RELIGIOUS PROGRAMS AND RECIDIVISM AMONG FORMER INMATES IN PRISON FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS: A LONG-TERM FOLLOW-UP STUDY*

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In the mid-1990s, Prison Fellowship (PF), a nonprofit religious ministry to prisoners, commissioned a study to determine the relationship, if any, between religious programming and recidivism. Subsequent research found no difference between PF and non-PF inmates on measures of recidivism. Inmates most active in PF Bible studies, however, were significantly less likely to be arrested during a 1-year follow-up period. This study extends and improves on previous research by: (1) increasing the recidivism window from 1 to 8 years; (2) incorporating new approaches to measuring program participation; (3) including two measures of recidivism—rearrest and reincarceration; and (4) using survival analysis and proportional hazards modeling to present and analyze the data. Results from survival analyses indicate: (1) no difference in median time to rearrest or reincarceration between PF and non-PF groups throughout the 8-year study period; (2) participants with higher levels of participation in Bible studies were less likely to be rearrested at 2 and 3 years after release, though the effect diminishes over time; (3) statistical differences across groups only border significance at 2 and 3 years for reincarceration; and (4) proportional hazards modeling shows that high participation in Bible studies significantly reduces the hazard of rearrest at years 2 and 3.

The evolution of the American correctional system has been accompanied by a constant influence of religion and religious workers. Terms like corrections, penitentiary, reformation, restoration, and solitary confinement themselves have religious

origins. Even contemporary topics like restorative justice have their roots in religiously oriented points of view (Umbreit, 1985). The influence of religion, however, is by no means uniform or predictable, as very different perspectives on issues like punishment or treatment have been both supported and opposed on religious grounds.

One indisputable factor is the pervasiveness of religious programming within prisons. Male or female, minimum or maximum security, prisons of all shapes and sizes are visited by many thousands of volunteers each year. Indeed, beyond work, education, or vocational training, religious activities attract more participants than any other personal enhancement program offered inside a prison.[1] As pervasive as religious programming in American prisons may be, published research in refereed journals on the relationship between religious interventions and recidivism is anything but common.

THE CRIME AND RELIGION LITERATURE

In recent years an emerging body of research examining the role of religion has begun to appear in crime and delinquency journals. It may be instructive, however, to distinguish between two different though not necessarily mutually exclusive kinds of research: (1) organic religion, research examining the influence or impact of religion on an array of social and behavioral outcomes; and (2) intentional or programmatic religion, research assessing the effectiveness of faith-based organizations or interventions.[2]

Organic Religion

Research examining the relationship between religion and crime, for example, tends to compare people of similar socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds while controlling for the influence of religion. Religion or religiosity can be quantified any number of ways, though most researchers tend to examine the

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[1] The Bureau of Justice Statistics published data based on face-to-face interviews with 13,986 inmates in 1991. Similar surveys were conducted in 1974, 1979, and 1986.

[2] A third category of research not discussed here, "ecological religion" refers to the impact religion might have on people who may not be religious at all, are unlikely to attend religious services, or participate in religious activities, but are still exposed to the possible influence of religion. For many urban youths in disadvantaged communities, a high percentage of the prosocial institutions they encounter, or receive various kinds of support from, may well be religious institutions. Even without any formal religion in their lives, such youths may still be exposed to and thus the beneficiaries of religious influences. Because there are so few studies that tap "ecological religion" the current paper focuses on either organic or intentional/programmatic religion.

degree of religious commitment of the subjects. Most often measured by the frequency of attendance at religious services or participation in religious practices, religiosity is also measured by self-reports. Most research in published literature thus tends to examine the degree of religious commitment and seeks to understand how, if at all, this is related to outcomes such as crime or delinquency.

The term organic religion provides a conceptual way to think about research that examines the relationship between measures of religiosity (e.g., attendance, activities, and other commitments) and measures of deviance (e.g., delinquency, drug use, or violent crime). It represents the influence of religion practiced over time, such as being raised and nurtured in a religious home. Religious activities, involvements, practices, and beliefs, therefore, tend to be very much a part of everyday life. Although organic religion is still understudied, empirical research on it and its impact on various outcome factors has yielded an impressive and mounting body of scientific evidence, including a developing literature within criminology. The role of religion in reducing or preventing crime and delinquency has been debated for many years, yet until recently there was no consensus on the nature of this relationship. Bolstered by several literature reviews and a steady stream of important delinquency studies, consistent and growing evidence makes it increasingly obvious that religious commitment and involvement help protect youth from delinquent behavior and deviant activities (Johnson, Li, Larson, & McCullough, 2000; Baier, & Wright, 2001) and may lower both minor and serious forms of criminal behavior (Evans, Cullen, Burton, Dunaway, Payne, & Kethineni, 1996). Recent research suggests that such effects may persist even in communities typified by decay and disorganization (Johnson, Larson, Li, & Jang, 2000). There is also preliminary evidence that religious involvement may have a cumulative effect throughout adolescence and thus may significantly lower the likelihood of a deleterious trajectory (Jang, & Johnson, 2001). Additionally, there is growing support that religion may be a useful tool in helping to prevent high-risk urban youth from engaging in delinquent behavior (Johnson, Larson, Jang, & Li, 2000, 2001).

Research on adult samples is less common, but tends to show the same general pattern of religion reducing adult criminal activity. Evans, Cullen, Dunaway, and Burton (1995) found that religion, as indicated by religious activities, reduced the likelihood of a broad range of criminal acts. The relationship persisted even after secular controls were added to the model. Further, the finding

did not depend on social or religious contexts (Evans et al., 1995). Several studies have also confirmed an inverse relationship between regular religious attendance and reports of domestic abuse among both men and women (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999). Systematic reviews of social science research also confirm that measures of organic religion (e.g., religious commitment or involvement in religious practices) tend to be associated with reductions not only in deleterious outcomes like delinquency among youth and adolescent populations, but also in criminality in adult populations.[3] At the same time, there is a similar body of research consistently finding that religious commitment is a source for promoting or enhancing prosocial or beneficial outcomes such as well-being (Willits, & Crider, 1988; Tix, & Frazier, 1997; Graney, 1975; Blazer, & Palmore, 1976; Markides, 1983; Musick, 1996), meaning and purpose (Sethi, & Seligman, 1993), self-esteem (Ellison, & George, 1994; Bradley, 1995; Koenig et al., 1999), and educational attainment (Regnerus, 2000, 2001).

Intentional or Programmatic Religion

Another important dimension of religion, however, has been relatively neglected by researchers, especially quantitative researchers. What I will call "intentional" or "programmatic" religion is perhaps best understood as an intentional religious intervention designed to address some problem area. In relationship to crime and delinquency, certain religious or spiritual interventions come to mind: faith-based drug treatment, conversion-based offender rehabilitation programs, spiritual restorative justice programs, and church-based gang intervention strategies.

