WE NEED A FAVOR If there is a “W” on your address label, we sent you an inmate name to write. With the name was a blue form to be returned to us. Please contact us if you are writing and to whom you are writing. If we sent a name and you are not writing, also contact us. Send us the name of who you are not writing. If you have an inmate application and you’re not writing, please return it.

FIVE NEW PRISONS

The times we live in are very confusing. Guess what? In the State of California, where they need new schools, they are building prisons. Thirty two prisons are now being used. All are at over 100% capacity: two are under 150%; eleven are over 200%!

At a time when we started in California, there were less than 50,000 inmates — now almost 200,000! California now runs the largest prison system in the western world. It houses more prisoners than do the countries of France, Germany, the Netherlands and Singapore combined. It has the most over-crowded prison system in the United States.

A federal judge expressed shock at what he called neglect and “depravity” in parts of the prison health system, and ordered a receiver to take control. Court-ordered improvements could send costs soaring in a program that already spends $1.1 Billion a year. Many have converted gyms, large dormitories, even chapels into housing. Tent city at San Quentin was another massive failure. This crowding has raised racial and other tensions, making prisons more difficult to control, and hindered the very limited treatment and education that is provided.

DOES THIS MAKE SENSE?

An inmate commits a crime and goes to prison for, let’s say, ten years. He committed the crime in, let’s say, your town. But he lives in and has family in a town 400 miles away. While in prison he cannot work or save anything, so he is broke when paroled. When paroled, even though he may have family 400 miles away (if they have not deserted him), he is paroled to where he committed the crime?!

Figures vary, but it costs about $45,000 a year to house a man, woman, boy or girl. Ten years =$450,000! Lots of money, and when released, he or she may get $200.00. The recidivism rate is up to 75% in some states. We wonder why?!

PAROLE.
Overcrowding is the root of prison failures, and parole is the root of overcrowding. Three strikes says if you commit a third crime, failing a blood test, you get life? When or if inmates make it back home, they are ill-prepared, either by their stay in prison or poor parole programs, to get or hold a job. The little Hoover Commission found that 10% are homeless (I think that figure is much higher), half are illiterate, as many as 80% are unemployed and the same number are drug users.

HOW ABOUT THIS?

Way back in the ‘80s Yvonne and I helped with a new re-entry program, training inmates to adjust to freedom after being institutionalized. Six months prior to release it was mandatory to learn how to do all things necessary to adjust. On our own, we found men with skills and contacted employers to help get jobs. One State said get a GED or stay in prison until you do. If eight out of ten are going to return to prison at more than $45,000 plus a year, would it not be cost effective to give for a period of time, $1,000 a month, $12,000 a year, to help enter society?

Then there was our Dress Out program. George had been in prison 6 years and was getting out. He had no money, no job, no place to stay. The State said, O.K., we will give you $200.00 to get started—$100 at the gate, the other $100 when you get to your parole point. When George arrived at the gate, the guard says, “Do you have any clothes?!! No? Then we have to sell you what you are wearing.” The State takes about $50.00 out of George’s gate money. This is very sad, When we had the Dress Out program, George would have had several sets of clothes, especially coats, in case he had to stay under a bridge.

PRISON GANGS

The Black Guerrilla Family (BGF) is the most politically oriented of major prison gangs. Formed to eradicate racism, maintain dignity in prison, overthrow the U.S government, membership is traditionally black male inmates. Lifelong allegiance is required and a Death Oath taken.

Mexican Mafia: Philosophy is built on ethnic solidarity and drug trafficking. They are centered around drugs, trafficking, extortion, pressure rackets, and internal discipline. They use killing to maintain discipline or gain respect. Killings are extremely gruesome, to establish fear. This is just a small example of gangs. There are many more.

IN THE BEGINNING

When we started in Prison Ministry it was easy, with my background, to reach into this madness. We saw a need and set out to fill it. First we joined forces with an organization called M2. They had a one to one visitation program that really helped inmates keep in contact with the real world. As a rookie, I signed up to be a Sponsor. I was matched with a Black gang member. My first visit was an experience I will never forget, but I learned from it. The inmate was really nervous. He told me he would never get out of prison unless he could leave the gang.

We became real friends, especially as I would soon be a Chaplain there. Yvonne and I have seen hundreds of men visit inmates and change their lives. It was funded by grants, but most of the
volunteer sponsors were Christians and brought Jesus with them. The State cut the program because of religion.

Our dream is to start a full-force program called Two Care, using the same ideals but without State funds. Also, a Program called Friends Outside that we hooked up with. This helped with family needs to keep inmates in contact with family, ideally on visiting days, as often they cared for kids when parents visited. Also, after we provided the clothes when someone showed up wearing something the prison did not allow; we would provide acceptable clothing. This is still working, but cut way back in what it does. The dress-out program that we had in almost every prison, died when we left.

SIDE BY SIDE WE STAND

Someone Cares always tried to use and join with other organizations, using their talent with ours. A dream we had was to establish a total ministry that could help cure the madness of incarceration. When a person goes to prison it is supposed to be for punishment, not as punishing. When someone goes to prison today, it is to spend time doing nothing. In days past there were programs that gave inmates a reason to change. Once if an inmate worked, or went to school, they got a day-for-day credit. So, every day they did something productive, a day came off their sentence, it worked, but has been done away with.

