WELCOME

We (Yvonne and I) wish to welcome all those who came our way from the recent radio broadcast. We again wish to thank Voice Of Prophecy for sending God's word through Someone Cares around the world. Since so many of you, including a massive number of inmates, contacted us, we ask the Holy Spirit to shower all with His blessings.

We will, as an invitation, cover some of what The God Squad has been up to. If you want to hear the radio show, contact:

Voice Of Prophecy
101 W Cochran Street
Simi Valley California 93065
805 955 7606

The program aired for 5 different days.

TWO CARE PROGRAM

As part of Someone Cares, this program has been slowly growing. What is it? This is a one-to-one, male-to-male, female-to-female, or couples visitation program. Now, because we have only a few willing to visit it is limited. We take inmates already in our letter writing Pen Friend Program and match them with “Free World” Christians. We choose the inmate by the progress they make with their Pen Friend or their work with our Bible study program.

We write the inmate and say we have a person or couple that would like to visit once a month and ask if they are interested. Then we make arrangements to get the visitor or visitors cleared. We now have 37 inmates receiving visits.

GATESVILLE PRISON

When I, Paul, got John’s name and the paperwork for getting cleared to visit him, I must admit I said "What have I gotten into"!? When I had been cleared, it was time to go. I have driven by the prison often, but now I was going in. I had written John
and also his Pen Friend.

I arrived at the prison, parked and went to the entrance building. I presented the approval paperwork and a Sergeant asked about the program. I told him I would be visiting John once a month on a one-to-one basis.

The Sergeant said, "More programs like this really would ease the tension a lot."

After signing in and going through a metal detector I arrived in the visiting room. I had to wait about 15 minutes for John to arrive. First impression: Here was a very clean cut young man with a very strong hand-shake.

The first words from John: "You don't know how grateful I am that you are here, I pray we can become friends. His second question was, "Do you want to know why I'm here?" He was surprised to hear me say no. We chatted about family, friends, school and prison life.

Don had told me to take a Bible (not all prisons allow this) and just put it on the table. It was not used the first visit. As it came time to leave, I did ask John if he would like to have prayer. He looked around the visiting room and said, "another time." We shook hands and I left a warm feeling in my soul. More next month...

SOLEDAD PRISON

I met Don and Yvonne at our church and got on their mailing list, sending a check every now and then. I was impressed by all I learned from them. Not being a much of a letter writer (my name is Pete), visiting seemed to be the thing to do. I volunteered for the Two Care program and was matched with Jeremy. Writing to him and his Pen Friends, a neat couple, I learned a lot.

Clearances done, I head the 75 miles to the prison. I will tell you the visiting procedure for most is very degrading, I had no problem. I seated myself at a table; the guard would bring Jeremy in to me. I was a bit shocked by the very large black man who was Jeremy. We shook hands and he smiled.

“I know you knew I was black but I didn’t know you were white. That makes this even better.” He told me he was street raised in street gangs. He had been in gangs both in and out of prison almost all his life. While in lock-down, he made up his mind he wanted to change. A friend told him about Someone Cares and he got a Pen Friend. The friend wrote only once. He asked for a new friend and got John and Barbara. They helped him crawl toward God's word. Don enrolled him in Breath of Life and arranged for an easy-reading Bible. Jeremy told me he read God's word in the corner of his cell, hidden from all. He asked Jesus into his life, fighting Satan and the Bloods (Gang) We really enjoyed our visit, so much I told him I'd see him next week. “Cool,” he said. I drove to the prison again only to find he was in lock-down.

Don called me and said he had been jumped by gang members. He was released in
60 days and I went back. He said up front that the gang did not want to cut him loose, but he had put it in Gods hands. All that was several years ago and now the drive is 110 miles, but he is a true friend and a real Christian.

Want something to do for the Lord? Join The God Squad!

DOWN IN FLORIDA

My husband and I were driving to the beach listening to Christian radio. I was not really paying attention until I heard this man say,

"What have you done for Jesus? What has your church done to fulfill Jesus’ command to visit the inmate? Mark and I had been church members for all our 13 years of married life. Attended church almost every week. What had we done for Jesus? We pulled into a rest area and learned a lot about what we had never done. We made arrangements to listen to the other five days, and for the first time made a commitment to serve Jesus through Someone Cares.

I called and Don answered, "Praise the Lord, Someone Cares.” He and his wife sure do, and now so do we and several friends. Mark and I (Judy), started each having one Pen Friend then two, now three each. It is a joy to share the love of God with those who live in such a mess. All of our inmate friends are guilty of the crime they are in prison for. Four are studying God’s Word slowly. The other two are really teaching us!

