

Letter Writing **MINISTRY**



A Spiritual, Bible-Based
Friendship Resource Guide
FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PRISON MINISTRY

AdventSource

Letter Writing Ministry Resource Guide

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Remember that the Lord Jesus is the Master Worker.
He waters the seed sown. He puts into your minds
words that will reach hearts.

TESTIMONIES, VOL. 9, PG. 41



1

The Purpose of this Resource Guide

This Resource Guide is provided to instruct, encourage, and inspire those that would have a desire to follow the Lord's leading in prison ministry. It is our desire that every correctional resident in the North American Division will have the opportunity to get to know Jesus Christ and be saved through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This ministry can be accomplished through individuals dedicated to providing literary services for the incarcerated.

To reach all incarcerated individuals with the knowledge of salvation, we need more volunteers. Providing in-facility programs along with written and literary correspondence will allow greater exposure to the gospel.

Correctional residents are pleading for someone who cares and is willing to take the time and effort to correspond in Christian love. Subsequently, to implement this service specific correspondence guidelines should be followed. Through this resource guide and the examples given, you will be effective in this ministry.





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What is Letter Writing Ministry?

Letter Writing Ministry is a program that provides correctional residents with Christian correspondence (one-to-one).

How Can I Be a Letter Writing Volunteer?

- All letter writing volunteers must be 18 years or older.
- Have a deep love for people and a desire to help them reconnect with God.
- Have a genuine personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Thoroughly read and understand the information provided in this resource guide by the North American Division Seventh-day Adventist Letter Writing Ministry.
- Become familiar with the guidelines for writing letters throughout this resource guide.
- Complete the volunteer application form and share it with the designated Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator for review.

How Does the Ministry Function?

- All requests to participate in this letter writing ministry as a volunteer or a correctional resident will be directed through the designated Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator.
- Correctional residents and letter writing volunteers will be matched by the Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator.
- All correspondence, both incoming and outgoing, will be addressed to a centralized post office box, ideally one that is used only for prison ministry. This helps to keep the letter writing volunteers anonymous.
- All correspondence, both incoming and outgoing will be reviewed by a member of the Letter Writing Ministry coordination team.
- Contact your Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator with any questions.

A Word of Caution

It is a serious violation of the rules of the Letter Writing Ministry to

- Give or receive money, or funds of any kind, from a correctional resident.
- Give your real name, personal address, phone number, email address, social media handle or number to any inmate.
- Give contact information of anyone to any inmate.
- Send your photograph to any inmate.

The primary purpose of the Letter Writing Ministry is to assist correctional residents in gaining a personal knowledge

of Jesus Christ. In order to avoid any undesirable personal and/or emotional entanglements, all correspondence should have a redemptive spiritual focus. Lift up Jesus and the Holy Spirit will guide your thoughts and words to bring blessings through your letters. **The Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator will assess and terminate all inappropriate correspondence.**

The Correspondence Cycle

- Correctional resident requests a correspondent.
- Coordinator assigns a writing volunteer.
- Volunteer writes an introductory letter and sends it to the Letter Writing Ministry post office box
- Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator reviews the letter and sends it to the correctional resident.
- Correctional resident replies to Letter Writing Ministry post office box.
- Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator reviews the letter and sends it to the ministry volunteer.
- Repeat 3 to 6.

In order to save some time but still maintain the needed oversight, the following could also be done:

- Letter Writing Ministry volunteer writes a letter to the correctional resident and emails it to the Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator
- Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator prints and reviews the letter and sends it to the correctional resident.
- Correctional resident replies to the ministry volunteer at the post office box address.
- Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator reviews the letter. Then scans and emails it to the volunteer.
- Repeat steps 3 to 6.
- The Letter Writing Ministry Coordinator should know how to confirm locations of correctional residents to properly redirect letters when they are moved from one facility to another.

Email Correspondence

A growing number of correctional facilities are offering an electronic option for corresponding with correctional residents. An “electronic stamp” is required and must be purchased through the institution. There are a few possible advantages that email correspondence offers.

