FAITH AND JUSTICE
Focus Group Initiative

Nathan Deal, Governor
Jay Neal, Executive Director
Robert Keller, Deputy Director
Anita Cloud, Faith and Community Partnership Coordinator
Tony Lowden, Faith and Community Partnership Liaison
David Jordan, Faith and Community Partnership Liaison
Healing Communities of Georgia

The Interfaith Community Coming Together to Heal the Hurt Caused by Crime & Incarceration

“It has often been said often that there are none so blind as those who will not see,” she said. There are people who go through life burdened by ignorance because they refuse to see. When they do not recognize the truth that they belong to their community and their community belongs to them...it is because they refuse to see.”

May 22, 2014

Maya Angelou’s Final Recorded Words by Dan Good, ABC News
Governor’s Office of Transition, Support and Reentry

Faith and Justice Focus Initiative

June 12, 2014

1:00 – 1:05pm  
Introductions/Welcome  
Anita Cloud, Faith and Community Partnership Coordinator, GOTSR

1:05pm - 1:30pm  
Healing Communities Overview  
Harold Dean Trulear, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Applied Theology, Howard University

1:30pm - 1:45pm  
Call to Commit  
Jay Neal, Executive Director Governor’s Office of Transition, Support and Reentry

1:45pm - 1:55pm  
Transition to Vinzant Hall

2:00pm - 2:30pm  
Governor’s Address  
The Honorable Nathan Deal  
Governor, State of Georgia

2:30pm - 3:00pm  
Q&A

3:00pm  
Adjourn
Introduction and Status Report

Healing Communities of Georgia is a network of diverse congregations of all faiths from across Georgia, working collaboratively to make their communities safer by healing the pain in neighborhoods and within families torn apart by crime, incarceration and victimization. Congregations within the Healing Communities Network actively engage the principles of restoration of relationships and accountability within their worshipping communities. Through the assistance of the Governor’s Office for Transition Support and Reentry (GOTSR), Healing Communities of Georgia congregations are provided opportunities to learn and implement models through introductions to best practices, ongoing educational opportunities, and engagement in policy discussions — all geared to strengthen their capability to work with returning prisoners and help improve their lives within a spirit of forgiveness. These activities create a sense of welcome and inclusion for former prisoners, lessen their stigma and shame, and help transform their hearts and minds so that they stay crime free. As a result, communities are strengthened.

Healing Communities was successfully piloted in cities across the U.S. by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private foundation working to help vulnerable kids and families succeed, and a toolkit was developed to provide assistance for congregations. Because of its proven success and ability to address a need in its collaborative-based model, the Georgia Prisoner Reentry Initiative (GA-PRI) is utilizing the Healing Communities approach as a strong new component of the GA-PRI vision and mission which provides evidence-based and cost-effective pro-social support for returning citizens, their families — as well as, the victims of crime and their families.

Healing Communities of Georgia is a unique approach that illustrates how corrections and faith institutions can work toward common outcomes while respecting the line between ‘church and state.’ Healing Communities is currently under the auspices of GOTSR with support from the Faith and Justice Focus Group, a diverse body of key faith and justice representatives from across the state of Georgia.

Network development and oversight within each GA-PRI site is locally driven by the faith community and GA-PRI representatives. Currently, Macon, Savannah, Atlanta, Columbus and Augusta serve as pilot sites for the initiative, with Albany to be organized in 2014. Continued network development in new sites will be implemented by the Faith and Community Partnership Coordinator and Liaisons.
Faith & Justice Focus Group

The Faith and Justice Focus Group supports *Healing Communities of Georgia*’s growth and development and advises the staff on complex or specialized matters as well as general programmatic goals and direction. Within this Faith and Justice Focus Group lies the Executive Committee. This committee completes the oversight process of the faith reentry activities of the Governor’s Office of Transition, Support and Reentry.

Members must be firmly committed to the goals and success of *Healing Communities of Georgia*. In addition, members must possess knowledge of the principles of restorative justice, a strong commitment to a fair and just society, and an interest in expanding the faith experience of our worshipping communities.