A participant in a faith-based drug treatment program and who subsequently experiences a spiritual conversion or "turning point" in the life course could be said to be the recipient of intentional or programmatic religion. Many former drug addicts have indicated the centrality of their faith to getting and staying off drugs. In an intentional way, therefore, religion is introduced to meet a particular need at a particular time in a person's life. Studies of the effect of intentional religion, however, have been far less common than those examining the effect of organic religion. This oversight is particularly regrettable as the role of programmatic religion and its public policy implications are now being debated at local, state, and federal levels.

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[3] For additional information on research reviews, see, for example, Baier and Wright (2001) and Johnson, Spencer, Larson, and McCullough (2000).

While there is a growing body of evidence linking higher levels of religious participation and involvement (organic religion) to reductions in various harmful outcomes, there is very little research evaluating the effectiveness of faith-based interventions in reducing crime and delinquency or in rehabilitating offenders (intentional religion). What minimal research has been completed, however, reveals that faith-based organizations (FBOs) may have certain advantages over their secular counterparts that may lead to more effective interventions (Johnson, Thompkins, & Webb, 2002). Preliminary evaluations of faith-based programs in prisons have been linked to reductions in recidivism (Young, Gartner, O'Connor, Larson, & Wright, 1995; Johnson, Larson, & Pitts, 1997; Johnson, 2002; Trusty, & Eisenberg, 2003; Johnson, & Larson, 2003). Recent evaluation research has found that faith-based programs may be especially beneficial in aftercare settings (O'Connor, 2001; Trusty, & Eisenberg, 2003; Johnson, 2003). Finally, at least one study has found that drug treatment based on an overtly religious modality is associated with reductions in relapse (Bicknese, 1999). There are, of course, many anecdotal accounts of religious, nonsecular, and highly organized spiritual interventions that have claimed success, but published research on the subject is sparse.

Can Organic and Intentional/Programmatic Religion Overlap?

There is no question that organic religion and intentional religion are related to each other. Clearly, many people attend religious services regularly and may claim to be highly religious (organic religion), but have never had an epiphany—a spiritual awakening or profound spiritual experience in response to some need or crisis (intentional religion). On the other hand, many who do not have a religious background or upbringing (organic religion) may either become "born again" or experience some other kind of spiritual transformation that enables them to effectively cope or make some major life course change (intentional religion). Another situation involves the person raised in a religious home who attends church regularly (organic religion) until a teenager, then quits attending or even rejects the faith, then later in life undergoes a spiritual transformation (intentional religion) and returns to the discarded religious roots (organic religion).

Some faith-based organizations (e.g., Teen Challenge or Prison Fellowship) operate under the premise that drug addicts or prisoners are first and foremost in need of a spiritual transformation and are structured accordingly. This paper contends that Prison Fellowship's outreach efforts to inmates

through faith-based seminars and Bible studies represents intentional rather than organic religion, specifically designed to rehabilitate prisoners through a spiritual intervention.

Programmatic Religion and Recidivism:
Research on Prison Fellowship

One of the country's most prominent FBOs is Prison Fellowship (PF), a nonprofit religious ministry to prisoners, ex-prisoners, crime victims, and their families. Founded in 1976 by Charles Colson, this volunteer-driven organization is the largest prison ministry in the United States, with more than 50,000 trained volunteers providing various kinds of intentional religious programming such as Bible studies and seminars. Unlike most FBOs, PF interventions have been the subject of a number of empirical studies and evaluations.[4]

In the mid-1990s, a group of researchers obtained PF permission to conduct a study to determine whether the various types of religious programs offered by this ministry changed the behaviors of inmates both before and after release from prison. Johnson, Larson, and Pitts (1997) examined the impact of religious programs on institutional adjustment and recidivism in two matched groups of inmates from four adult male prisons in the state of New York. One group had participated in religious programs sponsored by Prison Fellowship. The second had not. Johnson and associates found that there was no difference between them on institutional adjustment (as measured by institutional infractions), or recidivism (as measured by arrests during a 1-year follow-up period). However, after controlling for level of involvement in PF-sponsored programs, inmates who were most active in Bible studies were significantly less likely to be arrested (14% versus 41%) during the 1-year follow-up period. The major limitation of this study was that the 1-year follow-up period was not optimal for determining the influence of religious programs on recidivism over time (Johnson et al., 1997, p. 162).

Melvina Sumter (2000) studied 321 prisoners from 12 states and found that "inmates who report high levels of participation in religious programs and report high levels of belief in the supernatural are less likely to be arrested after release regardless of whether they are classified as being 'religious' or 'nonreligious.'" In a related study, Clear and Sumter (2002) found that higher levels of inmate religiousness were associated with better

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[4] For a review of the published research on Prison Fellowship, see Johnson (2002).

psychological adjustment to the prison environment and fewer self-reported disciplinary confinements.

Programmatic Religion and Recidivism:
A Long-Term Follow-Up Study

In this research, I use a quasi-experimental design[5] to extend the study of Prison Fellowship programs by performing survival analysis. This prospect was not possible in the original 1-year follow-up study due to the small number of rearrested offenders in the high participation category and the observation that those few persons happened to be rearrested almost immediately after release. The current study expands and improves on the previous study in that: (1) the recidivism window extends from 1 to 8 years, (2) new approaches to operationalizing program partici-pation are incorporated, (3) two measures of recidivism are used—rearrest and reincarceration, and (4) survival curves and proportional hazards modeling are used to analyze the data.

METHODOLOGY

The Sample

The sample was drawn from four prisons in the state of New York[6] because data on PF program participation in 1992 were superior in these particular prisons compared with other New York State prisons offering PF programs. The original data collection represented PF's first attempt at gathering useful and accurate data on program participation. The rationale for selecting these prisons was obviously driven by mechanistic factors given the technical difficulties often associated with implementing and sustaining data collection protocol. The sample, therefore, was not random, nor was it representative of inmates in general or of New York State inmates in particular.

Prison Fellowship participation data pertained to 201 male inmates from the four prisons who had participated in at least one of three PF activities: Bible studies, in-prison seminars, or life-plan

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[5] A more desirable approach would have been to randomly assign prisoners into the overtly Christian intervention (in this case Bible study). However, this would only be feasible if one had enough volunteers for the religious intervention. In the current study, there were too few voluntary participants (n = 201) to consider the possibility of random assignment. Studies with experimental designs and random assignment are not inexpensive and, unfortunately, it seems unlikely we will see such studies unless federal agencies begin to target and fund research on intentional or programmatic religion.

[6] Three were medium-security—Arthur Kill, Bare Hill, and Franklin—and one (Elmira) was maximum-security.

seminars. Inmates could have participated in all three of these programs, or several times in only one religious activity. Thus, varying degrees of PF program participation were possible and, as expected, observed in the data.