- Electronic stamps typically cost less than a postage stamp and lower your cost and your letter writing partner's costs.
- It takes less time for an emailed letter to ‘travel’ through the mail and reach your letter writing partner.

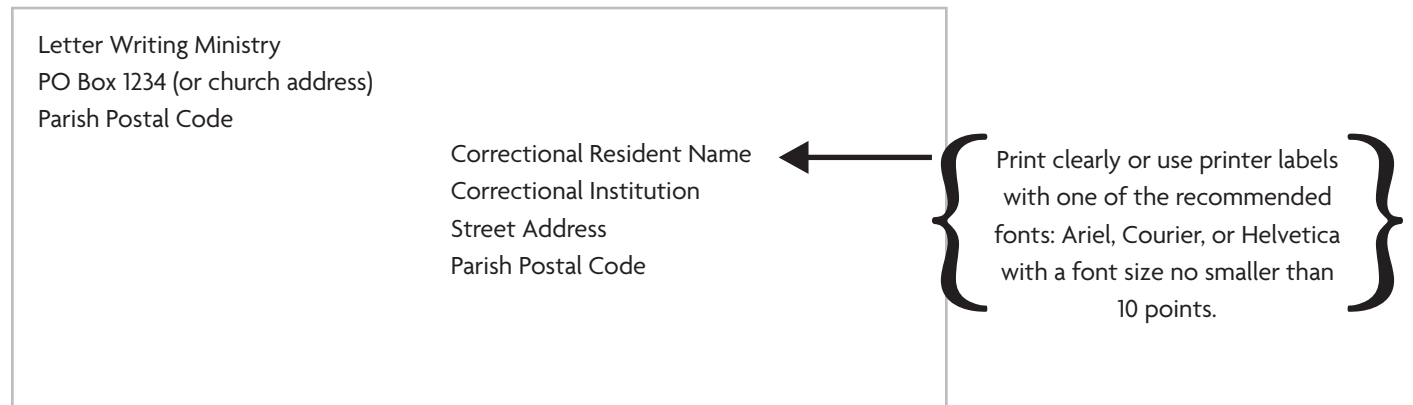
If you would like to explore this option, be aware that the rules and regulations surrounding this activity may differ from regular mail correspondence. The Letter Writing Coordinator should contact the correctional facility to learn the rules governing electronic mail. In addition, all correspondence would still be channeled through the Letter Writing Coordinator the best practices found in this resource guide still apply.