**Roles & Responsibilities of Members**

- Provide advice on strategic direction to the staff.
- Promote *Healing Communities of Georgia* to colleagues and connect the organization with leaders who can assist in advancing the organization’s mission.
- Solicit funding through donations, grants, sponsorships, and in-kind contributions.
- Sponsor/support *Healing Communities of Georgia* activities and attend *Healing Communities of Georgia*-sponsored events.
- Hold at least one meetings each year.
- Promote linkages between congregations, denominations, faiths, businesses, nonprofits, and government.
- Provide feedback regarding training development, collaborative events and advocacy work.

**Structure**

- The Executive Committee will consist of 15-20 leaders from the faith community.
- The faith community representatives should reflect the diversity of the Georgia faith community.
State Organizational Structure of the GA-PRI

Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform

Faith and Justice Focus Group

GA-PRI Oversight and Policy Committee

Governor's Office of Transition, Support and Reentry (GOTSR) Administration, Management and Support

Statewide GA-PRI Advisory Committee

Implementation Steering Team (IST)

Departmental Implementation Resource Teams

Grant Development & Planning Committee

Transition Accountability Planning Committee

Data, Information, Evaluation, and Performance Committee

Employment Committee

Housing Committee
Balancing Justice with Mercy: Creating a Healing Community

Harold Dean Trulear, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Applied Theology, Howard University

In the past decade, both the public and private sectors have expressed significant concern over the growing rates of men and women returning from incarceration. From the initial (2001) federal agenda for the White House Office on Faith Based and Community Initiatives through the shifts in national faith based organizations’ priorities toward the formerly incarcerated, to the distressed, local communities receiving these men and women after their confinement, concern mounts over the supports necessary to facilitate a successful reentry to society. Such successful reentry impacts communities in producing productive citizens in family and community life, reducing recidivism and further crime, and developing the social capital necessary to become a part of neighborhood stabilization and even transformation.

As such, prisoner reentry does not exist as an issue unto itself; it is not a stand-alone challenge simply to reduce crime rates. Rather, because men and women, and of course adolescents who are incarcerated have been members of families, communities and other social networks, prisoner reentry stands as a challenge that effects the whole of community and family stability. Because of its work in family and community strengthening, the Annie E. Casey Foundation began its work in prisoner reentry not simply as a “crime and recidivism” enterprise, but rather, consistent with the
The Foundation's ongoing commitments, as an issue contextualized by the realities of the vulnerable families and communities the Foundation engages in its regular work. In working in these communities, the Foundation discovered excellent reentry programs. But they lacked the resources to achieve the scale necessary to address the large numbers of persons returning from incarceration. But they also noted the profound resources of the faith community and its heroic efforts to minister to a variety of persons and families in their distressed communities. This lead to the question: What are the distinct contributions made by the faith community in the area of prisoner reentry, and how can the foundation partner with faith based organizations in this work?

The Foundation convened a consultation of religious leaders, criminal justice experts, community leaders, scholars and others invested in prisoner reentry work. Included on the number were persons who had either spent time in jail or prison or those with incarcerated family members. They viewed the film *A Justice That Heals* detailing the role of a congregation which had used its basic resources of pastoral care, relationships and a theology balancing justice with mercy to provide ministry to two families united by the tragedy of the murder of the son of one family by the son of the other. From the ensuing conversation one significant consensus arose: building relationships serves as the key to successful reentry, and faith communities are repositories of relational capital.

The challenge is to mobilize the relational capital- abilities and infrastructure- of the faith community around the specific population of those returning from incarceration. In addition, the relational focus of such a ministry requires that the faith community both provide relationships that offer social support, but also work to promote, develop and strengthen familial and other networks of support for those retiring from jail and prison. Indeed, the shift had begun from a model of working with individuals returning from incarceration to a work of family and community strengthening through the focus of energies on a particular population. From the consultation, the
Foundation developed the Healing Communities model.

**Healing Communities: Faith, Redemption and Restoration**

Faith communities give specific definition to the concept of community, because of the values of forgiveness and restorative practices; a methodology for providing the support, accountability and loving relationships needed for healing and restoration. Restorative practices integrate with evidence and faith based programs, such as TrueLifeWay®, a biblical cognitive process, that infuses Restorative Practices with cognitive principles of change and transformation.

