SOMEONE CARES PRISON MINISTRY  
Quietly Changing Lives  
News Letter

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Someone Cares is a faith ministry, supported by God's love and your gifts. It is a non-profit corporation; all donations are tax-deductible.

Don & Yvonne McClure  
Directors

PAPER SUNSHINE

Sometimes we take the Pen Friend program for granted, it just keeps going and going. The last Voice Of Prophecy radio show brought so many blessings only God can keep up with them! As all of you called, wrote, faxed, and E-mailed, we praised HIS name. The Master Matchmaker did the rest. As you contacted us we put your name at the bottom of one pile. As the inmates contacted us, we put them at the bottom of the other pile and when your names reached the top, God Blessed.

We have been doing the radio show for a long time but this one was different. Those who contacted us were younger than ever before. We’re still matching names as we open mail.

If you have never written an inmate, please try to put yourself in his or her place. Your inmate believes he lives a boring life in a boring place. The system is designed to make each of its captives a non-person. A good Pen Friend will try to encourage that inmate to see himself as God sees him: as he can become. One of the favorite sayings of prison Christians is “To be free in Jesus is to be free, indeed.” When the heart belongs to Jesus, the mind can endure the tribulations that occur inside the walls. Find colorful paper to brighten their day. Descriptions of your surroundings, what flowers are in bloom, how they smell, interesting and funny things your pets do, photos of these things, all serve to keep your inmate in touch with what’s going on in real life. If you attend a specially meaningful service at church, tell how and why it drew you closer to Jesus.

PEN FRIENDS

You write the inmate using our address as a return. All mail goes through us, and your address is not lying around a prison, ours is. We hate to bring up a sensitive topic in this age of “political correctness” we live in, but folks, there is a lot of prejudice in this old world of ours. Using the two-pile system, we sometimes match a black inmate with a white “Christian” who doesn’t ever write and doesn’t even return the paper-work. Such a shame. Yes, there are cultural differences, and that diversity can be beautiful. We are taught as children to regard difference as something bad. God loves ALL the colors He created. We only see a fraction of the real spectrum in a rainbow. Make an effort to at least try to establish a relationship with the inmate God has given you. If you have truly made an effort and after a period of time just aren’t communicating, contact Someone Cares and be re-matched.
We were blessed with a call from a black congregation in Chicago that is already organized to handle an extensive number of black inmates as Pen Friends. God works in mysterious ways, but the results are awesome! Won’t it be neat to meet all these folks in Heaven?

THE INMATE

Prison is a lonely and frightening place: a place where inmates lose track of reality. Letters are a way to keep in touch with the outside. There’s no radio or TV in a lot of cases, or a TV run by the stronger inmates or gangs, where your choice of viewing is restricted. Your day starts with an early breakfast or you stay in bed a little longer. Your cell is as small as a bathroom and there are two or more of you living there. Programs have been cut, or canceled, because of overcrowding. Violence for control of what little you have is rampant. You sign up for a Pen Friend not knowing what will happen. You hope it’s a female you can hook up with. [Inmates are firmly informed that’s not the purpose of the Pen Friend Program, and sign an agreement that they understand.] You get a letter and find you have little to write about. Or the Christian tells you all about their religion. We suggest that religion not be brought up until you establish a friendship. Ask lots of questions to help them answer, but don’t ask why they are there. The purpose is to lead men, women, boys and girls to know JESUS. Church comes much later. You may find out the inmate knows more about the Bible than you do.

Now, a problem, especially with male inmates. They mostly have no knowledge of Agape Love. They take kindness for romance and we need to stay in control. Feel free to set them in place if they get out of line, and if they continue, we will rematch you. Once in awhile we miss a letter that may be sexual in nature, some even vulgar. Do not give up, just stand firm, and let us know.

As for them, you cannot blame; but inform them of what you can and cannot do. Please do not make a promise you cannot keep. Often they will ask for things because they have so little, but do not send an item unless sure they can receive it. If you want to send them something for a birthday or Christmas, you can put some money in their account, but it MUST be in the form of a bank or postal money order, made out to “The Account of [inmate’s name and number]” and their mailing address. Enclose it with the card, and the mail room will handle the rest. Your inmate will receive a notice of your gift.

