



## COLUMBIA STREET PROJECT

Where Faith Gets Down to Business

***Mission Statement:*** *The Columbia Street Project is a faith-based community resource center, serving individuals and families impacted by the criminal justice system who respond to the opportunity to “rise above their circumstances”.*

### **Narrative Description of Activities,** **Sept. 1, 2015**

The Columbia Street Project is a faith-based public service nonprofit corporation of the State of Maine, organized exclusively for charitable purposes. Specifically, this organization will provide services to individuals who have experienced incarceration, intending to empower such individuals to rise above their circumstances toward productive life in society. Such initiatives as literacy training, job training, entrepreneurship training and life-skill development are intended, as well as person-to-person mentoring through its program, CSP Navigators.

### **Need for the Activity:**

Ministry to those marginalized by poverty, crime, sickness, rejection and abuse in American society has traditionally taken the form of the dispensing of material goods, agenda-driven by solicitation of confessions of faith. The Church culture is largely unprepared to address the societal contributors to brokenness and despair. Indeed,

the non-profit focus of churches is to provide spiritual care through religious education and acts of charity.

Poverty, crime, sickness, rejection and abuse surface in a common destiny – our jails and prisons. While church members are not immune to familiarity with the criminal justice system in their families, there is a tendency to view such instances as failure of parental guidance and religious training. For the most self-conscious wing of the Christian church, Evangelicalism, the outreach has largely been limited to preaching and teaching within the jail and prison system, with little or no delivery of vital services to those returning to society after serving their sentences.

In 1997, a study was conducted by Lamar University professor Byron Johnson to measure the effects on recidivism of the popular Prison Fellowship Ministries (PFM) begun by former White House aide, convicted Watergate conspirator and recently deceased Charles “Chuck” Colson. No significant difference in



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recidivism rates between PFM and non-PFM populations were found recidivism rates between PFM and non-PFM populations were found.<sup>1</sup>

Johnson updated his study in 2004 after matriculating to Baylor University. He was able to confirm a direct correlation between religious programming in prison and re-arrest only with respect to active participation in Bible Studies, with even that diminishing over time.<sup>2</sup>

In 2011, Johnson published an article in the *Dallas News*, advocating for “...a new series of public-private partnerships that will enlist thousands of new volunteers to assist correctional authorities in the delivery of much-needed educational, vocational and faith-based programs, not only in prisons, but in the communities to which prisoners will be returning”.<sup>3</sup>:

Religiously motivated individuals and groups have often been marginalized by governmental agencies, and faith-based groups have often been unwilling to partner with the government.

Two realities point to a new window of opportunity to do something about the mass release of prisoners back into our communities. First, an established and mounting body of empirical evidence documents the significant role of the “faith factor” in crime reduction. Second, shrinking state budgets are making it necessary to consider new approaches that emphasize cooperation between secular and sacred entities in order to help former prisoners remain crime-free after leaving prison.

Innovative approaches such as this will be successful only if many new volunteers and groups — most of which will come from communities of faith — are encouraged to partner with governmental agencies in confronting the prisoner re-entry crisis.

These sacred-secular partnerships are our best chance to achieve scalable solutions in addressing the prisoner re-entry crisis here in Texas. These volunteer coalitions have the potential to bring together a “coalition of the willing” who can coordinate job placement, housing, drug treatment, life-skills and, most importantly, match prisoners (before they leave prison) with mentors who can hold them accountable on the outside while providing the social and spiritual support they need to live crime-free lives and be productive citizens.

This combination of accountability and assistance is essential for any effort to effectively change the lives of offenders and lower recidivism, thus creating safer communities, fewer victims and less cost to taxpayers (Johnson, 2011).

Johnson cited as support for sacred-secular partnerships, a 2007 New England Journal of Medicine report that found that deaths among recently released prisoners were 12 times the average for the general population and that the death rate from drug overdose was 129 times average.

The services recommended by Johnson are exactly those envisioned by and that define the purpose of the Columbia Street Project.

#### **Standing of Columbia Street Baptist Church:**

Columbia Street Baptist Church (CSBC) was founded in 1845 as a ministry to the working poor at the waterfront in Bangor, ME. Presently located one block west of Penobscot County Jail and one block east of the primary Section Eight housing in the City of Bangor, it is uniquely positioned to provide both goods and services to the poor and dispossessed. Currently, it provides meals and religious services weekly to some 200-300 “street people” mostly within walking distance of the church. It has neither the resources nor the professional staff, however, to provide the kinds of services that will build restorative life-skills.

In 1962, the church purchased a 2-story 10,000 ft<sup>2</sup> building next door at 45 Columbia St. A basketball court was constructed on the second floor of the building. Recently, a 21 ft. climbing wall was added, and the bathrooms and locker rooms were updated. The first floor, however, had fallen into disrepair over the years.

In 2013, a scaled-down \$150,000 capital campaign raised nearly \$125,000 from church members and interested parties toward a \$225,000 upgrade of

the facility, including compliance with ADA standards, new restrooms, office space, security access and a natural gas 9-zone heating system. The remaining 2/3 of the first floor has been finished for accommodation of private partnerships offering services to assist those in need of skills that will help them become self-sufficient.

#### **The Development Plan:**

The Columbia Street Project (CSP) will be the corporate vehicle that brings together, both physically and virtually, community social services and the faith focus of CSBC. Its mission is to offer counseling and life-skill development for any and all regardless of religious orientation. Beginning with the many now receiving survival help from CSBC, CSP will broaden the scope of those vital services to training, life-skill teaching and mentoring of those seeking to rise above their circumstances toward a life of self-reliance and community service.