Faith communities, using restorative processes, can help build a community consensus around the challenges facing families with incarcerated loved ones and the citizens returning home from incarceration. Family members and returning citizens are more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when they have a voice in their own change process and things are done with them rather than to and for them. Whenever a community seeks to transform churches and neighborhoods into stations of hope, the stage for healing is set.

The Healing Communities model engages congregations in the ministry of healing and restoration, beginning by supporting their own members-individuals and their families affected by crime, incarceration and prisoner reentry. It mobilizes the religious values of acceptance, love, personal accountability, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation, to create a restorative environment of healthy relationships of support and corrective thinking. In a restorative process, values of forgiveness and reconciliation help build rapport, to increase problem awareness and the importance of change among those impacted by the justice system. Houses of worship, then serve as catalysts that facilitate the transformation of surrounding neighborhoods into caring communities. These are places of hope, safe places and safety nets for those retuning as well as their families, victims and those seeking to support them (i.e., service providers, landlords, employers).
The value resources of *forgiveness, restoration, reconciliation, and healing* common to the majority of faith based organizations and congregations in distressed neighborhoods can be important tools for the reconstruction of a community consensus that welcomes the returning person, and places them in relationships of support, both formal and informal, that contribute significantly to their reintegration.

We use the term *forgiveness* because of its connotation of *thinking differently* about an offense. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting that an offense has occurred, rather it points to the need to receive the offender in spite of the offense, and not define an individual simply or primarily in terms of the offense. True forgiveness, as a relational transaction, also calls for the offender to acknowledge their responsibility for the offense. But such acknowledgement is not a prerequisite for the offer of forgiveness- often it follows a community’s sincere desire to forgive.

*Restoration* is used because in the religious traditions that pervade reentry neighborhoods, it refers to a bringing back of that which was originally a part of something greater. In this case, the neighborhoods and families to which persons return from incarceration is the *greater thing*. Some refer to this process as *restorative practices*. This recognizes that while persons returning from incarceration must take responsibility for their decision making processes upon returning to the community, the community itself is an active agent in the restoration process. The community *pays the price of* mobilizing its resources of care, forgiveness and support to those who return. The community becomes intentional about its role in restoration, creating a sense of welcome and hope for the formerly incarcerated. The community’s agency in this work replaces the numbness referenced earlier.

*Reconciliation* refers to the actual reconfiguring of relationships that occurs as a result of the restorative process. Those who have been incarcerated have committed acts that have brought harm to their neighborhoods, friends and loved ones, whether intentionally or not. Violent and property
offenses bring pain to neighbors. Domestic violence brings clear harm to loved ones, and the reality of incarceration brings a separation that can and does strain, fracture and even end relationships within family and friendship networks. Restorative processes involve a making right of relationships between all parties concerned, offender, victim, family and the larger community. All are stakeholders in the restoration of meaningful relationships that sustain not only the person formerly incarcerated, but also those who have been victimized, either directly or indirectly, by that person.

*Healing* refers to the wholeness restoration brings both to the identity of the person returning from incarceration, and the community of reception and redemption. Successful integration comes not simply with access to services— even the successful implementation of the tools of services— but with the wholeness that comes when a community—a Healing Community—has welcomed the returning citizen and engaged them into a restorative process, that fosters self-worth and addresses thinking errors.

Because of values of forgiveness and reconciliation, Healing Communities reject the stigma and shame associated with incarceration and provides individuals and families with social networks that ensure their continued membership in the neighborhood and restore those to the community that have left it.

These values lead Healing Communities to new language and understandings concerning persons affected by incarceration. Instead of traditional notions of *ex-offender, ex-con,* or *ex-felon,* the Healing Communities model describes those who have been incarcerated as *returning citizens.* The concept of the *returning citizen,* developed by congregations involved in reentry ministry, resists the tendency to identify persons in terms of their past, especially a painful part of that past. Congregations take on the nomenclature of *stations of hope,* reflecting the idea that Healing Communities are not specialized prisoner reentry ministries as much as they are whole
congregations mobilizing their resources around those impacted by the justice system, much as they do around hospitalization, death and other traumatic events.

