Plenary Session 5
Trials and Triumphs: Making the Case for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Involvement

Moderator/Panelists: Leon McGowan

Presenters: Rev. Dr. Lonnie McLeod
Terrence D. Walton

Mr. Leon McGowan highlighted the objective of the plenary: to identify challenges, issues and opportunities when using faith-based and neighborhood organizations to assist in helping ex-offenders who are returning to their communities and families.

Rev. Dr. McLeod opened with a real life story of his wife and adopted daughter and how his past imprisonment affected their relationship when he reentered society. His daughter expressed a lot of rebellion toward him. With time, that changed as she recognized him as the only father she would know. According to Dr. McLeod, faith in the prisons institutionalizes the prisoner's soul as well as the physical person. Bondage becomes the norm. Prisoners begin to relate better to the conditions inside prison than those outside prison. He listed five factors needed to connect ex-offenders with community and family: contextual, relational, hope, sustenance and critical mass.

Mr. Terrence Walton made his case for faith-based initiatives and neighborhood involvement by emphasizing the need for religious organizations to reach out to prisoners while they are still imprisoned as well as once they are released. He focused on helping people find their way back into society. When prisoners are taught a sense of hope, they can begin to find promise, pardon themselves, find the power to release their guilt and shame and begin new positive partnerships. Helping former prisoners repair relationships with their communities and families through religion and mentoring enables them to successfully make the transition and become law abiding citizens.