Jerry, one of Mark’s friends, asked if he knew about tithe. Our church does not tithe, but we do give. He wanted to tithe on his salary of 14 cents an hour. I told him to send it to Someone Cares, and then we decided to do the same. Learning about giving and receiving has brought additional blessing to our ministry and marriage.

[Yvonne and I do not want anyone to send tithe to us unless they first consider their church. We surely don’t want to take from any church, but we are a Ministry of God.]

FROM ANN

Is there any way you can publish a "how to” on what we should write about. So many inmates write the canned letters, “How are you, I am fine.”

This is a friendship ministry. Getting to know someone involves asking questions. There is little to write about in prison, but ask simple questions until you really get to know your friend. Things like “I know nothing about prison. Tell me about it -- your cell, your daily routine. If you work, what is your job and pay scale?

Now you also must be willing to give what you get, such as... Dear Joe I am very happy to receive your name as a Pen Friend from Someone Cares. I read the application you filled out and the introduction letter, but now please help me
understand were you are coming from, were you live and what are your plans. We are told that often inmates just write to see what they can get. My new friend, this is a ministry and I want to be your friend in Christ.

I would like to share Jesus with you, but if that is not your bag let me know. ((Remember, if religion is not on their mind, wait.)) I want our time together to be productive so I need your help. How do you lead him or her to become a conversation-alist? Ask questions with positive interest. Be blessed if they tell you why they are in prison, but don’t ask.

Also their letters are read by prison staff, so they feel threatened to open up. If they ask for something and you can’t give it, deal with the problem openly. If you write three letters with no replies, don’t give up; ask for a new name. I’ll handle the current one.

We have about three hundred inmates and their Pen Friends trying to bring each to what they believe in. It’s all about Jesus. Ann, who is on SS sent us a dollar and God blessed us and granted the increase.

WE ARE GOING TO DO A VIDEO

All these years working in prison, caring for clothes and mail, then speaking on week-ends for the funds it takes to do what we do is tough. We want to do a two hour session in church in Prison to train all of you to do what we do. If we can raise the funds to do this we can send the video to interested churches and let them show it, with a Free-Will Offering at the end. We receive no salary, except for the generous gifts that come our way from our newsletter and speaking. I have just spent 15 straight days without a day off, making all this happen.

My bride is going to get a vacation soon—we have not had one in 22 years. Every time we hear of an inmate really changing, making it on the outside, that is added to our treasure in heaven. As Jean stated in the last newsletter, if you have questions or suggestions, please send them along. Ann sent her letter in Feb 2003.

YVONNE’S CORNER

You will never know the blessing you are missing out on until you go to prison and visit or write. When we first started, I had no intentions of ever going to prison. It was O.K. if Don did, but I had the attitude that they do the crime, they can do the time! Then one night Don said it would be nice if they had someone to play the piano in the chapel, so they might have a song service. I heard him say that but my thought was they should have thought of it before they went to prison. A few months later on a rainy night, I told Don I would go with him, so he patiently waited as I took my time, hoping he would go without me, but no such luck.

As we entered the prison I asked who the song leader was and went right to the piano, and we started song service. I wondered why they were such a happy bunch
of Christians having such a good time for a Bible study. Don had a good Bible study, they seemed like they wanted it to last forever. As we left it was pouring rain and a few wanted to give me a paper or something so I wouldn't get wet. My answer was, “I'm not salt or sugar, I won't melt.”

They thanked me for coming and we left. When we got to the car Don started the engine turned on the lights, and all the inmates from the chapel were standing in the rain waving good-bye. I asked Don why they were standing there getting drenched? In one word he said they really liked the music. That was it, I was hooked, I told him he could never go again without me. That was 1977 and I still feel the same. Please pray about making your commitment for the Lord, you will receive the blessing, whether you write, or are a prayer partner, or a supporter, God will Richly Bless You!

JEAN'S JOTTINGS

It’s unusual for me to be blessed with a letter from a reader. This one came from a Divinity student and I’ll try to clarify my perspective in the June issue with her comments.

Dear Don, Yvonne, & Jean,

I am usually very uplifted by your newsletters, and yes, I still write to about 10 inmates through your program.

In this last newsletter, though, one thing bothered me. In the last paragraph of "Jean's Jottings", she says "I challenge more men to be active in this ministry. Paul says women should be quiet, but when men shirk their duties, there's no one else to nurture prisoners."

I thoroughly agree with her that women belong in prison ministry; there are few enough people willing to do this huge (and growing) work as it is.