The New York Department of Corrections and the Division of Research and Planning once again provided data on criminal history and recidivism for the entire cohort of inmates released from the New York State prison system—almost 40,000 between January 1, 1992 and April 30, 1993. In the current study, the PF and non-PF groups were tracked far beyond the original 1-year recidivism window in the first study, as the New York Department of Corrections and the Division of Research and Planning provided criminal history and recidivism data for the same cohort of inmates through December 31, 2001. The current study, therefore, allows for an examination of a recidivism window covering 8 years postrelease.

The Matched Comparison Group

As described in the original study (Johnson et al., 1997, p. 150), a matched group of inmates was selected by first excluding all known PF program participants from the released cohort of approximately 40,000 inmates. On the basis of a multivariate matched sampling method, seven variables most strongly predicted members of the PF groups: age, race, religious denomination, county of residence, military discharge, minimum sentence, and initial security classification.[7] The 201 former inmates most closely matching PF inmates on these seven variables were selected for the non-PF matched group. Stated differently, each member of the PF group was assigned a non-PF match. Table 1 displays descriptive data for the PF and non-PF groups. As described in the previous study, "the two groups match closely on study variables such as denomination (8% Muslim, 41% Protestant, 39% Catholic), marital status (28% and 26% married, respectively), age (32 years), education (10th grade), and race (47% black, 12% white, 40% Hispanic), [though] Hispanics and Catholics represent a higher proportion of both samples than one might expect given their national distributions" (p. 150). The remaining variables, military service/discharge status (89% never served, 9–10% dishonorably discharged), average minimum sentence (2.3 years),

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[7] An additional eight variables were used in the multivariate matched sampling method, but ultimately were dropped because they were not predictive for those PF inmates who made up the study group. The variables were: offense type, drug used in crime, education, most serious prior record, second felony offense, alcohol use, marital status, and maximum sentence.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Selected Study Variables

Variable[a]	All Inmates	PF Inmates	Non-PF Inmates
Religious Affiliation			
Catholic	39.3% (n = 158)	39.3% (n = 79)	39.3% (n = 79)
Protestant	41.5% (n = 167)	41.3% (n = 83)	41.8% (n = 84)
Muslim	8.2% (n = 33)	8.5% (n = 17)	8.0% (n = 16)
Other	10.9% (n = 44)	10.9% (n = 22)	10.9% (n = 22)
Married	27.1% (n = 109)	27.9 (n = 56)	26.4 (n = 53)
Military Discharge	88.6% (n = 356)	88.6% (n = 178)	88.6% (n = 178)
Never Served	9.7% (n = 39)	9.4% (n = 19)	9.9% (n = 20)
Dishonorable Honor/General	1.7% (n = 7)	2.0% (n = 4)	1.5% (n = 3)
Race			
Black	47.3% (n = 190)	47.3% (n = 95)	47.3% (n = 95)
White	12.4% (n = 50)	12.4% (n = 25)	12.4% (n = 25)
Hispanic	39.8% (n = 160)	39.8% (n = 80)	39.8% (n = 80)
Age at Release			
Mean	31.9	32.0	31.8
SD	7.3	7.2	7.5
Range	18–61	18–61	18–57
Minimum Sentence			
Mean	2.3	2.3	2.2
SD	1.6	1.7	1.5
Range	1–15	1–15	1–12
Initial Security Classification[b]			
Mean	6.1	6.1	6.1
SD	2.3	2.4	2.3
Range	1–10	1–10	1–10
Years of Education			
Mean	9.9	9.8	10.1
SD	2.1	2.3	2.0
Range	0–17	0–17	1–14
Age at First Arrest			
Mean	21.4	21.6	21.2
SD	5.7	6.1	5.3
Range	15–48	15–48	15–42
# of Prior Felony Arrests			
Mean	4.1	4.1	4.1
SD	3.2	3.1	3.3
Range	0–20	0–16	0–16
# of Prior Misdemeanor Arrests			
Mean	2.7	2.6	2.7
SD	5.1	4.6	5.6
Range	0–58	0–49	0–49
# of Prior Felony Convictions			
Mean	1.7	1.7	1.7
SD	1.2	1.2	1.1
Range	0–8	0–8	0–5
# of Prior Misdemeanor Convictions			
Mean	2.8	2.8	2.9
SD	5.5	4.9	5.7
Range	0–64	0–51	0–51

[a] Although cases were matched by county, county is not shown in the table.
[b] Security classification ranges from 1 (Maximum-A) to 3 (Medium-1) to 10 (Minimum-Historical)

and initial security classification (Level 6, medium-security), also matched closely.

Religious Program Measures

In-Prison Seminars (IPS), according to Clower (1991), were originally intended to "disciple Christian inmates in their walk with Christ so that they, in turn, could have an impact on other inmates in the name of Christ." Put differently, the goal was to help turn immature Christians into mature Christians. Over the last decade, however, the focus of the 3-day IPS has been "outreach oriented." In this way, the IPS can be seen as a tool to essentially introduce the unchurched inmate to the Christian faith and then to provide the necessary teaching to help the inmate develop more mature religious commitment.

Life-Plan Seminars (LPS) were implemented to meet the needs of prisoners soon to leave prison and designed to help inmates develop realistic plans for their lives and thus support successful reentry. The objectives therefore differ from the "spiritual growth" emphasis found in the more established PF Bible studies and IPS programs. The seminars are taught by PF-trained LPS instructors, last 2 or 3 days, and seek to establish a mentoring relationship between the inmate and instructor during the 6 to 12 months prior to release.

Interestingly, prisoners only rarely availed themselves of the opportunity, however, with only 37 inmates attending a LPS, and each attending just one time. Multiple analyses confirmed that there was no relationship between this particular religious intervention and the outcomes of interest in this study. The decision was therefore made to drop Life Plan Seminars from the final set of analyses.

Bible Studies were originally intended, Clower (1991) explains, to provide inmates an ongoing opportunity to study God's Word and to enjoy Christian fellowship. The sessions were seen as an opportunity to offer inmates a way to "grow in the Lord." Over time, they came to be seen as an excellent way to follow up on inmates who attended an In-Prison Seminar. Typically meeting once a week for one or two hours and including a time of "fellowship and sharing, scripture study, and praise and worship" (Clower, 1991), they are led by PF volunteers who usually come from local churches and, like IPS instructors, have taken a PF training course.

In the original study, multivariate analyses revealed that attendance at Bible studies was the most reliable mechanism for characterizing the level of PF program participation. Inmates who did not attend any were classified as low participants (49%); those attending one to nine over the course of 1 year were considered medium participants (40%); those who attended at least 10 were considered high participants (11%). Overall, there was a very low level of participation for many prisoners in the PF groups. Sixty-one percent had attended an IPS, but only 16% an LPS.

The current research expanded on the previous study by examining prisoners who had attended five or more Bible studies. This arbitrary new cutoff made it possible to double the high participation cell size from 22 to 44. However, to be consistent with the previous study, the 10-or-more cutoff was also examined.

