WELCOME TO THE GOD SQUAD

Once again the unity between Voice Of Prophecy and Someone Cares has been one more of God's blessings. Yvonne and I welcome the hundreds of you who called, wrote, or Emailed us. You have joined us from all over the U.S., Switzerland, France, Australia, and Canada. God Bless you. It is a true joy to have so many new friends joining us to serve God through our combined efforts. By the time you receive this you will have been matched to an inmate; if not, let us know. Also each of you can write as many inmates as possible.

I'M NOT GUILTY

I received a letter to share with each of you new and old in the Pen Friend Program:

"I want to ask your advice and help with one of my Pen Friends. This man is young and is on Death Row. He has convinced me he did not kill the two people he was convicted of killing. Since he has been in prison he has accepted Jesus Christ. I do see evidence of this transformation. The inmate claims the Court-appointed attorney did not bring in important evidence, pointing to someone else. The other man plea bargained to a lesser offense and this man got stuck with the crime."

The letter requests we investi-gate and do something for him. Brothers and sisters, this is a story told by a million inmates, and a lot of them are telling the truth. Friends, these men and women have to do what all the others do- go to the Law Library and work on their own appeal.

Keeping up with what God called us to do is more than a full-time job. There is no justice in the Justice System, but for us to try to take it on would destroy God's ministry through us.

JOY OF WRITING

Thank you both for the privilege and joy of being involved with your, our, ministry. My Pen Pal and I are getting along great and are a blessing to each other. I am very grateful for this ministry, it has enriched my life a lot.
Carol

CAN YOU GET US INFORMATION?

Brothers and sisters, when we assign an inmate to you there are questions that come up. Medical condition, location, stopped writing. If we had to contact the prison to get these answers, we would need a full-time staff person. Inmates are often transferred without their property, i.e., address book. So they can't write. Please write or call the prison where they were. If letters are not returned, they are being received. Massive cutbacks in prison staff are going to make writing difficult. If they don't have a stamp, they can't write.

NO PLACE TO LAY MY HEAD

From Dennis: "If you know of a place that accepts offenders, some release center, pass my name on to them".

"I really want a church to accept me, a job, a place to live, someone to sponsor me. I've been down 20 years and want to become a useful, productive citizen."

Every inmate in every state has all the resources the state provides them, they just have to ask. Pastors get letters from inmates all the time asking for the church to take them in. It is such a shame.

This man down twenty years should have been planning from day one for his release. Here in California when a man's or woman's time is up, the State does not care if they have a job, a place to stay, or money. They do give them a $100.00 to start. Then we wonder why eight out of ten return to prison.

HE WEPT

We had an inmate who was in our program for years, an inmate who really did change in prison. He had a long time Pen Friend, Ina W., who died, and we provided him with a new friend before she did. One of the joys of this Ministry of "Paper Sunshine" is reading the letters and seeing this change.

Prison sadly becomes a way of life easy to adjust to and learn to accept. This man did all he could to get ready for return to society. My heart broke, as did Yvonne's, when we found out he could not adjust and killed himself. Like the man above who was down 20 years, the prison system does nothing to prepare for reentry. After long term internment, adjustment is impossible for many. We do pray that Sean and Ina will meet soon at the feet of Jesus.

ANAM CARA SPECIAL SOUL FRIEND
Having such a friend has added a lot to my life. Every time I receive a letter from him I am given a great gift. My soul friend is in prison. In prison he prays often, reads and studies the Word. He shares stories of this intimate relationship and I have learned much. My own faith is examined and strengthened as we talk. For different reasons, my friend in prison has come to humility, wisdom, and lack of pretense. The mundane events I describe to him gain luster because he listens to me with careful attention and concern. By taking time to respond to his letters, I am slowed down and made more reflective. His humor, his ability to be delighted by little things despite his circumstances, the courage he summons to get through each day, all inspire me. We thank God, giver of all good things, for the grace that comes to us through friendship. 

E.P.

HELP, HELP, HELP!

Folks, I have a problem and I really need your help. The inmate you matched me with can barely write, and I can't read most of what he does write. What can I do? Joan.

Yvonne, I want to thank you for your advice a year ago. I was matched with an impossible inmate-no schooling and almost impossible to understand. I was able to provide him with a remedial reading correspondence course and you provided him an inmate tutor. Here is the difference in a year: M in poison for a long time. Ned a friend to help me. Today Judy am sure glad you hung in there with me, I am working on my GED John

Two different situations. But if you are not comfortable with the inmate you are writing, please return all information and let us re-match you both.

