Why the Angels Sang …
(Part I – Miami and Seffner, Florida)

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance.” Luke 15:7.

The angels had much to sing about this month. Four precious souls dedicated or rededicated their lives to God through baptism. Here are their stories …

Over the last twenty-seven years, on a periodic basis, Dr. Rafael Lorenzo, a retired veterinarian, and his wife, Felina, a medical transport worker, have studied the Bible with several people. Pastor Idel Suárez, Pastor Ciro Arevalo, Sister Irma Suárez, and Sister Elsa Argueta have, at different times, all opened the Scriptures with the Lorenzo family. The Lorenzos’ conversion experience reminds us of the truth found in 1 Corinthians 3:6: “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.”

Recently, the Lorenzos went through a heart-wrenching tragedy. Through the darkest hours of their experience, God gently spoke to them. The bits and pieces of truth they had gathered over the years finally came together into a perfect whole, and they decided to commit their lives to the Lord in baptism.

On March 10, in sunny Miami, members from the Miami, Homestead, and Tampa churches (all in Florida) came together to witness the blessed event. The Lorenzos were joined in baptism by a young mother of two, Ana Ilén Santos.

The daughter of a Bible worker who is also the church leader of the Homestead church, Sister Ana has heard much of the love of God throughout the years. Her mother has prayed faithfully for Sr. Ana and was thrilled to finally see her child baptized.

Immediately after all were baptized, they were offered the right hand of fellowship and issued special Bible verses to give them encouragement in their Christian journey. Colossians 3:2-4 had been chosen for Brother Rafael: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” His wife, Sister Felina, received I Corinthians 1:7: “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And Sister Ana was blessed with I Timothy 4:12: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

The baptismal ceremony concluded with an altar call. Pastor Suárez asked if there were any visitors who were interested in preparing for baptism. Four souls stepped forward, including one particular young man who had especially noticed the changes taking place in Sister Ana Ilén’s life—her husband.

The following Monday, March 12, Pastor Suárez arrived at a beach in Seffner, Florida, to perform another baptism. At eighty-two years of age, Brother Luis Rodriguez, a retired dental technician, son of the first Reformers in Puerto Rico, and a singer with several CDs to his name, had asked to be rebaptized. Only a few people were able to attend since it was in the middle of a Monday; but as Pastor Suárez extended the right hand of fellowship to Brother Luis, the courts of heaven rang! His baptismal verse is found in I Corinthians 1:8: “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Let us rejoice over these new souls as all of Heaven certainly does.
March 24, 2012, was a special day for the church in Sacramento, California. The precious wife of Pastor Henry Dering braved the cold waters of the American River to be rebaptized, by her husband. The following is her testimony.

"Over the course of my life so far, I have learned much about God’s character. I believe I have always loved Him, though imperfectly; but my love and appreciation for Him have grown so much that I stand in awe and humble gratitude for His amazing love and patience with me, a sinner. I have realized the absolute truth of what the apostle Paul writes in Romans 2:4: ‘Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?’

“It is my heart’s deepest longing to have God’s full forgiveness and to be part of His family in heaven as well as here on earth. All that this world can offer is not able to cure a broken heart, to restore peace to the soul, to dispel anxiety, or to eliminate disease. Fame, genius, and talent are powerless to cheer up a broken heart and rebuild a ruined life. But a broken heart is healed through forgiveness. Both he who forgives and he who is forgiven feel joy and peace.

“I am so thankful for the warm acceptance, encouragement, and expressions of love I have received. Even though in my heart I already loved all my brothers and sisters, I wanted to publicly renew my covenant with God through baptism. Sabbath, March 24, was a most memorable day, rich with blessings and answered prayers! I felt God’s smile and approval and am so thankful for the joy He gave me!

“With much love and sincere appreciation,
Verica Dering”

News from the World of Education:
Cedar Christian School
Margie Seely, AU Education Leader, Cedartown, GA

At the beginning of February 2012, Cedar Christian School applied for and received full accreditation from the state of Georgia for kindergarten through ninth grade. Cedar Christian School also received accreditation to provide non-traditional education for grades ten through twelve. The staff and students praise God for His guidance and provision.
Missionary Minute:
Exploring Prison Ministry

“I was in prison, and ye came unto Me.” Matthew 25:36.