3

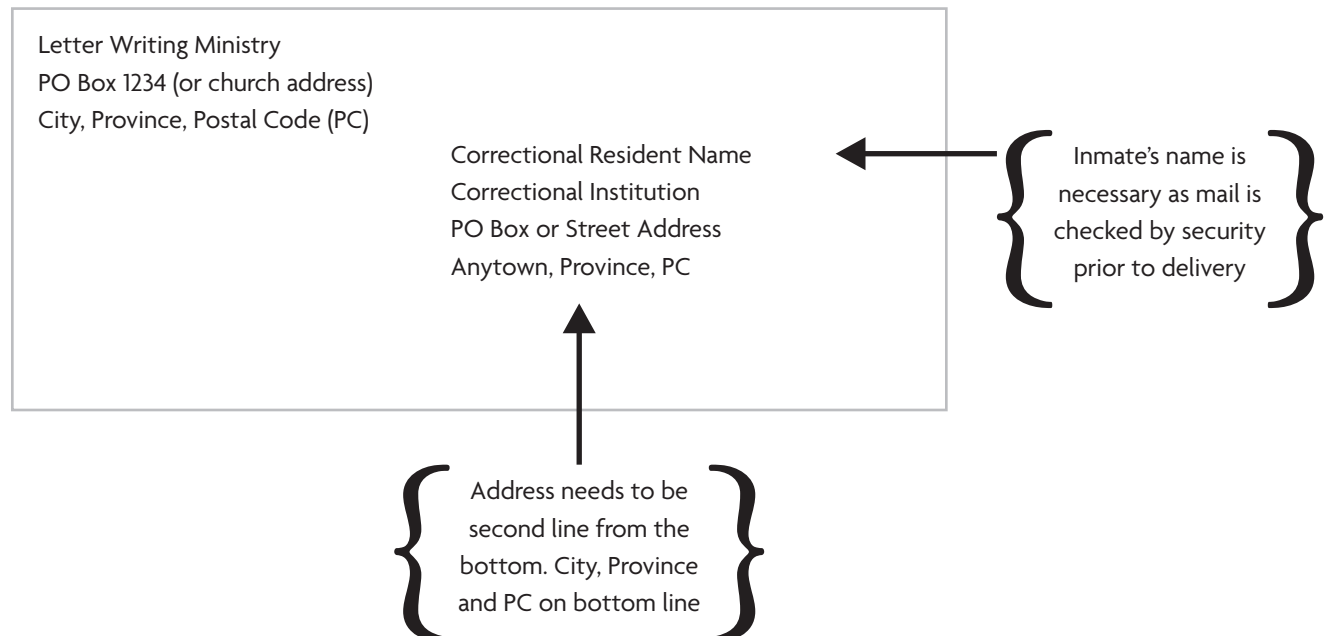
Sample Envelopes

Following are sample envelopes for how you must address all correspondence with the incarcerated parents for them to receive your mail. There may be variations in requirements from institution to institution. Be sure to check with the specific institution you're working with

BERMUDA:



CANADA: This envelope is typical for writing to a correctional resident of a federal institution in Canada. Provincial institutions may vary.



GUAM:

Letter Writing Ministry
PO Box 1234 (or church address)
Locality, GU Postal Code

Correctional Resident Name
Guam Department of Corrections
PO Box 3236
Hagatna, Guam 96932

