



**CHURCH AMBASSADOR
NETWORK**

INITIATIVE OF THE FAMILY LEADER FOUNDATION

THE BREAKING BONDAGE INITIATIVE

A VISION FOR CHURCH AND STATE PARTNERSHIP
TO BRING SHALOM ACROSS IOWA



**“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our
hearts are restless until they rest in You.”**

- Saint Augustine

BONDAGE IN IOWA

In the Church Ambassador Network, a ministry of The FAMiLY Leader Foundation, we work to come alongside the State of Iowa to help people break free from bondage and prevent others from falling into it. The Gospel of Jesus Christ brings the hope of freedom, rest and peace. It is the power by which the Church of Jesus Christ has seen people rescued from the deadly grips of bondage for many generations.

Bondage:

Being unable to escape from a circumstance or behavior

All of creation lives in some form of bondage and all of creation is crying out to be set free.

This booklet gives an overview of critical areas of bondage impacting Iowans, counties in our state that have most felt bondage's effect, ministries that are successfully breaking bondage, and key systemic problems and solutions to address in order to bring shalom in the State of Iowa.

36.2%

OF CHILDREN IN IOWA ARE BORN OUT OF WEDLOCK

https://data.idph.state.ia.us/t/IDPH-DataViz/views/OutOfWedlockBirths/StateCountyDataTable?iframeSizedToWindow=true&%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=no&%3AshowVizHome=no&%3Arender=false

11% STATE POPULATION BELOW POVERTY LEVEL AS OF 2024

<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2024.S1701q=poverty+level+by+state#:~:text=Download%20Table%20Data-,American%20Community%20Survey,-S1701Poverty%20Status>

8,587

IOWA PRISON POPULATION AS OF JANUARY 2026

<https://doc-search.iowa.gov/dailystatistics>

3,058

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE AS OF LATE 2025

MORE THAN A 50% DROP SINCE 2020

<https://www.kcci.com/article/kcci-investigates-facts-about-iowa-foster-care-system/69463827>

22.5%
BINGE DRINKING RATE
(HIGHEST IN THE NATION)

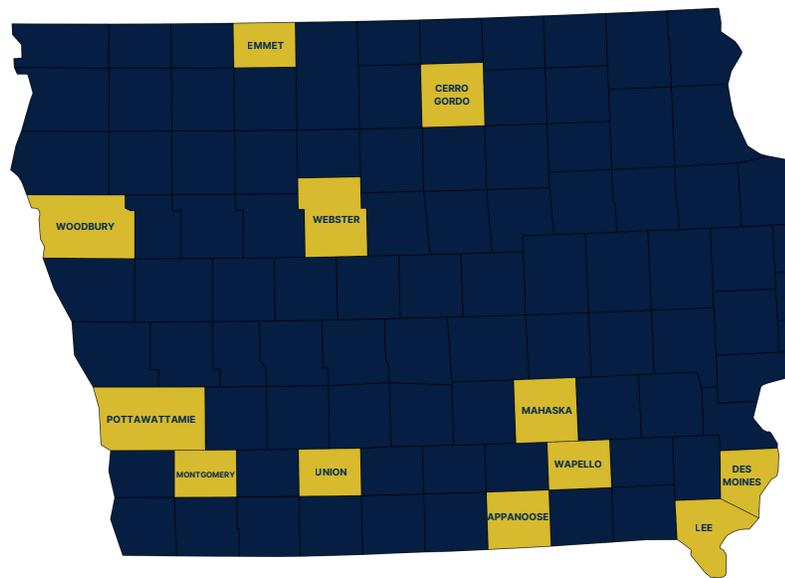
<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/health/2025/05/12/binge-drinking-rates-iowa-cdc-data/83534858007/>

36%
OF IOWA MARRIAGES
END IN DIVORCE
https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/divorce_states/divorce_rates.htm

9.39%
STATEWIDE SUBSTANCE
ABUSE RATE
 The Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP) 2020 Report

29%
OF IOWA FAMILIES HAVE
ONLY A SINGLE PARENT
IN THE HOME
<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/release/tableseid=359379&rid=412>

To get a better snapshot of Iowa, we have provided both a statewide overview and a county level per capita analysis on key areas of bondage including poverty rate, child abuse, foster-care placements, food insecurity, prison admission, bankruptcy and substance abuse rates for all 99 counties. The counties highlighted are those ranking highest in bondage on a per capita basis.



