



# Successful Reintegration: Navigating from Prison to Church

Dr. Vance Drum  
Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association  
May 15, 2026 – Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL

**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

CMCA 2026 SUMMIT | MAY 14 - 16, 2026 | WHEATON COLLEGE

# Successful Reintegration: Navigating from Prison to Church

- Two Outcomes
  - What does a Welcoming Church look and feel like?
  - Realistic Release Expectations for Successful Reintegration

**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

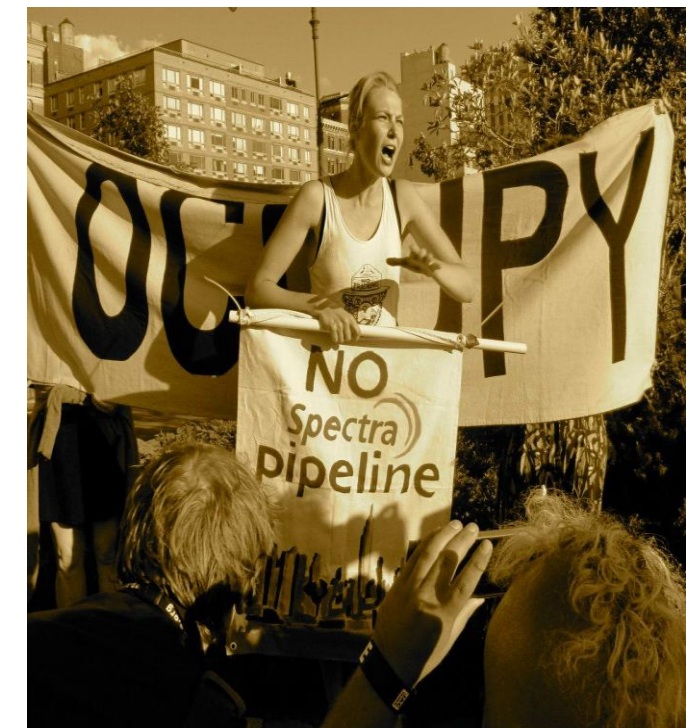
Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

# Welcoming Church?



## True Stories:

- Massachusetts 1974, First Congregational Church, est. 1657
- Texas, 1999-2000, Sunset Christian Church, est. 1903
- Galatians 2:11-14, Church at Antioch, est. AD 50: “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel”
- Diotrephes (3 John 10): “refuses to welcome,” “puts them out”



# GOD OUR PROVIDER

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## What is a Welcoming Church?

- What is a faithful (welcoming) church? Who is a Christian?
- Does God love everybody? Sinners? Lawbreakers?
- Who does God receive?
- 2 Cor. 5:20, ambassadors: “ministry of reconciliation”
- What is the difference between a faithful church and the Lions, Kiwanis, or any benevolent social club or group?

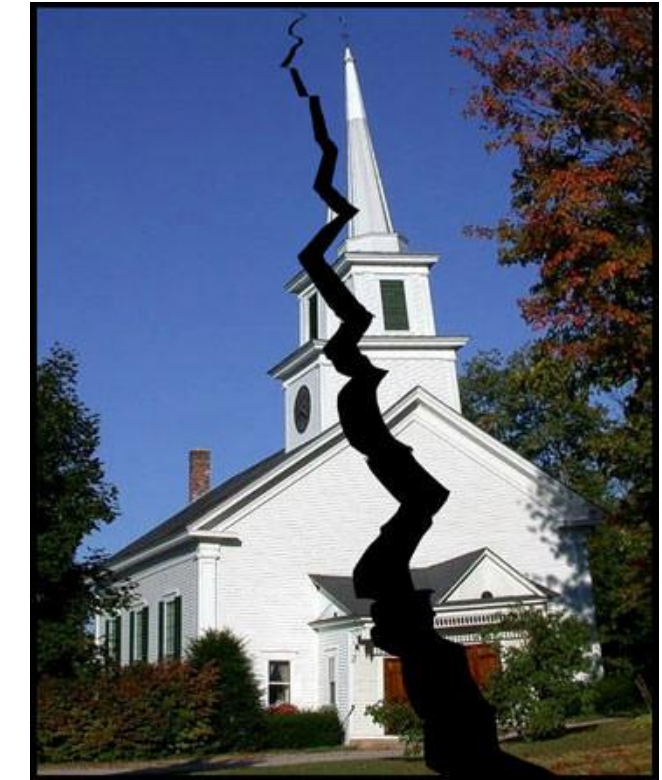


**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## Welcoming Church?

- I came, I was disappointed, I left, I did not return. ('74)
- “Son, don’t you have a church...?”; “not too churchy”(‘99)
- Chaplain’s “faithful few” (15) in 3,000-man prison.
- “Welcoming and Affirming”?
- Your examples?



**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## Welcoming Church



- Who is the builder/owner of the church?
  - Matthew 16:18, “I will build....”
- How much autonomy do we have in doing church?
  - Money Man: “Get rid of that preacher”; Drunk deacon
- King’s Chapel Boston, est. 1686

**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## The Welcoming Church



- Foundations: Acts 2:42, “They devoted themselves” to the
  - Apostles’ teaching
  - Fellowship
  - Breaking of Bread
  - Prayer
- Is all of this necessary? Can a church be church without these?

**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## Welcoming Church



- What does your congregation do to welcome guests?
- Do any former prisoners attend your church?
- How do you help releasees find their way?
- What about tattoos, addictions, clothing, LGBT, children

**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## A Welcoming Church

- All who enter are welcomed/greeted
- Do not ignore guests. Be patient with immaturity.
- Handwritten note, Subway gift card; Worship style?
- “Who and What” meeting/Invite membership
- Men’s Fellowship: discipleship over dinner and a book



**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## Release Expectations

- What are some unrealistic release expectations of church?
- If expectations are unrealistic, what is the usual outcome?
- How can expectations be more realistic?
- What are some realistic expectations for prisoners looking for a free-world church? What if they don't find them in a church?



**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## Unrealistic Expectations



- Unrealistic expectations (stumbling blocks) for releasees looking for a church
  - Everybody's perfect here, no frowns or opposition. If not....
  - My theology is what everybody here believes. After all, I'm right.
  - Church is going to supply all my material needs. Work? What's that?
  - Discipleship? I need to grow in Christ? I *like* my sin!
- What are some signs of a welcoming church?

**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## Realistic releasee expectations

- Realistic expectations for a prisoner coming to church
  - We are only human here.
  - We are all sinners saved by grace, not by being good.
  - We receive you as a fellow pilgrim in Christ.
  - We will walk with you, provide fellowship, God's love, forgiveness in Christ, and accountability.



**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

# Research



- Evidence-based research is mounting on the inverse relationship between church attendance and recidivism (more attendance = lower recidivism).
- “More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How It Could Matter More,” by Byron Johnson, 2011, Templeton Press
- “Escaping the crime of inner cities: Church attendance and religious salience among disadvantaged youth,” by Byron Johnson, et al, in *Justice Quarterly*, 2000

**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## Navigating from Prison to Church

- Presenter Bio
  - Dr. Vance Drum
  - Pastor, 28 years in his 123-year-old congregation in Texas
  - Chaplain, 32 years in Texas Dept. of Criminal Justice, Director of Chaplains (retired)
  - Director of Peer-to-peer Chaplaincy Training, Prison Seminaries Foundation, 2017— ([prisonseminaries.org](http://prisonseminaries.org))

**GOD OUR  
PROVIDER**

Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.