Units of Faith-Based Participation

In the original New York Prison Fellowship study (Johnson et al., 1997), PF participants were placed in high, medium, and low categories according to number of Bible studies attended. It was found that high PF participants (10 or more) "were significantly less likely than low (none) or medium PF participants (one to nine) as well as their non-PF matches to be arrested during the 1-year follow-up period" (p. 161). As the authors noted, a major limitation was small cell size—only 22 inmates fell into the high participation category. A second was reliance on Bible studies as a single indicator. To address these, in-prison seminars (IPSs) and Bible studies were incorporated in an overall index of faith-based program participation, effectively increasing cell size while broadening the definition of program participation. IPSs were more intensive than Bible studies, prompting a need to weight IPS participation. Each Bible study was counted as one unit of faith-based participation (the basic unit of PF religious activity) and each IPS as three faith-based units. This weighting method is based on the fact that in these seminars an inmate generally received 3 full days of intensive religious programming or instruction. It should be noted that individuals who participated in the 3-day event may have received more faith-based units than the equivalent of three Bible studies. However, not wanting to overestimate the potential impact of IPS participation, it was concluded that a weight of three units per IPS was most appropriate. Therefore, the weighted units of faith-based participation equals the number of Bible studies attended plus the weighted IPS score.

Table 2. Prison Fellowship Program Participation Numbers, Means, Ranges, and Correlations

	Bible Studies	In-Prison Seminars	Weighted Units	Months in Program[a]	Weighted Units Per Month[a]
Participation Level					
0	99	78	27[b]	0	27[b]
1	34	99	24	8	89
2	8	20	5	28	37
3	10	4	73	30	20
4	6	0	11	29	12
5–9	21	0	27	74	11
10–19	12	0	16	31	2
20–29	7	0	9	0	0
30–39	3	0	6	0	0
40+	1	0	1	0	0
Range	0–40	0–3	0–49	0.1–14.9	0–10.7
Overall Mean (SD)	3.6 (7.0)	0.8 (0.7)	5.8 (8.2)	5.3 (3.6)	1.4 (1.8)
Mean of "Attendees"[c] (SD)	7.0 (8.6)	1.2 (0.5)	6.8 (8.4)	5.5 (3.7)	1.6 (1.8)
Correlation[d] with:					
Bible Studies	—				
In-Prison Seminars	0.36	—			
Weighted Units	0.97	0.57	—		
Months in Program	0.45	0.37	0.49	—	
Weighted Units Per Month	–0.3	–0.4	–0.36	0.33	—

[a]   For months in program and weighted units per month, the participation level "1" is a range from .01 to 1.00, "2" is a range from 1.01 to 2.00, and so forth.

[b]   Twenty-seven "nonattendees" of Bible studies and in-prison seminars attended a life plan seminar.

[c]   "Attendees" are inmates with at least one unit of participation in their respective columns. The mean number of months was calculated including only the 172 inmates with at least one unit of weighted faith-based participation.

[d]   Pearson's R was calculated including the 172 PF inmates with at least one unit of weighted faith-based participation. All correlations are significant at $p<.0001$.

Description of Program Participation

In Table 2, descriptive data is provided concerning level of participation in PF faith-based activities, months in the program, and intensity of participation (weighted participation units per month). Of 201 PF inmates, 27 did not participate in more than one faith-based activity (13.4%).[8] IPS attendance was more likely than Bible study attendance as 61.2% of PF participants attended at least one IPS, whereas 50.7% attended at least one Bible study. However, inmates attended more Bible studies on average. Of 123 inmates attending an IPS, 99 attended once (80.5%). Of 102 inmates attending Bible studies, only 34 attended once (33.3%).

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8 These 27 attended a life-plan seminar but did not attend any Bible studies or in-prison seminars.

The average number of Bible studies was 7.0 (SD = 8.6) among inmates who attended at least one study, compared to 1.2 IPSs per inmate (SD = 0.5) attending at least one IPS. In all, program participation ranged from minimal (or none) to extensive. It appears that a sufficient number of inmates attended several Bible studies, an IPS, or both types, to merit examination of recidivism by level of faith-based instruction.

Expanding further on the previous study, it seemed important to examine the effects of program duration (months enrolled) and intensity of participation (number of weighted faith-based units per month) in addition to quantity. If numbers of activities were not predictive, perhaps duration and intensity of participation would be. Time in the program ranged widely, from 2 days to 15 months, with the average at 5.3 months (SD = 3.6), and 164 inmates (81.6%) staying in the program between 1 and 8 months. Intensity also varied a great deal, with an average of 1.6 faith-based units per month and a standard deviation of 1.8. These two additional participation variables have sufficient variability to examine the effect of duration and intensity on survival to arrest.

To better understand the nature of program participation, it was necessary to examine the intercorrelations of five participation indicators (see Table 2) with the 172 PF participants who attended at least one Bible study or IPS. Although Bible study and IPS participation variables were mildly and positively correlated (R = .36), there was enough unshared variance to merit separate examination of the two faith-based program components. Weighted faith-based participation was strongly associated with Bible study attendance (R = .97), but moderately associated with IPSs (R = .57), suggesting that effects may not differ much when comparing Bible studies and weighted units. Program duration was mildly to moderately correlated with program participation variables, indicating a modest tendency for inmates to attend more activities the longer they were enrolled. However, frequency of attendance among those actively participating generally faded over time as intensity (faith-based units per month) was moderately and negatively correlated with faith-based program attendance. Conversely, a large number of inmates who received little faith-based programming had high intensity scores because they were enrolled for only a brief time. Finally, intensity of faith-based participation was positively related to time in the program, suggesting that active participants generally stayed in the program longer.

Recidivism Measures: Rearrest and Reincarceration

Although many inmates were arrested multiple times in the 8-year study period, the focus was on the first post-release arrest because the results of arrest can confound the rate and timing of subsequent arrests. For instance, an individual who is arrested after 3 years, charged, jailed, convicted, and sentenced will have fewer "opportunities" for multiple arrests than the individual who is arrested after 3 years and placed on probation. Also examined were survival rates for first reincarceration, coded by the date of disposition for the new prison sentence.

More specifically, I report the number rearrested, percent arrested, mean years to arrest, and median years to arrest.[9] Likewise, I report the number reincarcerated, percent reincarcerated, mean years to reincarceration, and median years to reincarceration. Median time to rearrest or reincarceration is more useful as a summary statistic than the mean because it describes the point when half of the sample has been rearrested or reincarcerated. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals (calculated below and above the median) provide the range of time values where rearrest or reincarceration is most likely to be observed for a set of individuals in a defined group. The mean time to rearrest or reincarceration is not confined to the boundaries provided by confidence intervals around the median. For this reason, the median statistic, surrounded by confidence intervals, provides the most reliable midpoint indicator of event timing. The higher the standard error is, the larger the confidence intervals.