The two common denominators across all 12 of these counties are **addictions** and **the breakdown of the family**.

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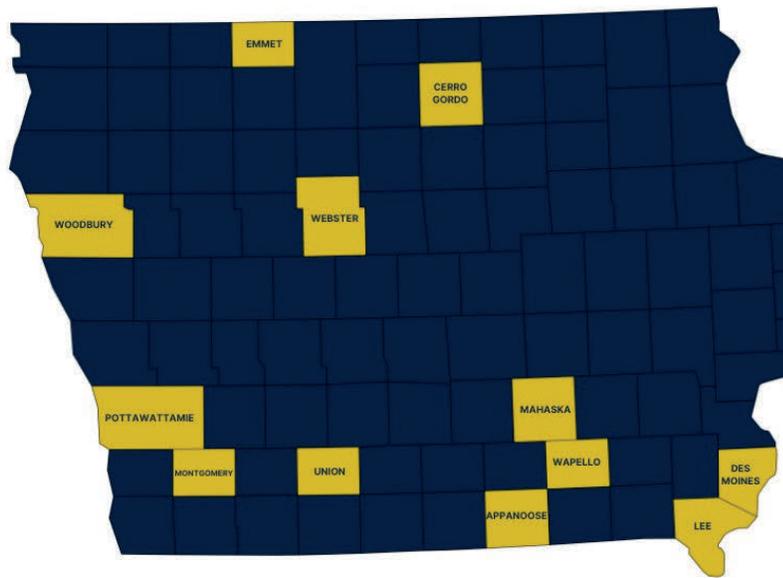
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#1 WEBSTER

- 3rd in substance abuse rate
- 3rd in single parent rate
- 5th in % of children in foster-care
- 5th in divorce rate
- 6th in adult food insecurity rate
- 6th in child out of wedlock rate
- 8th in prison admission rate per 100,000
- 11th in child food insecurity rate
- 15th in percentage below poverty

#2 WAPELLO

- 2nd in substance abuse rate
- 3rd in bankruptcy rate
- 4th in child out of wedlock rate
- 5th in jail admission rate per 100,000
- 9th in percentage below poverty
- 10th in child food insecurity rate
- 10th in single parent rate
- 11th in adult food insecurity rate
- 13th in % of children in foster-care

#3 MONTGOMERY

- 2nd in % of children in foster-care.
- 2nd in single parent rate.
- 3rd in child food insecurity rate.
- 8th in jail admission rate per 100,000.
- 9th in child abuse rate.
- 9th in child out of wedlock rate.
- 11th in adult food insecurity rate.
- 15th in substance abuse rate.

#4 APPANOOSE

- 1st in foster-care rate.
- 2nd in child food insecurity rate.
- 4th in poverty rate.
- 6th in prison admission rate per 100,000.
- 7th in substance abuse rate.
- 9th in adult food insecurity rate.
- 10th in divorce rate.

#5 WOODBURY

- 2nd in prison admission rate per 100,000.
- 2nd in child out of wedlock rate.
- 5th in single parents rate.
- 5th in substance abuse rate.
- 6th in foster-care rate.
- 7th in jail admission rate per 100,000.
- 9th in bankruptcy rate.

#6 DES MOINES

- 1st in bankruptcy rate.
- 1st in single parent rate.
- 1st in child out of wedlock rate.
- 4th in divorce rate.
- 5th in adult food insecurity rate.
- 6th in child food insecurity rate.
- 7th in percentage below poverty rate.
- 12th in substance abuse rate.

#7 LEE

- 1st in child food insecurity rate.
- 3rd in child abuse rate.
- 3rd in divorce rate.
- 3rd in child out of wedlock rate.
- 4th in adult food insecurity rate.
- 11th in single parent rate.
- 13th in poverty rate.

#8 UNION

- 4th in substance abuse rate.
- 6th in child abuse rate.
- 9th in divorce rate.
- 10th in prison admission rate per 100,000.
- 12th in poverty rate.
- 14th in foster-care rate.

