

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



Standard Operating Procedures

Policy Name: Faith and Character-Based Initiatives

Policy Number: 503.01

Effective Date: 08/07/2025

Page Number: 1 of 16

Authority:
Commissioner

Originating Division:
Facilities Division

Access Listing:
Level I: All Access

I. Introduction and Summary:

The Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) has established Faith- and Character-Based Initiatives to meet the needs of offenders, their families, and the communities they serve. A holistic approach is used to enhance opportunities for offenders to experience personal growth and development through enrichment of mind, body, and spirit. Faith and Character-Based Initiatives provide an environment for change through the promotion of personal responsibility, integrity, accountability, and the building of one's faith and character. Offenders have an opportunity to experience instruction, individual and group counseling, and mentoring provided by a combination of GDC staff, other state agencies, peer mentors, and community volunteers and stakeholders.

II. Authority:

A. GDC Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): 106.01 Purposes (Chaplaincy Services), 106.02 Chaplaincy Services Objectives, 106.04 Chaplaincy Services; 106.05 New Offender Orientation for Religious Programs, 106.06 Professional Development, 106.07 Chaplaincy Report, 106.08 Islamic (Muslim) Guidelines, 106.09 Marriage Procedures, 106.10 Communion Wine, 106.11 Religious Accommodations, 106.12 Wicca (Witchcraft) Guidelines, 106.13 Native American Guidelines, 107.18 R.I.S.E. - The Statewide Offender Mentoring Program, 109.01 Local Management of Volunteer Services, 206.02 Management of Offender Property or Contraband, 209.01 Offender Discipline, 220.03 Classification Committee, 407.02 Offender Store Account Guidelines, and 407.04 Contribution Trust Funds Guidelines.

III. Definitions:

As used in this SOP, these terms are defined as follows:

A. **Certified Correctional Associate** - Certified volunteers who have been approved and trained by the Department to assist in the delivery of programs and services to the Faith and Character-Based Program.

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- B. **Faith and Character-Based Dormitory** - A specially designated living unit within a facility that provides a pro-social, programmatic environment for change to those offenders who voluntarily request to participate in the program. This housing unit will foster moral and character development and cultivate pluralistic spiritual enrichment through programming centering on mind, body, and spirit.
- C. **Faith and Character-Based Initiative** - A holistic program, secular in nature, designed to equip its participants to explore and choose alternatives to criminal thinking and behavior through emphasis on spiritual, moral, and character development and life skills training. The program will meet the needs of the offender population, families, and communities, and enhance existing offender programs, and involve the community in the reentry efforts of the Department. The program will meet the needs of the development and life skills training of the offenders while supporting existing GDC programming.
- D. **Faith and Character-Based Prison** - A facility devoted to providing a pro-social, programmatic environment for change to those offenders who voluntarily request to participate in the program. This facility will foster moral and character development and cultivate pluralistic spiritual enrichment through programming centering on mind, body, and spirit.
- E. **Mentors** - An offender who is trained to assist, guide, educate, and support the offender population under staff supervision.
- F. **The State Repository of Information System (SCRIBE)** - GDC's official offender records management system.

IV. Statement of Policy and Applicable Procedures:

- A. General requirements for the Faith and Character-Based Initiatives:
1. Each designated facility-that has a Faith and Character-Based Dormitory will house offenders who have volunteered to participate in the program.

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- a. The program is a minimum of 12 months in length.
 - b. It is recommended that the dorm be a closed-dorm environment whenever possible.
 - c. Offenders selected for program participation are housed together.
2. Designated Faith and Character-Based facilities will also house offenders who have volunteered for the program.
- a. The program is a minimum of 24 months in length.
 - b. Offenders applying for the program must meet the requirements of the prison housing the program to include mental health and medical status.
- B. Participation in the program will not be a disruption to the daily operation of the facility, will not interfere with regularly assigned work/program activities, and will not disrupt the core mission of the facility.
- C. Offenders must voluntarily fill out an application and go through the approval process for selection into the program. No one should ever be placed in a Faith and Character-Based Initiative living environment without having volunteered and being on an approved list. The Faith and Character-Based Counselor will provide this list to the Classification Committee, ID officer, and any other supervisory staff who are authorized to conduct bed moves.
1. 12-Month Dormitory Program:
- a. Applications will be made available in areas designated by the facility to include Counseling, Chaplaincy, and officer workstations.