FINDINGS

Numbers and percent rearrested or reincarcerated, means, medians (with 95% lower and upper confidence intervals), and survival probabilities for 2-, 3-, and 8-year event histories are presented in Tables 3 and 4. I examined each statistic by program (PF versus non-PF), number of Bible studies (5+ versus <5 and 10+ versus <10), IPSs (2+ versus <2), and weighted faith-based participation units (10+ versus <10). After 8 years, 282 former inmates had been rearrested (70.2%), including 136 PF inmates (67.7%) and 146 non-PF inmates (72.6%). Median time to arrest was 2.4 years with 95% confidence intervals ranging from 2.2 to 3.2 years. PF and non-PF median times to rearrest did not differ, but the range bounded by confidence intervals was somewhat greater in the PF group, indicating greater variability.

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[9] It should be noted that means are biased because of censored observations, making interpretation difficult.

A parallel examination of 8-year incarceration rates shows that 165 former inmates (41%) were reincarcerated—80 PF (39.8%), and 85 non-PF (42.3%). Median time to incarceration was 2.6 years with 95% confidence intervals ranging from 2.5 to 2.7 years. Reincarceration rates did not differ significantly across PF and non-PF groups.

I conducted survival analyses to study the effects of program participation on time to both post-release rearrest and reincarceration. Figure 1 shows the cumulative survival functions (survival curves) for PF and non-PF inmate rearrests. The survival function is the unconditional probability that an inmate will "survive" (e.g., not be arrested) beyond a specified time t.[10] As seen in Figure 1, the survival curves (by program) show a barely discernible but nonsignificant difference during the 8-year follow-up period that slightly favors the PF group (see Table 3). However, dividing the sample into groups with high and low levels of participation in Bible studies (5+ versus <5) renders an obvious visual difference favoring the high participation group (see Figure 2). The median time to rearrest was 17 to 18 months longer among individuals in the high participation group or 3.8 years versus 2.3 years. The difference in probability of nonarrest is most pronounced at the 2- and 3-year time points, but then diminishes over time. Detecting this apparent effect, additional survival analyses were conducted as if the study ended at 2 and 3 years. The 8-year probability of nonarrest was not statistically significant, but when limiting the follow-up period to 2 and 3 years, a significant effect emerged. Only 27% of the high participation group were rearrested within 2 years compared to 46% of the low participation group. This difference was smaller after 3 years (41% versus 56%). The survival analyses revealed reliable differences in curves using the 2- and 3-year endpoints ($p < .05$ in each case).

Using the original definition of high participation, attending 10 or more Bible studies (Johnson et al., 1997), the pattern was very similar, though the effect was unexpectedly smaller. The difference between median times to rearrest was 15 to 16 months longer among individuals in the high participation group or 3.7 years versus 2.4 years. The probability of nonarrest was significant at 2 years ($p = .02$), but nonsignificant at 3 years ($p = .14$). Only 22% of the high participation group were rearrested within 2 years

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[10] The hazard function, a mathematical transformation of the survival function, is the rate of failure (arrest) in a given time frame, assuming the individual has survived to time t. Although the hazard function is equally interesting in longitudinal studies in which event timing is examined, we focused on survival curves to visually and statistically present the data. Later in this section, however, I model hazard rates using a group of explanatory variables.

Table 3. Rearrest Statistics and Results of Survival Analyses by Levels of Program Participation

Sample Subgroup Effect*	Median Time to Arrest				2-Year Recidivism				3-Year Recidivism				8-Year Recidivism			
	n	Median	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	Percent Arrested	Number Arrested	Mean Years to Arrest**	SE	Percent Arrested	Number Arrested	Mean Years to Arrest**	SE	Percent Arrested	Number Arrested	Mean Years to Arrest**	SE
Total Sample	402	2.43	2.17	3.24	44%	176	1.45	.04	55%	220	1.94	.06	70%	282	4.35	.20
Program																
PF	201	2.44	1.70	3.88	44%	89	1.41	.05	53%	106	1.80	.07	68%	136	3.92	.24
Non-PF	201	2.43	1.99	3.24	43%	87	1.48	.05	57%	114	1.97	.08	73%	146	4.29	.28
Effect						-2Log (LR) = 0.20, (p = .655)				-2Log (LR) = 0.10, (p = .756)				-2Log (LR) = 0.71, (p = .401)		
Bible Studies																
5+	44	3.79	2.44	6.02	27%	12	1.35	.09	41%	18	2.04	.15	68%	30	4.38	.49
<5	358	2.34	1.94	2.77	46%	164	1.43	.04	56%	202	1.90	.06	70%	252	4.29	.21
Effect						-2Log (LR) = 5.35, (p = .021)				-2Log (LR) = 4.37, (p = .036)				-2Log (LR) = 0.69, (p = .405)		
Bible Studies																
10+	23	3.70	2.31	8.37	22%	5	1.16	.07	43%	10	2.17	.17	70%	16	4.52	.66
<10	379	2.40	1.99	2.92	45%	171	1.43	.04	55%	210	1.91	.06	70%	266	4.32	.21
Effect						-2Log (LR) = 5.49, (p = .019)				-2Log (LR) = 2.22, (p = .136)				-2Log (LR) = 0.37, (p = .543)		
In-Prison Seminars																
2+	24	2.56	1.34	> 10	33%	8	1.08	.10	54%	13	1.89	.21	63%	15	2.61	.35
<2	378	2.42	2.05	3.24	44%	168	1.44	.04	55%	207	1.93	.06	71%	267	4.33	.21
Effect						-2Log (LR) = 0.95, (p = .330)				-2Log (LR) = 0.05, (p = .820)				-2Log (LR) = 0.67, (p = .414)		
Weighted Units																
10+	32	3.79	2.21	8.37	28%	9	1.38	.10	44%	14	2.05	.17	69%	22	4.39	.58
<10	370	2.39	1.99	2.86	45%	167	1.43	.04	56%	206	1.91	.06	70%	260	4.31	.21
Effect						-2Log (LR) = 3.69, (p = .055)				-2Log (LR) = 2.32, (p = .128)				-2Log (LR) = 0.44, (p = .506)		

*Note: Survival curves were examined using the −2Log (LR) test of equality over strata. Survival probabilities are expressed using the Chi-Square distribution.
**Note: Mean years to arrest is biased because of censored observations

