

From prisoner to activist shareholder

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

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Last week Marian Wright Edelman [chronicled](#) the work of Strength to Love, a prisoner reentry program run by the Church of Christ-Right Now in Washington D.C. I visited the church's offices last year when I was writing [a Century article on its pastoral training program](#). While I was there, a staff member turned around at his desk and asked church director Rebecca Stelle, "What if we bought stock in a prison? What if Strength to Love participants became stockholders in the same prison company that incarcerated them?"

A few months later Strength to Love made this a reality. Each ex-offender bought one share of stock in the Corrections Corporation of America, and together they drove to Tennessee to attend a stockholders' meeting. There they expressed their concern over the treatment of prisoners.

Even more importantly, they expressed their concern about what Edelman calls the "Cradle to Prison Pipeline" that imprisons 50 percent of black boys in the United States and gives the U.S. the highest incarceration rates of any country in the world. At the heart of the problem is a system that "has a conflict of interest at its core." To thrive, the corporation must fill beds with inmates.

The trip to Tennessee was energizing, but the problem that Strength to Love is addressing is enormous. By empowering ex-offenders, the group is gradually building a legacy that's worth everyone's investment.