School was important, but we have worked in prisons where inmates went to school, but where there was no one to give a final test. We are happy to say religion was a vital part of doing away with recidivism. It’s called regeneration. No matter how bad a person is or was, when Jesus moves in, self changes. We have been asked by many to return to California to again help make a difference. It is tempting. We both would love to once more make a difference where the changes would show. But California is expensive. If someone has a house, mobile home, or Condo we can rent affordably, for a long time, “California, Here We Come.” If not, we can do our best with Paper Sunshine to help men, women, boys and girls, change.

YVONNE’S CORNER

“I was in prison and you came to me” said the Lord, “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you have done it to me.”

Although, in her humbleness, she never mentioned this to me. I assume that my best friend had this scripture in her heart when she wrote to me when I was in prison over ten years ago.

“After spending over a year in prison for a property crime, my self esteem was reduced to dirt by my feelings of guilt, shame, remorse and anger at myself. Encouragement was almost nonexistent in these unforgiving walls. Obtaining my G.E.D. or 4.0 grade point average when I started college there, went without recognition.”

This is a small portion of “Josephine’s Prayer” that she wrote and gave us permission to use in the Newsletter. That is the way prison is, and even worse at times. At least, ten years ago, they could go to school. Like Don said above, a lot of programs have been done away with, they don’t exist, so inmates
sit in their cells. They may have two to four to a cell depending on the size of the cell. We have seen that. They are people just like you or me, I find it very perplexing when Christians want to write, but if we match an Afro-American to a white Christian, the white Christian does not want to write to them?! We are all Brothers and Sisters in Jesus! None of us is perfect; the Bible compares us to filthy rags if we do not have Jesus. As a Minister’s daughter I have observed a lot of people who attend church, every week, others off and on, but they all Love the Lord.

I think of an example where we matched an inmate who did not read or write well at all. We matched him with a retired school teacher who worked with him and took the time to teach him. I don’t believe I could have done that, but it was wonderful to see. How do you measure up as one of Christ’s followers? Do you hide your light under a bushel, or take it to a dark place to help lighten it?

**CASE IN POINT**

Don, forgive me. You sent me a packet and all the information I asked for. I read the information, read the letter from the inmate and got scared, I did not write. I also did not send the information back. Yesterday I got your newsletter and put it down to read later. I then opened a drawer, and Oops! there the year-old information was. I am returning it and asking to be matched with an older person.

I then dropped a line to the inmate who just happened to have died of AIDS. It is not a problem to say no, just return the information. We are blessed to be on radio and TV often, and people are touched at the moment. Often they are interested in finding out more, and we go ahead and match them. Now I make a copy so if the person does not write, we can match the inmate with someone else. But 50 of you have names we sent and have received no matchup letter from you. Please help us out by starting your Paper Sun-shine experience, or returning the material so we can assign another writer to your inmate. JEAN’S JOTTINGS

You all know the quote about walking a mile in someone else’s moccasins before griping about our own footwear in life. Friends, we are the ones on the outside of the razor wire, and don’t know what’s in the hearts of the inmates that brought them to prison.

If you’ve never “belonged,” been the last one chosen for a game, or the last one who was asked to the prom, or not asked at all if you or your family weren’t popular because of their skin color, then you’ve no idea what goes on behind that invisible wall.

It’s time to cultivate the friendship of the person in the envelope you hold in your hand. I can tell you from experience that one day you will rejoice with your Pen Friend and give thanks for the Agape love you both share as part of God’s family.

If you are an only child, you are about to acquire a new brother or sister. Share your inmate with your family, and have them put little notes in with yours when you write. How about the funny things your pets do?

Some of those to whom you write are very lonely and may overreach the bounds of agape friendship. Try to draw them back to Jesus. If that doesn’t work, ask advice from Don or Yvonne.

Jesus was always kind and tactful, but was lovingly firm with those who needed a new direction to travel.
The lady in the “Case In Point” said she read the inmate’s letter and got scared. Was the inmate in her house? No. Was he threatening her? Not likely; it would get him in a world of trouble. Is he wandering about outside the prison compound? Again, no.

So, why should she fear someone she’s never met, never known, but would only be exchanging encouragement to another human who made a mistake?!

Jesus said He had other sheep who were not of this (prison) Think of your inmates as human “sheep,” who are shut up in pens, needing a shepherd. Paper Sunshine is like spiritual food, and certainly a breath of fresh air from above, instead of the noisy, often antagonistic atmosphere of the prison environment.

Some of those inmates are in prison by false convictions. We cannot judge them either way, only lead them to the bridge Don talks about, that leads people to Jesus. Sheep may be led, but they don’t push easily. Your kindness is that bridge they can cross to reach the One who loves them infinitely.

And don’t let the color of a person’s skin EVER keep you from reaching across that bridge to lead your lost sheep to the safety of Jesus’ green pastures, and the water of Heaven to drink.

Someone Cares Home Page