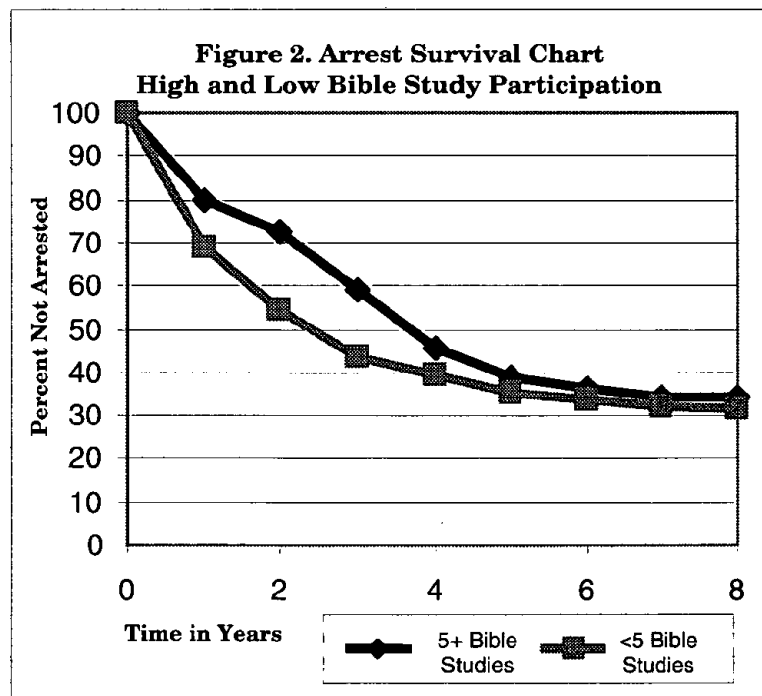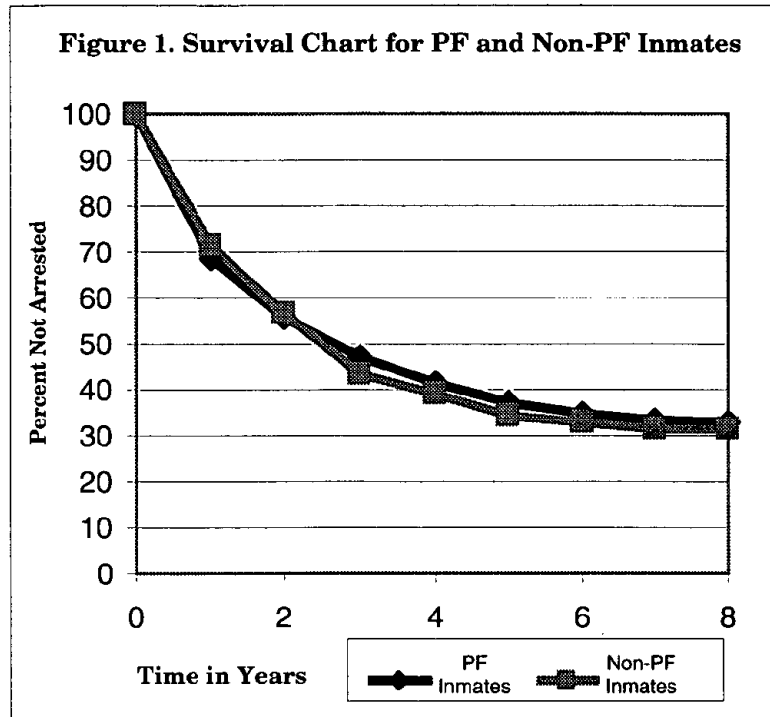**Table 4. Reincarceration Statistics and Results of Survival Analyses by Levels of Program Participation**

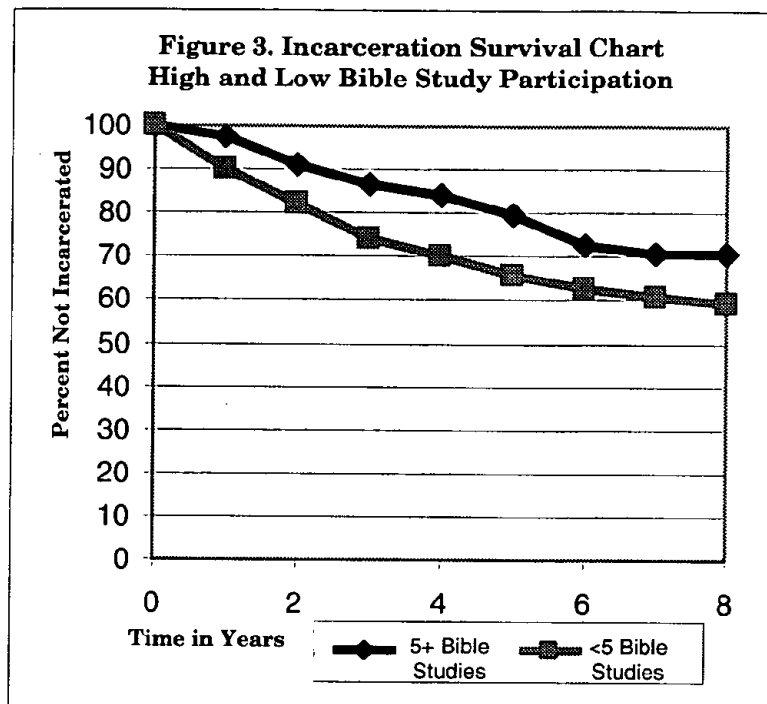| Sample	Median Time to Disposition				2-Year Recidivism			3-Year Recidivism			8-Year Recidivism		
Subgroup Effect*	n	Median	Lower C.I.*	Upper C.I.*	Percent Incarc.	Number Mean Years Incarc. to Incarc.**	SE	Percent Incarc.	Number Mean Years Incarc. to Incarc.**	SE	Percent Incarc.	Number Mean Years Incarc. to Incarc.**	SE
Total Sample	402	2.57	2.47	2.67	17%	68 1.82	.02	24%	98 2.61	.04	41%	165 7.04	.18
Program													
PF	201	2.63	2.48	2.77	16%	32 1.83	.03	23%	46 2.64	.05	40%	80 6.55	.22
Non-PF	201	2.44	2.31	2.58	18%	36 1.71	.03	26%	52 2.49	.05	42%	85 6.88	.26
Effect					-2Log (LR) = 0.30, (p = .587)			-2Log (LR) = 0.52, (p = .471)			-2Log (LR) =0.45, (p = .502)		
Bible Studies													
5+	44	4.49	3.98	5.00	9%	4 1.40	.03	14%	6 2.54	.08	34%	15 7.17	.41
<5	358	2.48	2.37	2.58	18%	64 1.81	.02	26%	92 2.58	.04	42%	150 6.93	.20
Effect					-2Log (LR) = 2.50, (p = .114)			-2Log (LR) = 3.54, (p = .060)			-2Log (LR) = 1.66, (p = .197)		
Bible Studies													
10+	23	4.49	3.79	5.18	4%	1 1.27	NA	13%	3 2.63	.07	35%	8 7.46	.53
<10	379	2.48	2.38	2.58	18%	67 1.81	.02	25%	95 2.59	.04	41%	157 6.97	.19
Effect					-2Log (LR) = 3.67, (p = .055)			-2Log (LR) = 2.14, (p = .143)			-2Log (LR) = 0.92, (p = .336)		
In-Prison Seminars													
2+	24	1.35	1.15	1.55	17%	4 1.30	.04	21%	5 2.41	.14	33%	8 6.84	.68
<2	378	2.57	2.47	2.68	17%	64 1.82	.02	25%	93 2.60	.04	42%	157 7.00	.19
Effect					-2Log (LR) = <0.01, (p = .966)			-2Log (LR) = 0.16, (p = .686)			-2Log (LR) = 0.73, (p = .393)		
Weighted Units													
10+	32	4.49	3.84	5.13	9%	3 1.34	.01	16%	5 2.55	.08	41%	13 6.96	.50
<10	370	2.48	2.38	2.58	18%	65 1.81	.02	25%	93 2.59	.04	41%	152 6.99	.19
Effect					-2Log (LR) = 1.67, (p = .196)			-2Log (LR) = 1.71, (p = .191)			-2Log (LR) = 0.11, (p = .746)		

Incarc. = incarcerated or incarceration.