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- b. Interested offenders will submit an application to the Chaplain and/or Counselor. Race, age, religion or sex will not be factors in the approval process.
- c. The application will be reviewed by the Counselor assigned to the Faith and Character-Based Initiative.
- d. As is done with all other programming, the Classification Committee will assign selected offenders to the Faith and Character-Based Dormitory.

Note: SCRIBE entry required at this point.

Note: For Women's Facilities, all components remain the same, but the program will be run open-ended due to the high discharge rate of female offenders. The program coordinator will coordinate gender specific programs.

2. 24-Month Facility Program;

- a. Interested offenders will submit an application to the Chaplain or Counselor for placement consideration. Applications will be made available in areas designated by the facility to include Counseling, Chaplaincy, and officer workstations.
- b. An application will be submitted for review and approval by the institutional classification committee. Applicants will read and sign the "Offender Contract" and "Program Rules" during the interview, and the staff recommendation will be forwarded to the Classification Committee for review and assignment. Race, age, religion, or sex will not be factors in the approval process. Priority should be given to inmates who have the earliest maximum release dates or TPMs.

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- c. Approved Applications will be sent from the Deputy Warden of Care and Treatment at the housing facility to the Deputy Warden of Care and Treatment at the receiving facility. The offender will be vetted by Care and Treatment and Security Staff at the receiving facility, and the final approved application will be forwarded to Offender Administration.
- D. Offenders participating in the Faith and Character-Based Program should meet certain selection criteria to be placed in the dorm.
 1. An offender should not be placed in the program as any sort of sanction or because a staff member determines the offender is “in need” of a program of this nature.
 2. It is recommended that the offender be Disciplinary Report (DR)-free for 180 days. However, each offender should be assessed on an individual basis.
 3. The offender must have demonstrated a willingness to participate in self-help programs and activities.
 4. There will be no documented Security Threat Group activity for a minimum of 12 months.
 5. For the dormitory program, offenders must have a minimum of 12 months remaining on his/her sentence at the point that they are projected to start Phase One. For the facility programs, they must have a minimum of 24 months left on their sentence. Consideration for the facility program for those offenders under 24 months will be made on an individual basis.
 6. Offenders approved for Initiative participation must not be assigned to any other Special Housing.
- E. An offender may be removed from the program either voluntarily or involuntarily through the classification process.

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1. A voluntary termination at the offender's request must be in writing and signed by the offender. This documentation will be noted in SCRIBE, and the signed request will be placed in the offender's institutional file. Sanctions should not be issued for a voluntary withdrawal request.

Note: All withdrawal requests should be thoroughly addressed through the peer mentoring system and with the assigned Counselor to try to work with the offender with the goal of the offender remaining in the program.

2. An involuntary termination may occur due to a lack of progress toward program goals or consistent violation of rules/procedures.
3. The decision to remove an offender from the program will be a collaborative decision of the assigned Faith and Character-Based Counselor, Chaplain, Security Staff, and the Classification Committee. Removal from the program will be processed through the Classification Committee.
 - a. Disciplinary action may be a cause for dismissal, but removal from the program is not a disciplinary sanction.
 - b. The severity of the DR should be taken into consideration. Alternative sanctions that directly address the inappropriate behavior should be considered.
4. After voluntary or involuntary dismissal, the offender may reapply after maintaining a clear record for 6 months or a time period designated by the facility.
5. Medical or Out to Court status that exceeds 30 days will result in an offender being temporarily removed from the program. The offender will be eligible to be reassigned at the start of the next scheduled Phase after returning to the facility or becoming cleared medically.

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6. The dismissal code is to be entered in SCRIBE by the Operations Analyst.
- F. The Deputy Warden of Care and Treatment, or designee, is ultimately responsible for the implementation and operation of the Faith and Character-Based Dormitory.
 1. The Counselor(s) assigned to the Faith and Character-Based Dormitory will:
 - a. Manage the program.
 - b. Coordinate volunteer recruitment with the Chaplain or volunteer coordinator.
 - c. Conduct Faith and Character-Based program applicants' interview and orientation.
 - d. Review the NGA and develop an individual plan for each participant.
 - e. Conduct individual and group counseling sessions as determined by program components.
 - f. Submit documentation to the Classification Committee for possible dismissal of offenders from the Faith and Character-Based Program.
 2. All offender participants will be assigned to the Faith and Character-Based Counselor's caseload during their time in the program.
 - a. It is recommended that the counselor assigned to the Faith and Character-Based Dormitory should only carry the Faith and Character-Based Initiative participants on their caseload. If not, it is recommended that this counselor assist with groups and programming. If the dormitory program has fewer than 100 participants, the counselor may carry other offenders on the caseload to reach 100. Case management documentation will follow the guidelines of the current counseling criteria.