Letter Writing Ministry
PO Box 1234 (or church address)
City, State 32790-2626

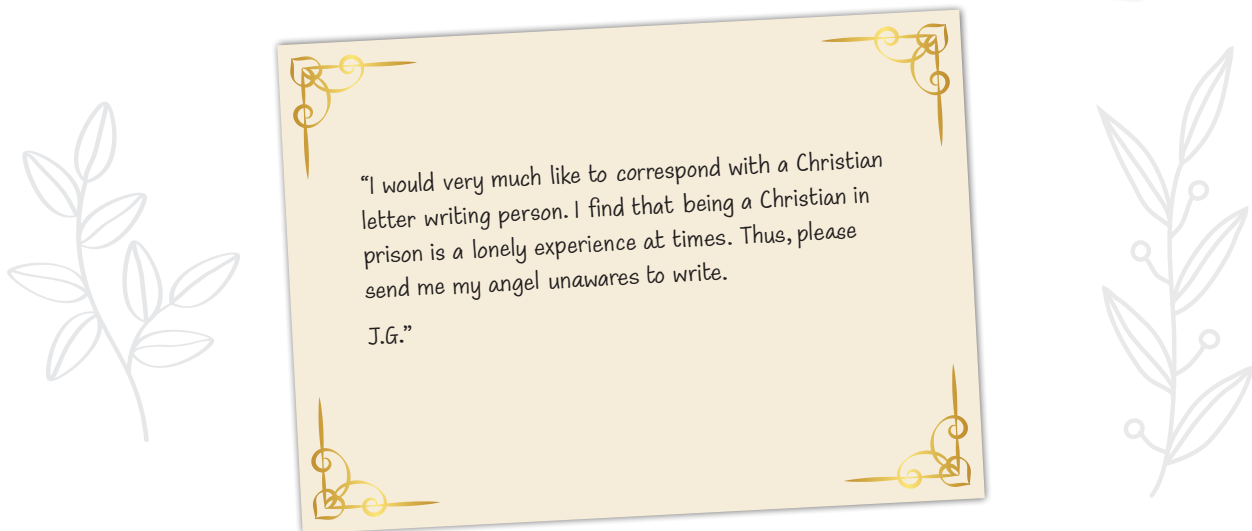
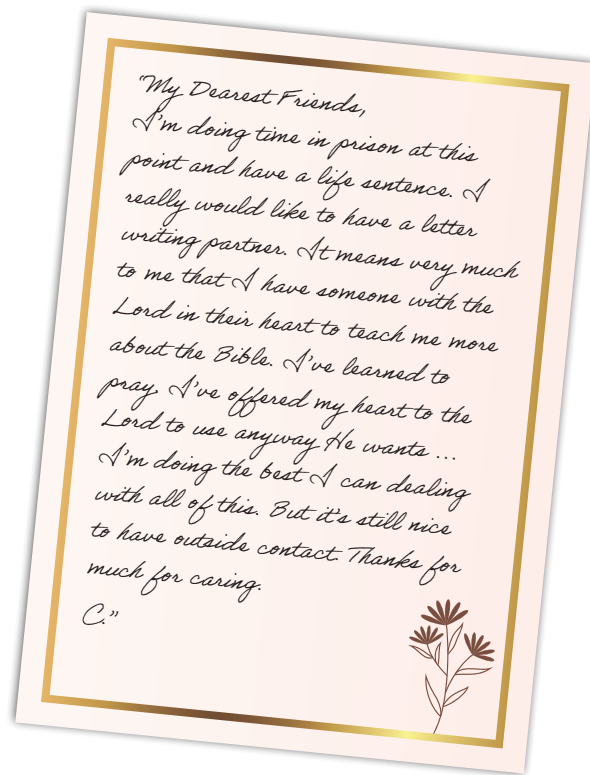
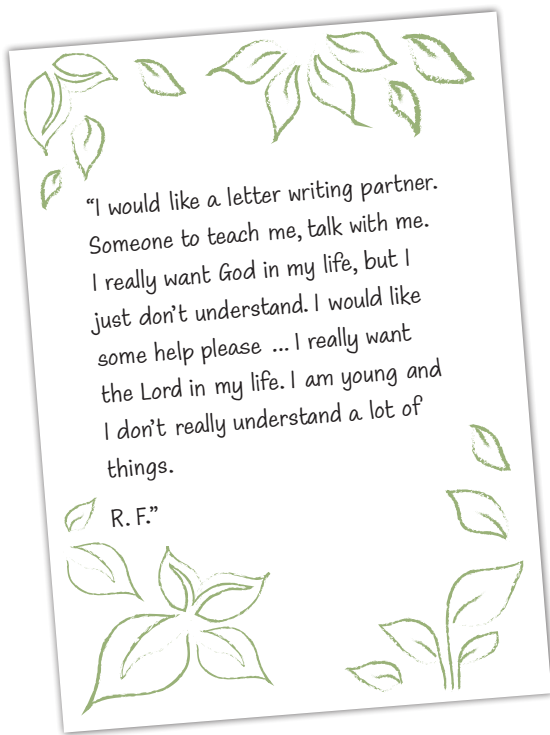
Correctional Resident Name
#A123456
Correctional Institution
PO Box 1234 B2 106L
Anytown, FL 12345-6789

