caregiver will select the clothing item. This change will continue to provide an opportunity for the prisoner parent to participate in the gift selection for his or her child, which is a significant part of the relationship-building process. At the same time, the caregiver will be able to suggest a clothing item that is appropriate and correctly sized for the child.

All Participation Forms must be postmarked by September 1 and shipped to our processing center by that date. Please use the enclosed UPS envelopes to return your Participation Forms and arrange for a UPS pickup prior to this date. We strongly recommend that you submit original forms as copies of the participation form may become illegible during the transmission process. Please send your forms early!

As always, we appreciate your work in behalf of the inmates in your facility. If you have questions, please refer to the Quickstart Guide or call 1-800-55-ANGEL for assistance.

Blessings,

The Angel Tree Team



Angel tree® is a registered trademark of Prison Fellowship Ministries.

## EXHIBIT 2: WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO MAKE ANGEL TREE HAPPEN

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### *Beginning in January:*

- Re-register churches for the new year;
- Review church surveys to evaluate results, difficulties, suggestions for improvement;
- Create and implement a plan to make people across the U.S. aware of Angel Tree’s ministry—and seek their participation;
- Recruit new churches;
- Follow up with participating chaplains to recommit for the new year;
- Recruit additional prison chaplains to let their prisoners participate;
- Recruit and train volunteer area coordinators—to help support the churches;
- Work with other organizations to provide Gospel materials;
- Order and send out program materials to churches (about 10,000 church coordinator kits);
- Order and send out applications and other materials to chaplains;
- Plan in-prison sign-up events for prisoners;
- Provide volunteer training for sign-up events;
- Send out periodic mailings and e-mails to churches and chaplains;
- Make sure all applications are returned by September 1st;
- Process more than 200,000 prisoner applications (and enter all the information in Angel Tree data base)
- Assign hundreds of thousands of Angel Tree children to participating churches in their communities;
- Promote “Share the Gift” for children who can’t be assigned;
- Deliver the appropriate applications to thousands of Angel Tree churches;
- Troubleshoot any problems encountered by churches, chaplains, or volunteer coordinators;
- Send out thank-you’s to all participants;

### *Ending in December*

## EXHIBIT 3: SAMPLE YOUTH MENTORING INVITATION LETTER

Last Christmas, through the Angel Tree program, Calvary Chapel delivered gifts to your children on behalf of their incarcerated parent. At that time, you may have heard about our Youth Mentoring program.

**If you are looking for new ways to help your child succeed, have you thought about mentoring?**

Here is some information about mentoring as well as some testimonies from parents whose children are currently being mentored.

**What is mentoring?** Mentoring is when an adult comes alongside a young person and offers friendship, support, and a positive influence. A mentor is a friend, coach, and an additional caring adult.

“My son has become a better person and son because of his mentor’s influence.”

**What do we do?** Calvary Chapel’s Youth Mentoring program offers one-on-one mentoring for children ages 8-16 who have a parent or guardian incarcerated. Friendships are developed with youth who would benefit from an additional role model.

“My daughter’s mentor has influenced my child in ways only someone who really cares for her could do.”

**What are the benefits of mentoring?** Mentoring benefits both children and families. Children may benefit by having an additional adult who can spend time with them, taking part in activities, playing games, sports or going on outings. Many children benefit from an additional adult who can help teach them learn life skills and encourage them in school. Mentors can also provide an objective ear and support.

Research shows that mentored youth are more likely to improve in school, avoid using illegal drugs, have increased confidence, and have better relationships with their parents and peers.

“My son has made the honor roll two times this year and opens up to me and his peers more since he’s had a mentor.”

Mentoring:

- Is a great experience for your child
- Requires very little work from you
- Gives you, the caregiver, a well-deserved break!
- Is free!

**Who are our mentors?** All children who participate in the program are matched with a caring Christian adult who enjoys spending time with young people. The mentor has been trained, screened, and gone through a background check.

**How do you enroll your child?** If your child is between the ages of 8-16 and has a parent or primary guardian that is in state or federal prison, your child can be part of this program.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**Byron R. Johnson**, is Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University, and Director of the Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR) as well as Director of its Program on Prosocial Behavior, both at Baylor. He is a Senior Fellow at the Witherspoon Institute (Princeton), Senior Research Scholar at the Institute for Jewish and Community Research (San Francisco), and chief advisor for the Center for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society, Peking University (Beijing). He is also a senior fellow at the Sagamore Institute for Policy Research.

Professor Johnson has directed research centers at Vanderbilt University and the University of Pennsylvania, and is currently completing a series of studies for the Department of Justice on the role of religion in prosocial youth behavior. He is recognized as a leading authority on the scientific study of religion, the efficacy of faith-based organizations, domestic violence, and criminal justice. Recent publications have examined the impact of faith-based programs on recidivism reduction and prisoner reentry. Along with other ISR colleagues he is completing a series of empirical studies on the religious landscape of China. His most recent project is directing a major grant (Merit Beyond the Badges: Eagle Scouts in Later Life) to complete a number of empirical studies looking at the long-term benefits of participation in Boy Scouts.

Professor Johnson is currently collaborating with the Gallup Organization on a series of studies addressing religion and spirituality in the United States as well as internationally. His research has been used in consultation with the Department of Justice, Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and the National Institutes of Health. He is author of the forthcoming book, *More God, Less Crime: How Religion and Faith-Based Approaches Reduce Crime and Foster Hope* (Templeton, 2011).

**William Wubbenhorst** is Research Fellow at Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion and Program on Prosocial Behavior. He serves as a project manager for the Faith Service Forum and is the lead subject matter expert within ICF Macro, ICF International company, in the area of faith-based and community initiatives and the establishment partnerships with government at the local, state and federal level.

Mr. Wubbenhorst is currently working as FBCO liaison for a Pathways out of Poverty project funded through the US Department of Labor. Previously, he served as project director for training and technical assistance for the US Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) for Promoting Responsible Fatherhood.

Prior to that, Mr. Wubbenhorst worked on behalf of the US Department of Labor (DOL) and the Corporation for National and Community Service's Americorps\*VISTA program on projects related to those agencies' faith-based and community initiatives. Additionally, Mr. Wubbenhorst worked for 8 years in Massachusetts state government.

He has published a number of articles pertaining to Charitable Choice and the Faith-Based/Community Initiative and served as an independent research consultant for the Center for Public Justice, conducting research on Charitable Choice and other related faith-based initiatives.



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