

# How will Texas Baptists respond to a 'tsunami' of prisoners' families?

November 16, 2009

HOUSTON—The next disaster facing the United States isn't a hurricane, tornado or flood, said David Valentine, pastor of [Covenant Fellowship in Huntsville](#). It's a 'tsunami' of families affected by incarceration, which may be as large as 350,000 people.

Each year, 70,000 people are released from prison, and another 70,000 people are imprisoned, Valentine said. Assuming each person has a family of four, hundreds of thousands of people are "in conflict or crisis" each year as they struggle with an incarcerated family member.

Beyond that, 100,000 Texans are on parole and 500,000 more are on probation.

More than 90 percent of people affected by the incarceration of a person are non-Christians, Valentine said.

{youtube}0pv6MOI5\_ME&hl=en&fs=1&rel=0{/youtube}

David Valentine, pastor of Covenant Fellowship in Huntsville, challenges churches to become involved in prison ministry.

"This is a problem that is bigger than me. This is a problem for Texas Baptists and Texas Baptist Men specifically. What are you going to do about this disaster?" Valentine asked during the Texas Baptist Men rally on the eve of the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting.

This situation provides a significant opportunity for Texas Baptists to make an impact on a large number of people and families, Valentine said. Seventy percent of non-Christians discharged from prison return within 36 months, the pastor said.

“There’s only one person who can change that—Jesus Christ. He is calling his church to step up,” Valentine shared.

Roughly 10 percent of people who commit to Christ while incarcerated return to prison, Valentine said. While ministering to about 140 people in Huntsville prisons, he has seen lives change. Fifty people have made professions of faith. He has baptized nine people. They are better behaved and are more likely to gain privileges.

His congregation’s ministry is being helped by Texas Baptist Men’s Inmate Disciple Fellowship, which is supported by the [Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions](#) , and Texas Baptists’ community care team.

Valentine hopes the church’s evangelism and discipleship efforts result in the training of ex-offenders who start congregations after being released.

Churches can reach out to people hurting as a result of a loved one being imprisoned, Valentine said. Church members can invite families to Sunday school classes or small group gatherings. They can participate in the Angel Tree program. They also can minister directly to offenders.

“There are thousands of different ways to reach these families,” Valentine said. “It’s simply a matter of praying, caring for them and sharing the good news of what Jesus is doing.”