In 1974, Chuck Colson, aide to former President Richard Nixon, pled guilty to obstruction of justice during the investigation of actions leading up to the Watergate scandal. Colson was described by The Washington Post as “one of the most powerful presidential aides, variously described as a troubleshooter and as a ‘master of dirty tricks.’” He was known as the ‘‘evil genius’ of the Nixon administration, who once said he[Colson]’d walk over his grandmother to get the president elected to a second term.”

Faced with a conviction and an impending prison sentence, Colson had reached the bottom of his life. He was a broken man. Filled with remorse and contrition, he gave his heart to Jesus Christ and became a Christian. Seven months later, Colson left prison a changed man. In 1993, Colson said humbly, “I shudder to think of what I’d been if I had not gone to prison. Lying on the rotten floor of a cell, you know it’s not prosperity or pleasure that’s important, but the maturing of the soul.”

But Chuck Colson was not content to stay out of prisons. He couldn’t forget the inmates he had met while he was incarcerated. Two years after his release, in 1976, Chuck Colson began Prison Fellowship Ministries (www.prisonfellowship.org), a ministry dedicated to “seek[ing] the transformation of prisoners and their reconciliation to God, family, and community through the power and truth of Jesus Christ.”

Many people think of prisons as a bad place. And yet, as was the experience of Chuck Colson, prisons can be a crucible of change. Sadly, many criminals who have been genuinely converted live out their lives within these walls, paying their debt to society but totally forgotten by their brothers and sisters in the faith. Just as our Christian walk is bolstered by fellowship with like believers, prisoners who are Christians also need our encouragement and love. Others need to hear the gospel spoken at a time in their lives when they will be the most receptive to its message.

Several years ago, the General Conference pastors of our church in Cedartown, Georgia, contacted the warden of the local men’s prison and asked if they could hold a worship service with the inmates once per week. Permission was granted. Currently, about twenty inmates attend these weekly services. The pastors preach the Word and sing with and mentor prisoners.

While pastors and organized church groups can usually, with permission, hold prison worship services, not everyone else is afforded that type of access. The prisons are rightfully careful about whom they allow to have contact with the prisoners. For most of us, linking up with a recognized prison ministry organization, like Prison Fellowship, is our best option.

The Prison Ministry website lists a variety of ministry options to choose from. You can mentor an incarcerated or recently released prisoner, write letters to someone in prison, or care for the families and children of those who are in prison. (Angel Tree [www.angeltree.org], also begun by a former inmate, is a ministry dedicated to caring for the families of prisoners.) For the last fifteen years or so, Brother Mike Alford, of Wilton, California, has, on a monthly basis, written to two inmates. One of these inmates is the daughter of a now-deceased member of the Sacramento church; the other, Mike “met” through Chuck Colson’s Prison Ministry. Each of them, both Christians, regularly expresses gratitude to him for his ongoing friendship and constant encouragement.

The United States’ prison population is the largest in the world. In fact, it accounts for one-quarter of the world’s prisoners. The majority of prisoners are sentenced for nonviolent crimes, with drug possession being the number one offense (48%), as reported by the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Conversely, homicide, assault, and kidnapping convictions result in only 2.9% of the incarcerations. Sadly, 1.7 million children have a parent who is serving time behind bars. Is there something you can do to share God’s love with someone in a prison near you?

Editor’s note: If you do sign on to volunteer in some capacity with inmates or their families, plan to do it on a long-term basis, as the volunteers mentioned in this article have done. Prisoners need to learn trust and commitment. That can only happen over time.

2 http://www.criminaljusticeusa.com/blog/2011/10-stats-you-should-know-about-our-prison-system
3 http://www.angeltree.org
4 Matthew 25:36.
Important Conference Information

- The registration forms for attendance, lodging, and meals at the upcoming General Conference Session at the North-West University Campus near Johannesburg, South Africa, along with all other necessary information, will be published shortly on the General Conference website at www.imssda.org. Keep checking the website for important updates.

- The Western Field has announced the dates for its upcoming field conference in Camp Alta, California. It will be held August 22-26, 2012. More information will be provided shortly.

Do YOU have an item of interest for the AUNL?

How is your church sharing the gospel message with others in your community?

What outreaches are planned in your area?

Let us know at americanunionnewsletter@yahoo.com

2012 Calendar

- June 24-July 11: World Assembly of delegates, South Africa
- July 11-15: General Conference Public Session, South Africa
- July 15-22: World Youth Conference, South Africa
- July 26-28: Missionary Seminar Graduation and Evangelistic Event, Canada
- August 22-26: Western Field Conference, Camp Alta, California