As a mobilization of congregational resources, Healing Communities draws on assets present in the culture of a healthy congregation, creating a sense of welcome and inclusion, working to reduce stigma and shame of those family members impacted by the justice system and fostering transformation of minds & communities and helping returning citizens to embrace accountability, to imagine the possibilities and achieve sustainability in their lives and in their community. Just as congregations rally around other families affected by trauma and crisis, the Station of Hope builds networks of support for those impacted by the justice system. Like models of chaplaincy, they develop ministries of presence where they walk with the person, and provide understanding and empathy.

Because returning citizens represent a network of their own, through family and friends, the larger community, and those victimized by crime, stations of hope provide presence, support and caring for others as well, in keeping with the principles of restorative practices. And congregations can develop these networks at any point in the justice system process: arrest, the trial, sentencing and incarceration, the points of release, reentry and reintegration into the community.

Because the Healing Communities model involves the mobilization of a congregation’s existing asset for care giving, it does not require setting up a program, starting non-profit agency or securing external funding. Rather, it requires a congregation and its leadership to determine that its traditional mission and function includes those affected by crime and incarceration, and develops the willingness to incorporate them into existing and new networks of caring and support.
The Challenge: Mass Incarceration

The most recent numbers on incarceration and reentry press the need for an urgent and complete response. According to a 2008 Pew Center on the States report, more than 2.3 million Americans are in state and federal prisons. The United States incarcerates its citizens at a rate higher than any country in the world. For African Americans, the numbers reflect a more daunting situation. One in fifteen African American males over 18 is behind bars as opposed to one out of 36 for Latinos and one out of one hundred six for white males.

Crime and incarceration does not impact all neighborhoods equally, nor do the challenges of reentry. Disproportionately, it is African-Americans and Latinos going to jail and prison, and returning to low-income neighborhood with limited resources to support their reintegration. Additionally, the rise in incarceration rates for women has escalated at a rate 1.5 times that of males over the past generation. Indeed, the female inmate population grew by 839% from 1977 to 2006—from 12,279 women prisoners’ to 115,308. Because a significant percentage of these women have children in their care, the implications for family strengthening and success loom large.

The United States Department of Justice states that approximately 650,000 men and women were to be released from state and federal prison in 2008. Though down from 712,000 in 2006, the numbers still startled, and they do not include those who come home from city and county jails. When congregation leaders discussed this chapter, their emotions ranged from anger over the disproportionate numbers of African Americans incarcerated to regret that religious efforts have not stepped up in significant strategies of scale to engage the returning population and their families. Virtually all could and did share stories about how incarceration had affected individual families in their congregations. Few had recognized the enormity of the issue, and the implication that said enormity suggested that there were additional families in their congregations and communities with members in jail or prison, or in the process of reentry and reintegration.
As noted above, many return to communities already in distress. But while those communities suffer from historically limited resources, they all are home to a variety of houses of worship which can and do provide social and religious capital to support the reentry process. In short, all of the social capital and economic goods that churches, community based organizations, foundations, and other community stakeholders have worked many years to create can be rapidly dismantled by mass incarceration, high recidivism rates, and ultimately the failure to provide a more radical approach to re-entry ministry. Successful reintegration that breaks the cycle of crime, recidivism and intergenerational incarceration and restores relationships requires more than institutional responses of reentry services.

The Role of Faith Leaders

Faith leaders, particularly clergy, play a critical role in helping a congregation become a Station of Hope. However, the Healing Communities model is consistent with research on best practices in calling for clerical roles to be defined primarily by providing vision for the ministry, organizational structure, and support for volunteers. This means that the primary persons involved in the actual doing of ministry are the laity within the congregation.

Healing Communities requires a change in congregational culture; therefore, leadership must provide the means of cultural change, not the primary heads, hearts and hands of the work. Clergy begin by identifying partner pastors and congregations, creating a “prayer circle” of support amongst congregations willing to engage in the work. In most cities currently employing the model (Detroit, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis, Richmond, Washington, DC) a group of six to eight congregations meets together regularly to share information on developments in the ministry, pray through issues of mutual concern, and form a basic peer learning community.