However, and perhaps I am misreading this, but it sounds as though Jean is saying that ideally, ALL chaplains would be men, but “if necessary” a woman volunteer is better than none...

My partner’s and my experience in prison ministry is based on the contact we have as volunteers, conducting services for three separate levels of inmates now, and truly enjoying the experience. We have worked with three different chaplains, all of whom are or were male, in a men’s prison. I did not mean to convey the slant that all should have been men or women. The fact that Yvonne is a full-fledged chaplain speaks well for her qualifications.

My statement stems from our efforts to get anyone else in our church to get up from their Laodicean comfort zone and participate in the ministry. One of the prison chaplains even came to our churches in an effort to recruit volunteers, but those who at first seemed interested, backed out; or promised to try once, and did not
show.

People somehow hear the word “prison” and seem to equate it with being attacked by Jack the Ripper. Where we work, the volunteers are escorted to the chapel by a guard, with others located en route. The inmates we serve are our own church members, who have run afoul of the law, or those who are interested in worshiping with us.

“Doing church” with them is little different from having them in our own local congregation. There are times when the Holy Spirit is tangible in the room, and voices seem multiplied as angels join in the music. Once trust is built, an inmate will share with us his special prayer need. My partner finds some-thing inspirational for them, and we try to have some kind of handout on nice paper they can keep and be inspired in the days to come.

We feel that we are the ones blessed the most on the day we go in each month.

...Historians who have examined Christianity in the light of competing religions of the period before Constantine adopted Christianity in 360 have found that one of its major appeals was that women participated “fully” in the religion, including their role as priests and bishops.

For example, an Eastern Orthodox church in the former Constantinople still shows a carved relief of three people together, with their names below. They are Jesus, Paul, and the bishop Alexandra (which should be spelled Episcopa Alexandra). She's believed to be the founder of the church in the second century A.D.

Women remained priests in the church until c. 600 A.D., when Rome ruled that all priests henceforth should be men. No, I'm not making this up; my M.A. is in divinity, but my Ph.D. is in medieval history -- specifically in the early church. I refer you to a book entitled "Women as Bishop, Priest and Laiety" in case you're curious.

So in the early church, women indeed were chaplains, pastors, priests, bishops -- servants of Jesus's people and leaders of the pastorate, as well. Indeed, Jesus Himself entrusted a great deal to women. The first "apostle" He told to spread the news of his resurrection, after all, was Mary Magdalene.

More next month...

Thanks to Ms. Mills for her input; also to the men and women who shared their Two-Care visitation blessings with us. Pen Friends are wonderful, but a face-to-face, flesh-and-blood visit from a warm human being is priceless.

Jesus poured out His gift of Agape love, on each of us. There’s a song we can live:

_And the Gift Goes On._

Knowing the history behind the role of women as priests, I do not feel out of place having been ordained to do the Lord's work. Though a few people don't like to see a
woman in the pulpit, I do not feel that I am out of place as a volunteer chaplain at the local Rescue Mission. Every time I preach there, I hang around afterwards to talk to the homeless who always approach me, and I sit around on the patio until they're through with "chow" so that they can have a longer conversation if they need to. Many of them have told me I'm the best pastor at the mission. I don't say that out of pride, because I don't even know all the other people who conduct services there, and I don't have any idea of whether the men are just trying to flatter me. I also get serious criticism. What I am sure of is that they realize that I accept them and many are willing to open up to me.

And that, IMO, is another reason to have women as chaplains and pastors. On the whole (and of course all generalizations are exactly that), women tend to be more sensitive and empathetic than men. Also, many women are more comfortable discussing a trauma, such as rape or spousal abuse, with another woman than with a male pastor.

I really think we ordained women have our place, and it isn't in silence at church. I am not proud of the fact that my own church has five male pastors and will not choose a woman to serve in that role, though the deaconesses have a good bit of power in the church.

I live near the Lompoc compounds of four prisons (3 state and a federal) in California. I would love to be doing work inside those facilities; I know that Prison Fellowship goes in only once every three months with a team from Los Angeles. Sure, PF helps men to accept the Lord -- but those new Christians need regular support beyond their overworked Chaplain. Three months between visits is too long.

I would like to establish a weekly Bible study there and believe I could recruit enough volunteers from my church, but though I'm cleared to visit friends in at least 5 California prisons, I have no idea how I would set up something like that. If you do, and support having a woman pastor leading a team of solid Christians, then please help me however you can. No -- don't help me. Help the inmates. I'm just a conduit, a servant, God's donkey ... but a donkey can carry a lot!

Pax Christi,
Drucilla Mills

"God and I have a great relationship, but we both see other people."

-Dolly Parton

Someone Cares Home Page