SPECIAL THANKS

We have been blessed by our church for several years with a $500.00 stipend for the Pen Friend Program. We received a call informing us that due to cutbacks, this would be reduced to $100.00

"Praise God" for all His blessing. Knowing God as we do we are sure He will find a way to replace that amount. His word says "Ask not, receive not." We need 400 folks to donate $1.00 a month and nothing will have to be altered. If you are a Faith Partner and can add a $1.00 each month, you will never miss it.

For those of you new to this ministry, we are, except for that $100.00 a month, totally supported by free will offerings-a true "Widow's Mite" ministry. All donations, small or large, are tax deductible, and needed.

NO TIME? TAKE TIME!

We were given tickets to a concert here in Visalia. The reason for the concert was to
help the victims of the Big Freeze we had here. Yvonne finally got through to me that there was more reason to go than not to go, and I gave in, knowing we needed a little free time.

We arrived early and in seconds I was thanking God again for my wife. Coming up the stairs toward the entrance was a bunch of supervised gang guys. First I laughed as I wondered if they knew what an opera was. We got to meet the head of this group and found that these were all street kids living in group homes. I asked and received permission to visit them and rap; they were happy to invite us. Remember "Scared Straight," the troubled youth who were taken into a prison and yelled at by hard core inmates? Well, we are going to take these kids into prison, to the Chapel to meet inmates who will share the love of Christ. Thank you Jesus, for the free tickets and another door opened to us.

YOUR NEWSLETTERS,
which I have been getting for a long time, are really special lately. I wait until I get home to read them because of the deeply emotional nature and spirituality of them. I shed many happy tears reading each one.

I need these newsletters as they remind me of how human we really are. It's like a special visit to church when I read them.

I am writing to the three new inmates you sent me. It is so exciting and rewarding to be involved with you two in God's work. Ruth

TO ERR IS HUMAN

Our growth has been massive and it gets better every day. With growth comes growing pains. Many have asked questions that we have not answered. This will not happen again. In fact, we will answer them in a newsletter. If you can Email us, the answer will be instant. We try our best to not let problems happen.

With every match we send a form to be sent back by you who are writing. Many neglect to follow through on this vital chore. Many decide to use a Pen Name and forget to tell us. We get letters we know not where to send:

A letter from D Alexander to Betty; from A Tarkington to A Smith; from John Given to R Roberts; from J Traynham to R Roberts; from D Shaffer to Sherry Patterson from J Sparks to Marie Neil; from Juan Rivas @ Tim Bell to Kenya Morris; from M Williams to Lori Moore; from R Sanger to Mr J; from R Hollis @ C Gutierrez to Megen; from E Brown to C Johnson; from D Tottes to Carm; from Art Collins to Lori @ R Lorentzen to B James.
If any of these are yours, please claim them.

REASON IT'S PLEASIN'
We just got a call from a young man who had just gotten out of prison. He is living in a park in Houston, looking for a job. Some folks were sitting on a bench listening to VOP. He listened to that radio show we were on and got the number. He called collect to thank us for what we do and tell us he wished he had heard of us while in prison. He informed me when he gets a job and a place to stay he would like to write inmates to share what he learned in prison.

He listened to me say "Inmates write themselves to hear their names called at mail call." His name is Jon Small. Pray for him. He has been in prison five times, and through God's grace prays that this time Satan's attacks will not shoot him down.

**YVONNE'S CORNER**

All of us on the west coast are truly blessed with all the signs of Spring. Some of the orchards are covered with blossoms, as if they were covered with snow. God is so good! He promises us that though our sins be as scarlet they shall be whiter than snow.

Don and I have just finished a week of being on the radio, as he has mentioned. What a blessing! We just never know who is watching us-and are we always a reflection of Christ?

The question I am most often asked is, aren't you afraid to go into prison? I just smile, because as a child I was never fearful. My parents gave me a strong Christian upbringing, for which I am very thankful. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Psalm 56:3, which was probably a memory verse for me at one time: "Whenever I am afraid I will trust in You." That verse comes to my mind quite often, and as we go into prisons I try to remember that the inmates are all children of God. They may not know it, or act like it, but then that is why we are there to try and help in any way we can.

Don has a Birthday June 8th. I dare not tell you his age, and if he reads this he might take it out, but I know he would be happy to receive cards from you. God gives us so much that it is difficult to stay in my corner, but I do want to share this with you, the author is unknown.