#9 POTTAWATTAMIE

- 2nd in bankruptcy rate.
- 7th in foster-care rate.
- 7th in child out of wedlock rate.
- 8th in divorce rate.
- 9th in prison admission rate per 100,000.
- 14th in single parent rate.
- 16th in substance abuse rate.

#10 EMMET

- 3rd in foster-care rate.
- 4th in child abuse rate.
- 4th in bankruptcy rate.
- 8th in child out of wedlock rate.
- 13th in single parent rate.

#11 CERRO GORDO

- 1st in substance abuse rate.
- 9th in jail admission rate per 100,000.
- 14th in child abuse rate.
- 14th in child out of wedlock rate.
- 15th in single parent rate.

#12 MAHASKA

- 6th in substance abuse rate.
- 7th in prison admission rate per 100,000.
- 7th highest divorce rate.
- 16th highest poverty rate.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF SHALOM

In the Church Ambassador Network, a ministry of The FAMiLY LEADER Foundation, we hold to the biblical teaching that God created the world and it was good. The world was created in perfect Shalom. Shalom is a word and concept used in Old Testament scriptures that does not translate well into English. In English it means **good, rest and peace**.

GOOD

Complete. Whole. God looked at Creation and said that it was good. It was complete. It did not need anything added or subtracted from it.

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed...So the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed...and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.”

Genesis 1:31 -2:2

REST

A place of quiet. Free from motion or disturbance. When something is complete, you can have a true rest in both your body and your soul.

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28

PEACE

Internal and external harmony. Where there is true rest there is peace. No hostility in the soul, the body, others, or creation. Only peace.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:7

WHAT HAPPENED TO SHALOM?

Shalom was lost when sin entered the world. Sin occurred and continues to occur when a person is convinced that what God calls good or complete is not good or complete. It needs something added to or subtracted from it. Satan successfully convinced Adam and Eve that creation was not complete and they chose to disobey - sinning against God. Mankind has been choosing this ever since. Sin has made creation incomplete, resulting in a loss of rest and peace; bringing hostility both between mankind and creation and more importantly between mankind and God.



WHAT BREAKS SHALOM?



"Seeking Shalom Training" provided by Philip Herman at Highland Park Community Development Association (Des Moines, IA) and The Lupton Center (Atlanta, GA)

WHAT IS CHURCH-STATE PARTNERSHIP?

Church-State partnership is stewarding seasons of favor that God gives His people with governing authorities, for the rebuilding of our communities through the revival of His Church, to the glory of His name. More practically, it is the fruit of connecting shepherds of the Church (pastors) to shepherds of Government (governing authorities) and equipping those shepherds to work together in meeting the needs of their community.

WHY CHURCH-STATE PARTNERSHIP?

OUR COMMUNITIES NEED VISION

People have a deep and growing need for a compelling vision for their communities and continue to look to governing authorities and other leaders to bring a life-giving vision.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” - Psalm 29:18

VISION COMES FROM GOD

The Church Ambassador Network believes that the only source of real, lasting vision is God. In the story of Joseph and Pharaoh, God gave Joseph vision to bless all of Egypt. Pharaoh, recognizing that it was God who gave the vision, carried it out with his God-given authority as a minister of government.

“Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are. You will be over my house, and all my people will obey your commands.” Genesis 41:39-40