*Note: Because of the smaller number of incarceration events, SAS did not compute lower and upper confidence intervals around the median. However, a substitute calculation was conducted for each comparison: •(t) +/- 1.96SE[•(t)]. These confidence intervals should be interpreted with caution.

**Note: Mean years to incarceration is biased because of censored observations.

***Note: Survival curves were examined using the −2Log(LR) test of equality over strata. Survival probabilities are expressed using the Chi-Square distribution

Figure 1. Survival Chart for PF and Non-PF Inmates

**Figure 2. Arrest Survival Chart
High and Low Bible Study Participation**

Figure 3. Incarceration Survival Chart
High and Low Bible Study Participation

compared to 45% of the low participation group. This difference was smaller after 3 years (43% versus 55%). One plausible reason for not detecting a statistically significant difference at 3 years is the small cell size ($n = 23$). Furthermore, early arrests, even among a few persons, can markedly reduce an otherwise meaningful effect when the cell size is small.

Figure 3 shows the survival curves for high and low levels of participation in Bible studies (5+ versus <5) using reincarceration data. As seen in this figure, there is a notable visual effect of Bible study participation on reincarceration. However, due to small cell sizes, the statistical differences across groups only border significance, particularly at 2 years ($p = .114$) and 3 years ($p = .060$). Only 9% of the high participation group was reincarcerated within 2 years compared to 18% of the low participation group. This difference remained about the same after 3 years (14% versus 26%).

The survival curves for high and low levels of participation in Bible studies (10+ versus <10) using reincarceration data are very similar to those found for the 5+ versus <5- Bible studies cutoff. Notably, only one in 23 inmates who attended 10 or more Bible studies had been incarcerated after 2 years, that is, 4% of

the high participation group compared to 18% for the low participation group—a difference approaching statistical significance (p = .055). This difference remained comparable after 3 years (13% versus 25%) but was not statistically significant. In sum, the results of the survival analyses for both measures of recidivism—rearrest and reincarceration—closely match each other showing the most prominent effects at 2 and 3 years across inmates categorized according to level of Bible study participation. The effect, however, continues to diminish over the 8-year follow-up period.

In the next phase of the survival analysis, I examined the effect of IPS and weighted faith-based program participation to better understand which PF components differentiated survival probabilities for recidivism. I found no significant differences below the .05 threshold, though weighted participation approached significance at 2 years (alpha = .06). These analyses suggest that IPS attendance does not merely fail in predicting recidivism, but dilutes the effect of Bible studies when blended into an overall faith-based participation score. The creation of the weighted variable added nine individuals to the high participation group (10 or more Bible studies). Of the nine observations, three were censored (not arrested in 8 years), one was a 4-year arrest, and another a 5-year. The remaining four arrests averaged 7 to 8 months. These nine observations cancelled out one another, suggesting no meaningful effect of IPS attendance on recidivism. The dilution effect was even more pronounced in a separate analysis in which I defined weighted participation groups using five units as the cutoff (results not shown).

To determine whether Bible studies would explain time to rearrest considering the effects of other predictors, I regressed recidivism on the same group of explanatory variables from the first study: Bible studies, no prior adult convictions, not a second felony offender, no record of violence, Hispanic, and older upon release (coded 0 = no, 1 = yes).[11] Instead of using logistical regression to predict categorical arrest (as performed in the original study), I used the Cox proportional hazards (PH) analysis to model the effects of covariates on the hazard function (see Table 5). Although the regression methods are similar, the PH framework is more appropriate (and more sensitive) due to its ability to model time to arrest and handle censored observations. Furthermore, PH models have the

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11 Five or more Bible studies (less risk), prior adult convictions (more risk), second felony offender (more risk), record of violence (more risk), and Hispanic (less risk), older upon release (less risk).

advantage of providing effect sizes, expressed as relative risk, referred to here as the hazard rate or hazard ratio (HR).

For the PH models, I used the same predictor variables used in the original study with the exception of Bible studies, where the lower cutoff (5+ versus <5) was substituted. Using a stepwise inclusion technique that enters variables significant at alpha < .05, I found that the Bible studies variable was not washed out by strong predictors such as no prior adult convictions, not second felony offender, race (Hispanic), and age (older upon release). In fact, PF inmates who attended five or more Bible studies carried a hazard rate that was 51 percent as large (HR = .510) as the risk for their counterparts, followed closely by no prior adult convictions (HR = .532) and race (Hispanic) (HR = .551). At 3 years, attending

Table 5. Results of the Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) Model Regressing Rearrest on Explanatory Variables at 2-, 3-, and 8-Year Endpoints

Endpoint Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio	Wald Chi-Square[a]	Pr > Chi-Square
2 Years[b] (176 arrested)					
5 or more Bible Studies	-.673	.300	.510	5.036	.025
No Prior Adult Convictions	-.631	.222	.532	8.058	.005
Not Second Felony Offender	-.443	.172	.642	6.637	.010
No Record of Violence	-.338	.154	.713	4.826	.028
Hispanic	-.597	.166	.551	12.914	< .001
Older upon Release	-	-	-	1.187NS	.276
3 Years[c] (220 arrested)					
5 or more Bible Studies	-.521	.247	.594	4.430	.035
No Prior Adult Convictions	-.375	.183	.688	4.170	.041
Not Second Felony Offender	-.423	.152	.655	7.716	.005
No Record of Violence	-	-	-	3.818NS	.051
Hispanic	-.675	.148	.509	20.857	< .0001
Older upon Release	-.314	.150	.730	4.410	.036
8 Years[d] (282 arrested)					
5 or more Bible Studies	-	-	-	1.458NS	.227
No Prior Adult Convictions	-.651	.153	.521	18.118	< .0001
Not Second Felony Offender	-	-	-	2.920NS	.088
No Record of Violence	-	-	-	0.989NS	.320
Hispanic	-.524	.127	.592	17.109	< .0001
Older upon Release	-.331	.132	.718	6.303	.012

[a] Individual significance tests of variables are expressed using the Wald Chi-Square statistic. Non-significant score chi-squares for explanatory variables are indicated "NS".
[b] 2-year Overall Wald Chi-Square = 48.29 with 5 df; $p < .0001$.
[c] 3-year Overall Wald Chi-Square = 43.37 with 5 df; $p < .0001$.
[d] 8-year Overall Wald Chi-Square = 41.01 with 3 df; $p < .0001$.

five or more Bible studies (HR = .594) was second only to race (HR = .509) and followed closely by not second felony offender (HR = .655) and prior adult convictions (HR = .688). Stated differently, attending five or more Bible studies significantly reduced the hazard of rearrest at the 2- and 3-year endpoints (51% and 50% respectively). Bible studies did not explain risk for rearrest in the 8-year post-release period. Turning to reincarceration, Bible studies were not predictive of survival times (see Table 6). Two factors, "not second felony offender" and "older upon release" significantly reduced the hazard of reincarceration when examining results for each of the three endpoints. A third, "no prior adult convictions" reduced the hazard of reincarceration in the 8-year period only.