**In Jail With Jesus**

Alone one night
In shame and despair
I looked for my help
But none was there.
No future but prison,
No past, just pain;
I looked in the mirror,
My tears, the rain.
By justice condemned
In time, to die;
My only hope God's mercy
For His grace did I cry.
Then a seed planted somewhere long ago
In the midst of my sorrow
Began to grow.
This seed was Christ
Who died for me
In jail with Jesus
I am set free.
No longer in the hell
Of my sinful ways,
He's made me a new person
Who loves and prays.
Though seasons come
And holidays pass,
In jail with Jesus
My Hope does last.
So I do share
With you, my friend,
In jail with Jesus,
It's not the end.

We pray that our actions will speak louder than words every day.

GOD SENT A MAN

The Lord sent us a Christian man with massive computer skills, who can take over 90% of the Pen Friend Program, so we can work in prisons where God wants us. It will cost us only $150.00 a week, which we need to raise. So if you do not support us now and would like to donate to the Pen Friend Program, mark your donations. We cannot hire this man unless we have commitments to cover one year. God will grant the increase.

LITTLE THINGS

If we only knew what a smile will do out on the highway of life -
A little cheer when the day is through will brighten its joy and strife -
A few words and a hand that will clasp a lonely one within its grasp -
Of these little things this world has need; they help the hungry soul to feed.
This great old world is carefree and gay. No matter what happens, it stays that way -
And so it depends on you and me
to help the sorrowing one to see
the sunny side where the flowers grow along life's pathways, row on row -
These are the things for which hearts plead -
Let's carry them through - be a friend indeed.
Emma Magin Bisssell

PEN FRIEND

Dear Don & Yvonne,

First of all, I want to thank you, Don, for taking the time yesterday to explain to me about visiting the inmates. I don't mean to be a pest but I just didn't understand. When I read the story in the last newsletter where you went to see a grandson of a lady, right away, then I really didn't understand. So I feel better about it now. I know you're really busy and I don't want to slow progress. I have been so blessed with your ministry. It has helped me to think of others' problems which are much worse than my own, and I love to share Jesus with the inmates.

I wanted to tell you that I would be willing to write to a person on Death Row. I wanted to share with you that I feel such a burden on my heart for the prison ministry that I'm trying to start a jail ministry locally. After what you told me, I'm not sure now that it will be possible but we'll just pray about it. We're getting a church started as a result of the Net '98 meetings and it seems the Lord is opening up all kinds of opportunities in our area. I see the Lord working in our lives and He's definitely getting us ready to meet Him soon. Keep up the good work. You're in my prayers. Thank you...Marilyn

THE SHEPHERD

There was once a Shakespearean actor who was known everywhere for his one-man show of readings and recitations from the classics. He would always end his performance with a dramatic reading of Psalm 23. Each night, without exception, as the actor began his recitation-"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"-the crowd would listen attentively. And then, at the conclusion of the Psalm, they would rise in thunderous applause in appreciation of the actor's incredible ability to bring the verse to life.

But one night, just before the actor was to offer his customary recital of Psalm 23, a young man from the audience spoke up.

"Sir, do you mind if tonight I recite Psalm 23?" The actor was quite taken back by this unusual request, but he allowed the young man to come forward and stand front and center on the stage to recite the psalm, knowing that the ability of this unskilled youth would be no match for his own talent.

With a soft voice, the young man began to recite the words of the Psalm. When he
was finished, there was no applause. There was no standing ovation as on other nights. All that could be heard was the sound of weeping.

The audience had been so moved by the young man's recitation that every eye was full of tears. Amazed by what he had heard, the actor said to the youth,

"I don't understand. I have been performing Psalm 23 for years. I have a lifetime of experience and training-but I have never been able to move an audience as you have tonight. Tell me, what is your secret?"

The young man humbly replied, "Well, sir, you know the Psalm ... but I know the Shepherd."

JEAN'S JOTTINGS

As a former shepherdess, it is easy to appreciate our Heavenly Shepherd's patience and love for us. When Jesus compared us to sheep, he had years of experience with the stubborn, the wanderers, the willful, and the heedless.

When the pasture dried up at home, we took the flock to a field nearby where there was tall, rich grass and plenty of water. But soon they'd find a hole in the fence and come back, stopping to devour the strawberry bed on the way.

We had rewards, too. In spring, the little white lambs raced around the barn while their mothers ate. When it was warm enough to let them out, they bounced joyfully in the sunshine on grassy hills, like woolly popcorn.

At shearing time, the crew would reward the bounty of our dinner table by saving out the very choicest fleeces for my spinning wheel.

Do we know our Shepherd's voice, and stay close to Him, or do we wander back to Satan's dried up fields of sin? I want to be one of the flock, not one of the fleeced. Let's meet in Heaven.

Home