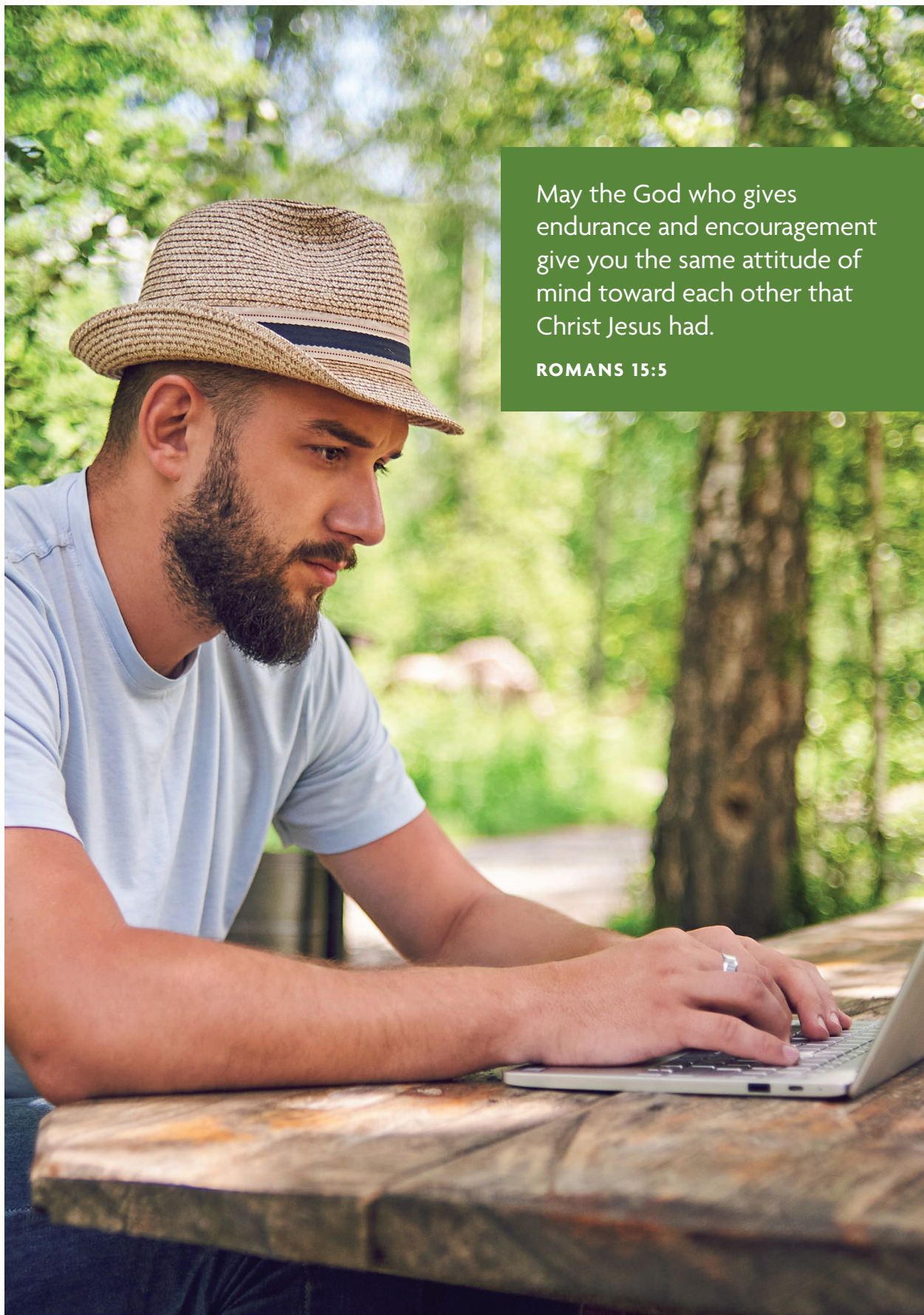
The inmate's
number is required
for an inmate to
receive their mail

Address needs to be
second line from the
bottom. City, State and
Zip on bottom line

4

Sample Requests from Correctional Residents





May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.

ROMANS 15:5

5

Writing to Correctional Residents

It is important for letter writing volunteers to be aware of appropriate boundaries in their relationship with a correctional resident. This is for the safety and well-being of both the outside letter writer and the correctional resident.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Prison Ministry Volunteer you are required to adhere to the rules and policies of the correction facility you serve. These rules will differ from institution to institution. For example, one facility may allow you to enclose postage stamps in your letter, while in many others, this is strictly forbidden. Ask the institution for a list of rules specific to letter writing/corresponding, as well as those for visitors. You will find that many of the rules that apply to visitors will be applicable to letter-writing/correspondence as well. The facility will tell you what is permitted or not permitted.

Keep your letters on a spiritual focus. This does not mean that you cannot discuss things of a general nature. Be genuine in your communication. It is natural and appropriate to speak about mutual interests, ambitions, or aspirations. Remember, your primary role in letter writing/correspondence is spiritual encouragement in the form of Christian friendship. If you keep your letters bathed in spiritual realities, they will be a source of constant encouragement to both of you and it will aid in keeping your correspondence on a healthy track.

