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## **Safety and Behavioral Aspects Prison Ministry Volunteers Should Always Follow:**

- When entering a state prison or local jail to serve, ministers must be aware that they are going into a very different realm than the one they just left. Everything from the security measures, the physical facilities, the history of the prisoners and their experience of being incarcerated demands that the volunteer adjusts to these unique conditions and stays aware of his or her surroundings.
- As a prison minister, it is important to always let the mission of the ministry guide every word and action – that is to bring to the prisoner and others in the facility the message of the gospel. It is essential to not deviate from this mission.
- The volunteer and everyone's safety are of paramount importance. Follow all the institution's safety and administrative procedures and observe these guidelines:
  - Maintain your privacy – keep personal information private.
  - Be careful of physical contact – in most cases a simple handshake is better than a hug.
  - **Always** be respectful of everyone who works or is in a position of authority in the prison or jail you visit. Wardens, guards, chaplains, and others in the prison staff have a very difficult job and deserve our respect and support.
  - Do not engage in conversations with inmates about a particular guard(s), staff member(s), or another inmate. Once again, it is important to always remain within the mission of the ministry.
  - Never act as an intermediary of information, money or material between the incarcerated and their family or friends.
  - Avoid confrontations and do not be pushy with inmates. Allow them the space to open up about themselves. Listen with sensitivity if they tell you their life story and how they ended up in prison. Do not provide your opinion on their guilt or innocence. Certain topics might require that you redirect the conversation and tactfully establish boundaries.
  - Do not commit yourself to doing favors for inmates. Maintain both physical and relational distance.
  - Do not remove anything from the prison – unless you get prior authorization from the appropriate staff member.

- Make use of prison guards and the staff wisely. They will often offer to go with the volunteer on visits. But be aware of their other duties that may require you to bring your visit to an inmate to an early close.