THE CHURCH AND STATE NEED EACH OTHER

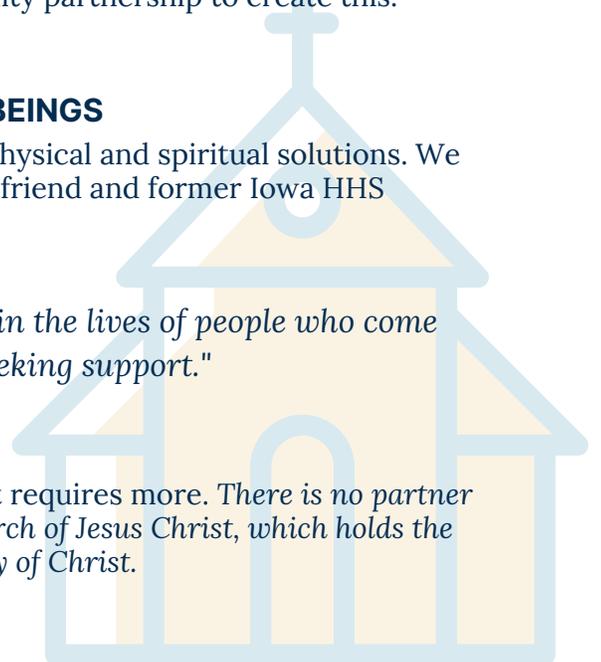
Iowa's communities (especially those in the 12 counties most in bondage) need vision. The government on its own is not able to cast a life giving vision, foster hope, or create community, it has always been dependent on community partnership to create this.

PEOPLE ARE BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL BEINGS

Any answer for people in bondage must involve both physical and spiritual solutions. We see this reflected in Iowans' most pressing needs. Our friend and former Iowa HHS Director said this:

“Hopelessness and social isolation are prevalent in the lives of people who come to Health and Human Services seeking support.”

There is no simple physical solution to these needs - it requires more. *There is no partner better suited to meet these essential needs than the Church of Jesus Christ, which holds the hope of the Gospel and real community through the body of Christ.*

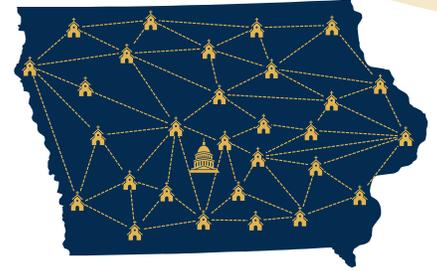


CHURCH-STATE PARTNERSHIP IN IOWA

In the Church Ambassador Network, we are building a network of Community Impact Churches from various evangelical denominations across the state. These churches share the Gospel, hold to the teachings of Christ as written in Scriptures, raise up disciples, and pour into their community. Through these churches, we are developing a county by county strategy to bring transformation to our communities through Church-State partnerships.

CHURCH PLANTING AND REVITALIZATION ACROSS THE STATE

For church-state partnership to work effectively across Iowa, we need more healthy churches. To this end, we have built a church planting and revitalization cohort with the simple goal of more healthy evangelical churches. We want rural and mid-size Iowa towns to have multiple healthy evangelical churches because we have seen that **healthy churches** bring **healthy parachurch ministries** which bring **healthy church-state partnerships** resulting in **healthy communities**.



Healthy Churches



Healthy Para-Church Ministries



Healthy Church-State Partnerships



Healthy Communities

A HEALTHILY CHURCHED COMMUNITY

- Has pastors that have been serving faithfully for a long time.
- Has healthy large, mid-size and small churches.
- Has churches that love their communities.
- Has churches that are loved by their communities
- Has multiple denominations with a strong presence.
- Has churches united to reach the community.

THE WORK STARTED WITH FOSTER CARE

In 2018, we were challenged by Governor Reynolds to help families before they were in need of intervention through state foster-care. It was through this challenge that our first church-state partnership formed. Together, we passed the Family First Act, changed the culture of the Iowa HHS team, launched a preventative foster-care ministry called Together For Good and made strides in strengthening Iowa's foster families. *Because of this partnership work between the Church and State, we have seen Iowa's foster-care rate drop by 50%.*

THE BREAKING BONDAGE INITIATIVE

A comprehensive partnership effort built on connecting shepherds to shepherds (pastors to government leaders), and equipping shepherds to create partnerships. We do this through:

THE BREAKING BONDAGE TOUR

Bringing together pastors and state leaders to break bondage in their county/community.

SOCIAL WORKER APPRECIATION

Hosting social worker appreciation events following breaking bondage tours to connect them to churches and ministries and show appreciation to them as they are often unseen.



MINISTRY LINK

After hearing social workers' needs as expressed at appreciation events, we developed a platform to connect church and ministry services to social workers. This platform is made to stand alone in addition to plugging into Thrive Iowa.