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Note: Within the Facility Program, the Counselors will be an integral part of the daily operations of the program.

3. The Chaplain will:

- a. Assist in the management of the Faith and Character-Based program.
- b. Be responsible for recruiting volunteers.
- c. Ensure that the faith and spiritual needs of the program are addressed in a **non-denominational, pluralistic, multi-faith, and inter-faith manner**. and ensure no preference will be given to one denomination.

Note: Offenders have the ability to practice their chosen faith in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

- d. Coordinate/lead cultural and faith diversity classes. A variety of faith/diversity classes will be offered. Chaplain(s) will ensure with all staff that the programs in faith are not evangelical in any manner and are only for educational purposes.
 - e. Facilitate "Confronting Self" groups, as needed.
 - f. Coordinate volunteers to teach faith, diversity, and character classes.
 - g. Assist in the coordination and monitoring of the Aftercare Component of the program.
4. Certified Correctional Associate (Volunteers) will assist with the delivery of programs and will conduct approved activities in the Faith and Character-Based Program.

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- a. Volunteer participation is very important to the program, and volunteers with a variety of skills and expertise should be recruited.
5. Correctional Officers will be specially trained by the Faith and Character-Based Counselor to support the basic principles of the initiative. It is recommended that this be a designated Post assignment. Within the prison program, all staff will receive this training.
6. The Warden is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the Faith and Character-Based Initiative is a part of the facility's mission and that an institutional team concept will be supported throughout the institution to enhance success in reducing recidivism and managing offenders.
- G. The Faith and Character-Based Dormitory program, for male institutions, is a 4-phase, 12-month program. Each phase lasts 3 months. If the program is a 24-month program, this must be approved by the Central Office.
- H. The prison program is a 4-phase, 24-month program with each phase lasting 6 months. The prison has the option to keep the offender within the program for mentoring and to participate in a graduation phase.
- I. The Faith and Character-Based Initiatives are structured as follows:
 1. The program will consist of a minimum of the following components:
 - a. Faith Enrichment;
 - b. Character Building;
 - c. Career Planning and Workforce Development;
 - d. Academic Education;

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- e. Leisure Skills;
 - f. Substance Abuse;
 - g. Cognitive Behavioral Programming, and
 - h. Community Service and Family Relationships.
2. These components will be divided into 4 Phases:
- a. Phase I is the Foundational Phase.
 - i. Offenders will be assessed to determine reviewed to determine need in the component areas of criminogenic risk and need in the 8 component areas.
 - ii. The offender will participate in programming as noted in their GDC assessment.
 - iii. Each offender will enroll in a minimum of 2 elective classes.
 - (A) The elective classes will be taught by peer mentors and volunteers:
 - (B) All curriculum developed by the offenders must be approved by the Faith and Character-Based Counselor; and
 - (C) The Faith and Character-Based Counselor must keep a copy of the curriculum (at a minimum, an outline) of all elective classes.
 - iv. Educational programming will begin with a variety of faith-based issues and topics.

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- v. Areas of character development are explored through a variety of means such as journals, groups, and role-play.

(A) Journaling is a mandatory part of the program. Participants must be given topics to write about at a minimum of once a week. The Faith and Character-Based Counselor will be responsible for assuring that the participants are completing this.

- vi. All programming in which the offender is currently enrolled will continue.

b. Phase II is the Discovery Phase of the Program.

- i. Offenders will explore their strengths and weaknesses and begin scheduled programming as identified by assessment.
- ii. If an offender tests positive on a drug test in the program, it IS NOT an automatic removal from the program. Offenders will be reviewed for the need for further substance abuse programming. The offender should be referred to substance abuse programming to work on the addiction issues, Next Generation Assessment (NGA), and elective programming.
- iii. Education, detail, elective, and other programs will continue.

c. Phase III is the Transformation Phase of the Program.

- i. The offender should begin to exhibit signs of change in many aspects of their lives.
- ii. Participation in all programs from the Discovery Phase will continue.
- iii. Offenders referred to "Confronting the Self" group will begin.

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~~iv.~~ Career Exploration will increase, and the Interest Profiler will be administered.

~~(A)~~ The offender will participate in the Reentry Assessment Center and receive training on job-related skills.

~~(B)~~ All offenders in this phase should develop an active résumé based on the Interest Profiler and Job Development Plan.