Table 6. Results of the Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) Model Regressing Reincarceration on Explanatory Variables at 2-, 3-, and 8-Year Endpoints

Endpoint Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	Hazard Ratio	Wald Chi-Square[a]	Pr > Chi-Square
2 Years[b] (68 incarcerated)					
5 or more Bible Studies	-	-	-	1.480NS	.224
No Prior Adult Convictions	-	-	-	1.197NS	.274
Not Second Felony Offender	-.635	.264	.530	5.794	.016
No Record of Violence	-	-	-	0.184NS	.668
Hispanic	-	-	-	0.288NS	.591
Older upon Release	-.687	.294	.503	5.470	.019
3 Years[c] (98 incarcerated)					
5 or more Bible Studies	-	-	-	2.182NS	.140
No Prior Adult Convictions	-	-	-	1.717NS	.190
Not Second Felony Offender	-.679	.220	.507	9.496	.002
No Record of Violence	-	-	-	2.067NS	.151
Hispanic	-	-	-	0.253NS	.615
Older upon Release	-.636	.240	.529	7.056	.008
8 Years[d] (165 incarcerated)					
5 or more Bible Studies	-	-	-	0.995NS	.319
No Prior Adult Convictions	-.455	.222	.634	4.212	.040
Not Second Felony Offender	-.415	.177	.660	5.526	.019
No Record of Violence	-	-	-	1.333NS	.248
Hispanic	-	-	-	1.914NS	.167
Older upon Release	-.612	.183	.542	11.135	<.001

[a] Individual significance tests of variables are expressed using the Wald Chi-Square statistic. Non-significant score chi-squares for explanatory variables are indicated "NS".
[b] 2-year Overall Wald Chi-Square = 10.30 with 2 df; p = .006.
[c] 3-year Overall Wald Chi-Square = 15.06 with 2 df; p < .001.
[d] 8-year Overall Wald Chi-Square = 24.46 with 3 df; p < .0001.

For descriptive and explanatory purposes, I computed the survival curves for each explanatory variable used in the regression analyses. The effects mirror the hazard ratios (effect sizes) computed in the PH models. As the hazard rates in Table 5

suggest, risk for rearrest was substantially lower among Hispanic inmates (HRs ranged from .51 to .59) and inmates with no prior adult convictions (HRs ranged from .52 to .69). Second felony offenders were at greater risk for rearrest than lesser offenders 2 and 3 years after release (HRs were .64 and .66), but not 8 years after. Having a previous record of violence was predictive in the first 2 years (HR = .71), but is not significant thereafter. Interestingly, younger age at release (a ranked variable in which one-third of the sample was older and two-thirds was younger) emerged as a significant risk factor at 3 years and remained fairly constant thereafter. Individuals over 36.5 years of age displayed a rearrest hazard that was 72% to 73% of the rates displayed by their younger counterparts.

To summarize these findings, the effect of Bible study attendance (5+ versus <5) was: (1) larger than the effect for record of violence throughout the 8-year study period; (2) the largest using the 2-year endpoint; (3) stronger than four important risk factors for rearrest including prior adult convictions, felony offender status, and age, using the 3-year endpoint; and (4) virtually nonexistent in the full 8-year study period. Over time, the effect of Bible study attendance diminished in importance such that risk for arrest was best explained by other variables, specifically prior adult convictions, race, and age.

CONCLUSION

The current research extends on a previous study of Prison Fellowship examining the relationship between religious programming and post-release behavior of former prisoners (Johnson et al., 1997). In the current study, I was able to improve on the previous study by: (1) extending the recidivism window from 1 to 8 years; (2) incorporating new approaches to program participation; (3) including two measures of recidivism—rearrest and reincarceration; and (4) using survival curves and proportional hazards modeling to present and analyze the data.

Results from survival analyses document the central finding that there is no difference between the PF and non-PF groups on either measure of recidivism—rearrest or reincarceration—throughout the 8-year follow-up period. This parallels the finding from the original study of no difference on key outcome variables between those participating in religious programs and those not.

However, dividing the sample into groups of high and low levels of participation in Bible studies (a procedure that yielded significant differences for 1 year post-release in the original study), produces significant differences in survival curves using 2- and 3-

year endpoints. However, the probability of nonarrest diminishes thereafter and is not statistically significant in years 4 through 8. Therefore, the median time to rearrest was 17 to 18 months longer among individuals in the high participation group, or 3.8 years versus 2.3 years.

Survival analyses focusing on reincarceration as the measure of recidivism revealed similar results to those found for rearrests. The statistical differences across groups only approaches rather than achieves significance at 2 years ($p = .114$) and 3 years ($p = .060$). The results of the proportional hazards modeling generally support the findings from the survival analyses for rearrests at years 2 and 3, but not for reincarceration.

DISCUSSION

Considering the prevalence of faith-based organizations known to work with offenders, prisoners, and ex-prisoners (e.g., Salvation Army, Teen Challenge, Kairos, and Prison Fellowship), it is curious that published research on intentional or programmatic religion is so underdeveloped. What little we know from preliminary research on the subject, however, tends to be positive. FBOs would appear to have advantages (e.g., the motivation of religious volunteers) over comparable secular institutions in helping individuals overcome difficult circumstances (e.g., imprisonment and drug abuse).

Recent research on prisoner reentry indicates that religious institutions and other faith-based organizations should not be overlooked as important pieces of a more comprehensive strategy in achieving a successful aftercare transition (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). Additional research confirms that, for parolees who had successfully completed parole, religious conversion and spiritual transformation were significant factors in their gaining and retaining employment and in overcoming other key reentry obstacles (Solomon, Roman, & Waul, 2001; Johnson, & Larson, 2003).

Although the volume of research on organic religion is certainly mounting, the research community has largely overlooked the role of intentional or programmatic religion in the lives of offenders, prisoners, or ex-prisoners. Additional research is needed that examines how organic and intentional religion might be related to one another, and how, if at all, either is related to issues like offender rehabilitation, inmate adjustment, and prisoner reentry.

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