Clergy lead the way in their study of the handbook in order to both learn about the issues involved, and be in a position to lead the congregation in the implementation of the ministry. In their preaching and teaching, as well as by action, they set the tone of
welcome and inclusion, in many cases using their own experiences of encountering the impact of crime and incarceration in their own or families' lives, and pointing to biblical texts and examples support the ministry.

As pastors and leaders, they also identify those in the congregation who are in need of support through their experience of crime and incarceration. This can be done through altar calls for those praying for loved ones in jail or prison, basic intelligence through existing relationships, or placing a general call to the congregation. If combined with the development of a welcoming and supportive environment, such a strategy can identify those formerly burdened by shame and stigma to come forward for the support they need. Church leaders also identify volunteers who are willing to provide intentional networks of formal and informal support. Those networks can engage in a number of activities as the chapter on volunteers describes.

As in any ministry of presence, the primary role is simply to be present and listen, using restorative circles. Empathy and ears make for a strong universal starting point to those whose stories and pain has been hidden by shame. Presence requires visitation, not just to the correctional facility, but also to the home of the family as well. In creating formal and informal networks of support, church members help individuals and families to know that they are heard, welcomed and valued. Activities within these networks are often determined by the need of the moment—a ride to an appointment, prayer while job seeking, a meal for a family while the returning citizen is out job hunting, financial support for bus rides, phone calls, etc.

In learning about the criminal justice system and mass incarceration, congregations come to know both the guidelines within which they must work with regards to the system's strictures, and the challenges facing those for whom they provide assistance. Congregations should also learn about other supportive systems and services available. Not every congregation can find or create a job for someone, but any congregation can discover where those opportunities exist for
Thank you for joining us on this historic day. We have been working on state level planning with local stakeholder engagement for months. Today is the day we turn the page and begin to engage in local level planning.

Your local community, and most likely your local congregation, is impacted by crime, incarceration, and victimization. Many times the impact is obvious but at times the impact go relatively unnoticed. While there are many individuals and organizations alike that are providing services and ministry to those who have been impacted, far too many within our communities fail to see the need for engagement. As a respected leader you play a vital role in ensuring your local community recognizes the incredible impact they can have on the lives of the returning citizens, their families, and the victims of crime. Your collaborative involvement will ultimately effect state level change.

The level of success we have building Healing Communities of Georgia will be directly impacted by the level of buy in we receive from you, the key faith leaders of your community. We challenge you to lead by: 1) Leading your congregation to become a Healing Community, 2) Encouraging clergy who you have influence with to lead their congregation to become a Healing Community, 3) Engage with the network of Healing Communities in Georgia, 4) Engage with the Local GA-PRI Reentry Council in your community or be a catalyst for developing GA-PRI if it is not present within your community, and 5) Serve on the Faith and Justice Focus Group.

Thanks again for your presence today. We look forward to incredible days ahead through a collaborative effort of state agencies, local government, community service providers, and faith based organizations.

Blessings!!

Jay Neal
training and placement. In many locations there are reentry task forces, committees and agencies operated by state, county, municipal governments, or in partnership with departments of corrections and/or community agencies. These should be part of the larger network into which a congregation can fit.

Specific support for the families of incarcerated persons and returning citizens often requires special support as well. Children often need some assistance staying connected with incarcerated parents. In one city, African American sorority members visit the county jail and video tape mothers reading stories in a nursery setting for their children at home. Also, in one city, congregations use church vans to shuttle family members to correctional facilities on visitation days. These are just a few examples of what a congregation has within its midst to do.

Congregations contain members who have been victimized by crime as well. The story of Ron Flowers and Mrs. Washington details how a churchwoman overcame her grief, with support, and became reconciled to her child’s killer. But this required a process where people were available to understand the anger and grief and support the healing process. Movement toward reconciliation requires a community of support and the pro-social development of families, individuals, and communities using cognitive principles of change and restorative practices that promotes transformation.