THE PRISON

This is a place that must be, but the cost in tax dollars to put someone away is massive. Did you know we build more prisons than schools? We send men women, boys and girls to prison then do next to nothing to rehabilitate them. We want to regenerate them. How do you “re-habilitate” someone who was never habilitated? Prisons are overcrowded and programs that were in place to help inmates, including Christian, are being done away with. Corcoran, when we were there, had 7,000 inmates and a Chaplain’s budget of $2500.00 a year?! Prisons come in levels from one to six. Level one inmates will see the street and mostly are in dorms, not cells. Two and three can be either. Levels four and five are in cells, six are just in cells almost 24 hours a day.
Most inmates come from a lower class and are not educated; these are destined to be in prison a lifetime as there is little way for them to change. School programs are being cut, jobs are hard to get and often do not pay.

Incentive to better oneself is in the mind of each inmate. All must avoid the predators who walk all prisons. These lions devour the lambs. Just getting through a day can be very hard and you can help with a ray of Paper Sunshine. Separation is just not done and gangs prey on the weak. Lock-downs due to racial tension and stabbing are more common than not. Protec-tion is rare, and fear rampant. An inmate who gets into debt to a gang member puts his life in danger.

Paul, a young inmate, got a letter from his Step-dad that he was sending him money. Paul went into debt, thinking he would pay when the money arrived. That never happened. He cannot pay and his life is in danger. He goes to staff and they tell him that if he gives up the names of those he is in danger from, they will help him. This makes him a snitch—worse than being a child molester by prison standards. Now he is in a pickle and he does nothing and gets stabbed, not killed—this time.

John, a foolish young man, gets in debt gambling and cannot pay. He did, though, by being raped. God just stands at the door unable to help, but with your help and prayers He can enter.

We would like to make a section of our newsletter dedicated to answering your questions, so send them on. We would like to hear stories from your pen friends, good and bad, to share with our readers.

The challenge of being matched to an inmate is persistence. Please do not give up when you are matched. Remember that it takes time to build up a friendship. When they make a request, they have no idea what is going to happen. Then you come along, from a different culture, a different background, different education. You write and they receive it. They want to answer but, no pen, paper, envelope, and mostly no stamps.

Our job is massive and we do the best with what we have. We suggest you write three times then let us know you’ve had no answer. We will rematch and contact the inmate.

HOW DOES IT ALL WORK?

Friends, it takes a massive amount of time and money. If everyone reading this would send any small amount (and those of you that God has blessed, a little more) we will be able to keep going. We are not paid by church, state, or prison systems, but by your tax deductible, free-will offerings. With postage going up, we need to increase our funding base a mite, as God wills and provides.

To you, our loyal Faith Partners, thanks. We have dropped a little into the red but through you, God will provide.

MY NAME IS JANICE
I am from a middle class Christian family. Well educated and had a good job. I met Ralph at a party and we hit it off at once. The next few months of my life were almost perfect. The only flaw, Ralph was not a church goer nor a Christian. But I let that slip. OH did I! Ralph always had money, drove a nice car, and said he was in investments. We were driving to Reno when my life changed forever. A red light appeared and I think I said something like “You're going to get a ticket, I told you to slow down.” But instead of slowing down he took off, police in pursuit.

The chase went on for about fifty miles and we hit a road block. I could not believe my eyes. Finally stopped, we were arrested. When we got to the police station we were separated. A policeman came into where I was being held and told me I was arrested for possession of drugs for sale. I told him I had never sold or used drugs in my life. I was informed that in my purse they found a massive amount of drugs, put there by Ralph. The officer told me Ralph had told them that we were just dating and he had no knowledge that I was a dealer, he was not. I was charged and convicted and sent to prison for three years, Ralph got off with no time at all. The lesson learned: stay equally yoked!

Janice only served 7 months but her life changed forever. She is a Pen friend and supporter.

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

When we were working at Avenal in California we had something happen that could have changed our ministry. We collected a whole lot of books, bibles and a video projector to donate to the prison. I mean a whole lot! The Chaplain got a truck and came to our house. After the paperwork was done to get all the things into the prison, we loaded them onto the truck and the Chaplain left to take it there.