MARRIAGE MATTERS

To be truly preventative in social services, we must address the breakdown of the family. MARRIAGE MATTERS is a service that comes alongside churches and ministries to build out programs to meet people where they are and cultivate a healthy marriage and family culture.

CHRISTIAN COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES

We have seen a worker shortage in critical roles in our communities and have partnered with Christian colleges and universities, elevating the state as a potential career/service opportunity and streamlining necessary education for these pivotal roles.

REPLICATING KEY MINISTRIES

As we've come alongside the state to see bondage broken in our communities, we have put an emphasis on strengthening Iowa's child welfare system while attacking the roots of poverty. In this work, we have discovered key partners that are changing the trajectory of individual lives. We aim to multiply these partners across the state of Iowa.



OUR COUNTIES OF FOCUS

Our desire is to build out this model in all of Iowa's 99 Counties. We currently have critical mass to begin in the following Counties well, with the goal of replicating/spreading across the state.

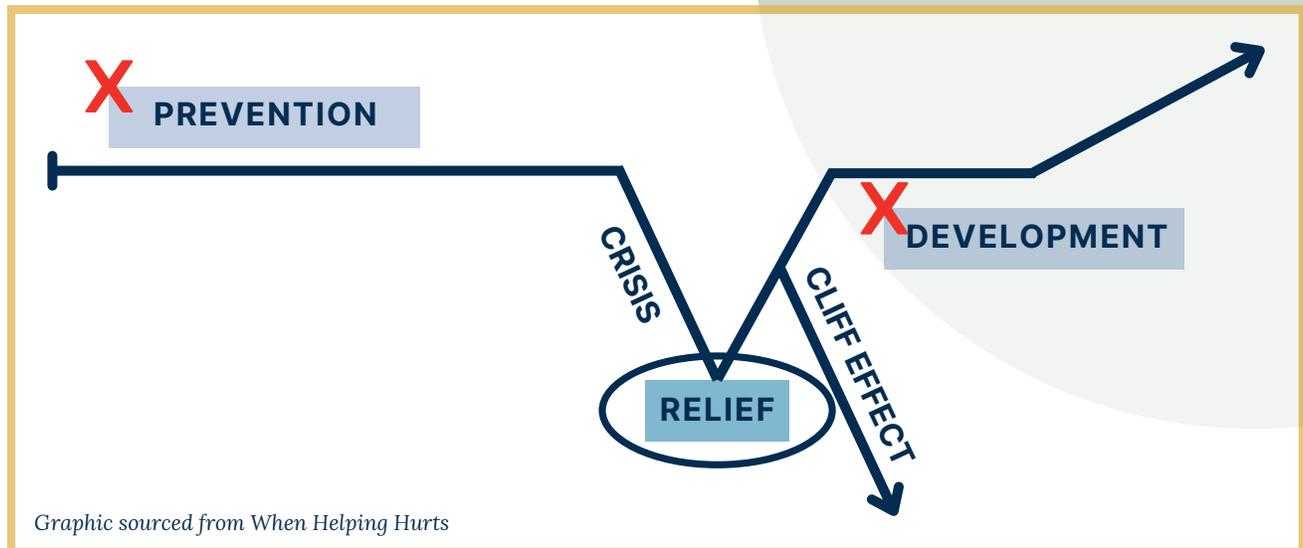
SCOTT
WARREN
WAPELLO
MARSHALL
DUBUQUE

POLK
BLACKHAWK
MAHASKA
STORY
WASHINGTON
JOHNSON

SIoux
CERRO GORDO
BREMER
SE IOWA
WOODBURRY

CHANGING OUR APPROACH TO BONDAGE

THE SHORTCOMINGS OF OUR CURRENT SYSTEM:



PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER:

- **We need to make a long term investment into people:** Generational poverty cannot be transactional, it requires a long-term investment into people. We need to walk alongside people as they develop more than we need to invest in resources. Time is our best investment.
- **Our social service programs must get beyond relief:** Investing heavily into relief can help bring temporary benefit, but if you do not help people move on it will result in generational bondage. We need to begin investing as much if not more into prevention, rehabilitation and development, working alongside community partners.

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH - WALKING WITH PEOPLE





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