The development plan calls for an advisory board of professionals and administrators within Greater Bangor, ME to map out strategies for attracting partners engaged in restorative services. Discussions have been underway with trade organizations and with social service agencies.

The advisory board will be comprised largely of social service stakeholders. Aside from its advocacy/mentoring role, CSP will limit its program options to those that strengthen our partners or that are not presently offered in the community. Because of the paucity of reentry services and the experience of the staff at CSBC with the prison culture, it is felt that a focus on restorative justice will find broad appeal among the poor and dispossessed of the area, a large portion of whom have been impacted by the criminal justice system.

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Programs considered and launched by CSP are subjected to a high element of scrutiny and planning. Each program must be a self-sustaining entity with its own management team and an outside partner working together to build a business plan. Services offered to such programs by CSP staff will be in the order of grant writing, financial management and administrative oversight as the CSP corporate structure is strengthened.

Monthly managers' meetings for emerging programs have been initiated. As individual programs become operational and sustainable, they will offer templates for other programs in various formative stages.

#### **Present Status:**

Goods and services provided by the Project must be consistent with the very real needs of its constituency. In the fall of 2013, CSBC partnered with a street ministry in Bangor – The Mansion. The Mansion has built an active and vibrant Sunday evening ministry of around 150 participants at CSBC and is in daily touch with its clients. The Mansion conducts services twice weekly at the Penobscot County Jail and once monthly at the maximum security Maine State Prison. It has a team of eight lay chaplains who have received clearance to provide services at the Jail.

Several programs are in various stages of development as spinoffs from our present partnerships. These programs will offer direct dialogue with the needy population and will be relied upon as bridges to the community. In addition to providing for immediate physical needs, these programs will be inventorying skills of recipients along with interests in life-skill training.

Three programs are in various stages of development. These will offer direct dialogue with the target population and will be relied upon as bridges to the community, offering the opportunity for skills inventories and developing interests in life-skill training:

#### **Maine Prison Chaplaincy Corps (CSP Navigators):**

- Funding: 2011 seed grant of \$18,000 from the American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) at Valley Forge, PA and under the leadership of the CSBC Senior Pastor, Dr. Stan Moody...
- Purpose: To train lay chaplains to become mentors of those returning from incarceration...







#### Adopt-a-Block:

- Purpose: Gaining trust, inventorying skills, and responding to needs through Saturday morning neighborhood visitations...
- Status: Team of around a dozen of CSBC leadership and congregants have visited an existing program, studied the structure and launched the program in the fall of 2014, going out door-to-door once monthly. Adopt-a-Block has completed its business plan now under consideration by several potential funding sources. Josh Peppard, organizer of the Celebrate Recovery Program, leads the project...

#### Crossroad for Women:

- Purpose: To build leadership skills in neighborhood women by involving them in efforts to establish the needs of the community...
- Status: As of the fall of 2015, an advisory committee has been assembled and is planning an event for March 2016 to gather feedback from women in the community. A seed grant of \$2,000 has been received for startup expenses...

#### The Bangor YMCA:

- Purpose: CSP has a recreational facility that is attractive to the Y for afterschool programming...
- Status: Since Sept. 2014, CSP and the Y have exchanged services of value for a 4-day afterschool program. In Sept 2015, the Y opted to pay for the use of the facility while continuing to collaborate with CSP on other recreational projects, including use of the climbing wall...

#### Art Education Program:

- Purpose: To encourage creative talents as a path to lowering recidivism. Community members with a variety of creative passions will conduct 10-week education projects within Penobscot County Jail. CSP will train mentors to begin release planning of select prisoners, meeting them at the door upon release.
- Status: A partnership is evolving with the Penobscot County Sheriff's Office, and a business plan has been developed and vetted.

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**Financial Needs and Commitments:**

All moneys raised through grants and solicitations will be earmarked for program. As the Project develops and expands, there will be built into its budget secretarial, security, custodial, utilities, rent and professional management services.

Charges by CSP for services are not anticipated. If, in the future, services such as job training become extensive and in economic demand, charges may be necessitated according to the ability to pay but will be initiated through the partnering entities and not directly by CSP. CSP will receive its revenues from rent and utility fees paid by partners along with grants and solicitations for staffing and management of the project. CSP will function in what may be described as a social service incubator, assisting partners in their development, securing resources, public relations, marketing, and providing office staffing for the Project.

**Statement of Civil Rights Observances:**

CSP will maintain the civil rights and dignity of its clients by adhering to the following standards:

- CSP services will be open and available to all eligible recipients. Staff, volunteers, congregational members, or any other subgroup of recipients will not be given priority or exclusive rights to services...
- CSP will not discriminate on the basis of religious affiliation except where such religious affiliation is considered counterproductive to the image, outreach and community standards of CSBC...
- While CSP may offer spiritual mentoring through its parent, CSBC, CSP will not require attendance at religious services in exchange for services rendered...
- CSP will not engage in discrimination in the provision of services against any person because of race, color, citizenship, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, unfavorable discharge from the military or status as a protected veteran...

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, Byron et al, "Religious Programs Institutional Adjustment, and Recidivism among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs." *Justice Quarterly Vol. 12, No. 1* (March 1997): 8.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Byron. "Religious Programs and Recidivism among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs; a Long Term Follow-up Study. *Justice Quarterly Vol. 21, No. 2* (June 2004): 329-354.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, Byron. "How to Reduce Recidivism with Faith-based Volunteers." *Dallas News (July 1, 2011)*.