It might be surprising to learn that in some cases, it has been the correctional resident who has been poorly treated by those writing to them. Some of these offenses can be:

- **Insensitivity to them as people.** The outside writer has his or her own agenda (if the inmate doesn't "respond right", the relationship is broken off). In a real sense, they have been led on.
- **Personal insecurities or fears of the letter writer:** Some are so fearful of "being conned" that they detect a conspiracy to rip them off between every line. Such people should not engage in letter writing in the first place, just to prove some self-aggrandizing point to themselves.
- **Hidden motives:** Oftentimes, the outside writers are not aware of their own improper motivations. These can include such things as their own emotional neediness, or a desire to be in a "safe relationship" (no physical entanglement). They may have a Messiah complex, a mother or father complex, or be on an ego trip because they can say they are "writing to someone in prison". Men writing to female prisoners can imagine themselves more desirable because they believe they are "the only game in town". Men especially, are susceptible to the "white-knight syndrome", ready to assist the poor, helpless maiden. Initially, seeing themselves as a mentor or helper, they can slowly make room for self-delusion and fantasy, making way for inappropriate emotional attachments.

These, and many other reasons, are unfair and unkind to the correctional resident. Since the reasons for writing are basically self-centered, the correctional resident often ends up being dumped or "written off" when all along the root problem is found in a selfish (and often undetected) need in the heart of the outside letter writer. The ultimate result is further rejection for the soul in prison.

This section contains guidelines to follow during your correspondence which will help you develop a healthy, Christ-focused relationship while avoiding potential pitfalls. Here are guidelines to follow when corresponding.

- It is strongly urged that women should write to women and men should write to men.
 - **Note:**
Of all the cautions that will cause the most problems when ignored, it is this one. Of all the reasons given for ignoring it, few have stood the test of time.
- **Be sure of your motive.** What is your primary reason for writing? What other reasons could there be. List them for your own awareness.
- **Do not discuss their court cases or legal issues with them.**
- **Do not engage in negative discussions concerning the prison administration, its officials, correction staff, or any other employee.**
- **Do not feed into (or otherwise encourage) vindictive, negative, vengeful, or angry discourses of any kind. Always turn such expressions toward Biblical truths and principles.**
- All correspondence, both incoming and outgoing, **never discuss another inmate or divulge the names of other inmates to others on the outside.** For security reasons, the institution usually prohibits this. Prayer meetings, for example, are a place where this can easily occur. If you want prayer for a particular need, do not reveal the person's name.
- **Do not discuss details of anything pertaining to security issues within the prison.**
These include such things as: movement times, counts, specific disciplinary procedures, transportation practices, or places where inmates work – especially, if it is outside the walls
- **Do not include an additional note or message for an inmate other than the person to whom your letter is addressed.** This also means not enclosing a note *from* someone other than yourself.
- **Remember that most correctional residents will be released within a few years.**
Unless you are personally planning to work with them when they are out, make sure that the limits of the assistance you are willing to give is clearly understood. Christian kindness and Letter Writing support is often assumed to mean that you will be there for them when they get out. This has disillusioned many inmates over the years and given Christianity a bad name as a result. Make it clear what you can or cannot do. The earlier the better.
- **Be careful of Christian phrases that can be misinterpreted.**
Statements like “I really love you in the Lord”, or even signing your letters, “In Christian Love”, or “Much Love in Christ”, can all be misconstrued by someone not accustomed to hearing such phrases. Similarly, the writing of poetry is a popular pastime in prison, but enclosed in a letter, it has a way of leading into deeper sentiments much more quickly than ordinary communication might generally permit. Emotionally needy people have a way of reading between the lines and hearing what they want to hear. This is true not only of the correctional resident correspondent, but of the outside correspondent as well.
- **Do not permit the letters to inquire too deeply about your personal feelings.**
This applies primarily to cross-gender communication. Be wary of the tone of the letter becoming too forward or familiar.
- **Do not permit the letters to probe too deeply into your personal affairs (home, business, etc.).**
- **Never send someone else's address. If they would like additional correspondence, refer them to the Letter Writing Ministry.**
For example, responding to the request, “Do you know anyone else out there who might be willing to write me?” Be especially cautious if the request is for someone of the opposite sex to write. Sometimes these requests can come in the form of a need for “more Christian fellowship”.