~~(C)~~ When possible, the offender should have their paperwork saved on a flash drive, and this should be placed in the TOPPSTEP folder upon completion.

~~(D)~~ While working within the Reentry Assessment Center, the Faith and Character-Based Counselor will be responsible for securing the drives when not in use.

Note: The Faith and Character-Based Dormitory Career Center will be provided with a minimum of one (1) computer for the sole use of the offenders participating in the program.

v. A community service project will begin.

d. Phase IV is the Transition Phase of the program.

i. Offenders learn to apply to their community, within the facility, and upon release, the lessons learned within the program.

ii. Offenders in this phase will begin peer facilitation, working with offenders enrolled in the earlier phases of the program.

(A) Upon graduation from the program, offenders may also be kept in the program as mentors.

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- iii. The offender will continue programs from other phases.
- iv. The offender will complete the Faith and Character-Based Program evaluation.
- e. The Graduate Phase:
 - i. This after-care component allows the participant the ability to develop individual release plans while assisting others within the Faith and Character-Based Program.
 - ii. Mentoring:
 - (A) Individual participants will be paired with mentors to establish positive contacts for release.
 - iii. Reentry Skills Building Program:
 - (A) The participant will continue with the program and use the skills learned to assist with the program.
 - iv. Peer Support:
 - (A) The participant will engage in active peer support of the Faith and Character-Based Program.
- f. All Faith and Character-Based program graduates should participate in a formalized graduation ceremony. These graduations will be a minimum of 2 times a year. Family should be invited, and food should be part of the ceremony. It is recommended that Faith and Character-Based Program graduation be held independently of other programs' graduation ceremonies. It is important that non-graduating program participants be part of the graduation ceremony. If graduation ceremonies are combined, a

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separate celebration should be planned for graduates of the Faith and Character-Based Program only. Each graduate should be given a graduation certificate.

- g. For the dormitory program, the graduates will be placed back in the general population. For the facility program, the offender will be transferred to a facility that best suits their case plan or will continue in a mentoring capacity at the prison. The mission of the graduates is to go into the general population and work with General Population inmates. It is recommended that the graduates be placed in dorms in groups. Graduates should meet a minimum of once a quarter, but in order to enhance the lessons learned throughout the program, it is recommended that graduates meet once a month. These meetings should be used for continued community development and discussion of future goals and projects for the graduates.
- h. A minimum of two (2) Family Days will be conducted in each program. These programs may be part of graduation but are recommended to be separate events.
- i. Mentors may be chosen from each graduating class to assist in a variety of tasks, such as continued work within the Faith and Character-Based Program, work with Chaplaincy, and assistance in individual dorm settings in areas like education and character development.
- j. Inmate Benefit Funds (IBF) may be used for graduation and family day events if all necessary approvals discussed in the IBF policy are obtained and IBF funding is available. Use of donations is also, a key component within the Faith and Character Programs. Guidelines outlined in SOP 407.04 Contribution Trust Funds Guidelines must be followed. Below are some, but not all, requirements of SOP 407.04, Contribution Trust Funds Guidelines:

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- i. All donations must be used for the good of the program and not for an individual within the program;
- ii. Donors shall provide a formal signed letter specifying the purpose of the funds, the method of donation, and, if applicable, the specific items or uses for which the funds can be used for. This letter should be kept on file in the business office.
- iii. A log with accompanying receipts must be maintained for all items bought for the program;
- iv. Gift cards are preferred over cash donations, but all receipts must be retained and purchases logged;
- v. Reloadable “credit cards” are not permissible;
- vi. Families of the offender may contribute to the program, but it must be used for the program and not the individual family member; and
- vii. The Deputy Warden of Care and Treatment is responsible for assuring that the items purchased with the donations follow all guidelines, and the Wardens and Deputy Wardens of Administration must be kept informed of all donations.

Note: Inmate benefit funds can be used to assist in funding the program.

V. Attachments:

Attachment 1: Offender Application for Dorm

Attachment 2: Offender Contract for Program

Attachment 3: Program Rules

Attachment 4: Volunteer Contract

Attachment 5: Faith and Character-Based Prison Application

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VI. Record Retention of Forms Relevant to this Policy:

Upon completion, Attachments 1, 2, and 5 shall be kept in the offender's record in SCRIBE, and a hard copy shall be placed in the offender's institutional file. Attachment 3 shall be utilized as required and destroyed when revised or obsolete. Attachment 4 shall be filed with the Facility Chaplain and updated annually.