The next day, we arrived at prison and were told to go to the warden’s office. We went. The warden asked why we had added three guitars to our donation. I said “I beg your pardon? We did not donate any guitars. He showed us the clearance and as plain as day you could see three guitars had been added. Again we told the warden we knew nothing about the guitars. The Chaplain assured the warden he knew nothing about the guitars. Our ID cards were pulled and we were barred from that prison. I let it slide and a couple of days ago I received the following E-mail:

I FOUND YOU AGAIN

I know you will remember me although you may have thought I was some kind of jerk. I was at Avenal back in ‘87 to ‘89, involved with Chaplain XX. I want to say how sorry I am for the way you were treated there. I am guessing, but I think your trouble was over my guitar. (The prison had turned down Don’s and the Chaplain’s request to bring in three guitars.) If so, I am terribly sorry and I never meant to implicate you in any of that. Of course as an inmate I was not very trusting at that time, and feel like Chaplain XX had pressured me and also misled me into believing some things that were not true. That is past and I know that being the folks you are, you will forgive me.
I listened to VOP here in Texas and there you were. It really warmed my heart to hear your voice again. Perhaps I can make up all the past damage by now helping Someone Cares. I have been out since 1992, married and doing well.

Don Chapman

I could open this up again but God will, and has directed our future and past. The shame of this was that we had given over ten years of free service, including all the stuff we donated through you to all the California prisons. No hearing, just the Chaplain’s word; he would have lost his job, still could.

YVONNE’S CORNER

We have been so blessed, because God has allowed this ministry to exist and He keeps it growing. I want to say WELCOME! to all the new Pen Friends who have joined us. I know you will be blessed by writing. The main thing to remember is to stick with it and be very blunt, that may sound cruel, but inmates are lied to so much—by the prison, by their families, that they really appreciate someone who is honest and truthful with them. That is the way you will gain their friendship, and their trust. When I tell people that some of my very best friends are or have been in prison they give me a strange look, but that is alright. When Christ was on this earth He also received some strange looks.

Down deep in every inmate’s heart, you'll find some gold. So I want to challenge you to find it, in each one that you write to, and believe me you will if you keep on keeping on. May God Bless all the Paper Sunshiners out there and the ones yet to come.

JEAN’S JOTTINGS

Our last prison visit put us in contact with another man who will take turns with us and we can have our inmates in “church” every week with the spiritual support they need. These guys love to sing, and the keyboard has been fixed, so we’re happy musicians.

It’s been awhile since the prison put on the appreciation banquet for the volunteers and Shirley and I chose our plants. My hibiscus bush has blessed me with huge, scarlet flowers; today three of them are open, dwarfing the little bush.

God is so Good Department: He certainly looks after His children and answers prayer. I had put two blank checks, three to be cashed, and a tithe check in its little envelope, into my planner, ready for a trip to the bank. Shirley and I went shopping, the day was windy, and somehow the checks must have blown out of the planner. I discovered at the checkout counter that I was almost broke and almost out of fuel. We prayed about it and went on, and went through the hoops with the bank(s). The two blanks got turned in at the store, and over a week later, an envelope came with two of the three to cash and an anonymous note! Praise God for the honest.

He also sends humor when we’re down. One of the cats sat on the windowsill, surveying her turf, when a cardinal landed on the sill outside, with only the glass to separate them.
The cat turned her head very slowly, not even a twitch from her tail/other muscles, and stared at the bird, obviously planning her strategy for having fresh cardinal for breakfast. He stared back, crest flat, black eyes riveted on the cat, planning his strategy for not becoming a fresh meal. At last, he broke the spell and launched himself to safety in a nearby tree. Red birds cure the blues!

The glass between enemies is like the incredible power of prayer. When you pray for your Pen Friend, a guardian angel is released to stand between him or her and harm, from making stupid decisions like going into debt to a gang member, from escalating a verbal quarrel or taunt into a fight, etc. If your Pen Friend also calls out to Jesus, he can have access to heaven’s storehouse as well. Even people who aren’t sure about God yet, still enjoy knowing that someone prays for them. We’re all designed to worship.