

NATIONAL FAITH-BASED PRISON PROGRAM

The Issue

When Chuck Colson left prison in 1976, he did so with a changed heart. Shortly after his release, he launched Prison Fellowship Ministries (PFM), an organization committed to transforming the lives of prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families. By the year 2000, Prison Fellowship Ministries (PFM) was a \$45 million organization reaching millions of inmates in more than ninety-five countries around the world.

One of its affiliates, PF Brazil, had developed an innovative faith-based prison program that systematically exposed prisoners to Christian principles and life skills. The program had a radical effect on the inmates it served; recidivism rates plummeted from an estimated 70 percent to less than 10 percent. International interest in the program grew rapidly throughout the late 1990s.

“The solid foundation laid by an innovative solution and the expertise of DMT has created for us a program that is flourishing today. Not only is it changing the lives of the men who participate, its effect is felt in their families, communities, and even among the victims. This is a powerful program that I’m proud to be associated with.”

- Tommie Dorsett, Program Director

Our Client’s Challenge

As the Brazilian model gained traction and began to replicate in South America, the Board of Prison Fellowship Ministries began to envision its replication in the United States. However, a variety of obstacles loomed on the horizon. How could a religious organization collaborate with the government to run a faith-based prison without violating the First Amendment? How could PFM translate the Brazilian model to another culture without losing its core principles? What would it cost and who would pay for it? To answer these and other questions, PFM turned to Dare Mighty Things.

Enter Dare Mighty Things

In 1996, Prison Fellowship hired Dare Mighty Things to study the feasibility of replicating the Brazilian faith based prison model in the United States. Accepting the challenge, DMT led a team of experts and major donors on several trips to Brazil and determined that the program could be replicated in the United States. Working closely with PFM executives and board members and consulting with constitutional experts, DMT developed a three phased, eighteen-month restorative and progressive pre-release prison program and then led the exploration of potential sites for replication, development of the curriculum, and hiring of staff.

The result? In 1997, PFM opened the InnerChange Freedom Initiative in Houston, Texas. Now, the prison model operates in six states—Texas, Kansas, Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, and Missouri, including three programs for women. National evaluations show that the program has reduced recidivism to 8 percent - far below the national average of 67 percent.

Results

DMT helped our client develop the first faith-based prison program in the United States, starting a national movement and accelerating efforts to forge partnerships between government and faith-based organizations to solve social problems.

