CON IN CONVICT

Our Pen Friend Program has exploded! With our massive amount of mail, we thought we would spend time on those in prisons. Today’s prisons house the upper of Upper Class to the lowest of lower class. No matter where you came from, prison will change you. With most states ignoring rehabilitation in place of very long sentences, prisons are becoming very bad. We know about the idle mind being the Devil’s work-place. In Prison it is the predators’ breeding ground.

Prisons are Minimum, Medium or Maximum Security. With overcrowding as bad as it is, most are mixed together, making prison a madhouse. Protective Custody is a place for the weak to try and hide. “The Hole,” or Administrative Segregation, is for gang bangers and those who commit crime in prison. Those who are street-or ghetto-raised are into gangs at once. Gangs inside are supported by gangs outside. They handle drugs, strong arming, protection, sex. For a price, often your body and some-times your life, anything can be bought. All have a price on their heads.

Surprising as it may seem often the hardened long-term criminals are easier to control. They have their turf and don’t want to be bothered. The youngsters are looking for reps and to move up the chain of command. At the top of the prison totem pole are the killers; at the bottom, child molesters. Youngsters are prey for all. Threats of rape force them to join gangs for protection. Even the Christians huddle together for protection.

Now, into this cesspool of humanity, we match you with an inmate who has requested a Pen Friend. Many write as part of a hustle, seeing what they can get from free folks. We try to prevent any of this by having you write through us.

RELIGION IN PRISON

Most prisons have Chaplains who are often more cops than ministers.

Even these men and women are manipulated by the convict. A vital part of prison religion comes from the volunteers. Working with several great Chaplains has helped us survive in a confusing system. We learned (and teach) to not let our Doctrine be a barrier, but a Bridge to Jesus.

It’s rare, but some prisons have some kind of volunteer program every night. Some inmates attend all the services to learn, or to try to get points toward parole. I know one inmate who has...
completed a hundred Bible studies and is still not even a Christian! Confusing, just being in prison.

I will never forget an inmate at San Quentin. He was taught by one group about eternal salvation, another about diet, another about speaking in tongues, yet another about the state of the dead. He came to us one morning after being up all night trying to learn speaking in tongues. We explained it was a gift and God would, or might, give it to him. It is such a joy to teach the simplicity of Jesus and let Him take over. If a man or woman in prison is going to talk the talk, they had better walk the walk. George was put into prison and assigned to San Quentin’s “C” section—a very tough section of the prison. He found a Bible in his cell and read it over and over. God blessed him with a Pen Friend who was able to answer a lot of questions. Andy got a pen friend who spoon-fed him just what they knew and it confused him because he did not understand them or their religion. We explained the simplicity of Jesus. He came to earth to live an example for all of us.

WHAT ABOUT THE CONVICT... who wants to use you? Our program is called the Pen Friend Program. Its purpose is to establish a friendship that will lead to a better way of life. We learn about the life and ministry of Jesus and then try to adapt simple parts to ourselves. We need to listen to what our inmate friend has to say, and slowly explain why we are writing.

Men in prisons are looking for a woman to write. If they get a man, they often don’t answer. Do we give up? No! We pray that you do not. True friendship is keeping on keeping on.

One bad dude joined our program. He had an attitude and we matched him by our two-pile system with a high school principal. Talk about opposites! But time is an ally and a real blessing. It took over two years, but these two men became friends and in helping the inmate (who learned to pass a GED), the principal led him to Christ. A code in prison is: “Do good to me and I am honor-bound to do the same to you. Do bad and look out!”

Yvonne and I will be doing much more helping, as this ministry is the snow ball rolling and growing.

DIED OF A BROKEN HEART

I just spent weeks and hours going name-to-name through our (we thought) Pen Friends’ files and found out a lot. Too many folks heard or saw us on the air, and their hearts were touched to get involved.

We sent a name and they found out this was not their calling. They forgot to tell us. When we send a packet out its says if this is not for you, return the packet.

Betty, an inmate in California, was matched and never got a letter. We found out and rematched her. I called the person and asked what had happened. She threw the paper work away because we were of a different faith than she??!!! Others misplaced the paper-work and even after getting a note and newsletter, never told us. Wow, I am so glad Jesus keeps on keeping on.

When we were at Soledad we established an All Faiths Chapel, and out of that, our ministry grew. It is still growing, as we have a group of writers, supporters and prayer partners who
follow the commands of the Lord in His word.

“What says the Bible, The Bible to me?
The words of men often deceive us,
What says the Bible to me?”

As free folks, we are creatures of habit. We write a letter and expect an answer. The rules explain, in writing an inmate, that they may not have paper, an envelope, pen or pencil, and most importantly, a stamp, or money to buy a stamped envelope. Stamps used to be used for money, so now many prisons require use of stamped envelopes purchased from their “store,” at inflated prices.

We have about fifty folks who had written the first letter but got no answer, and gave up. We dropped each a note and only six answered. How cruel!

DO YOU HAVE AN E MAIL ADDRESS?

If you do, please send it to us. If you would like to write via Email, great! You must start the Email just like a regular letter with a date, the inmate’s name + their prison number, and their full address. End your letter with your name or Pen Name.

We cut the top (electronic I.D.) part off the Email, snail-mail the letter to the inmate, and return their letter to you. If you use a pen name it must be a Two-Name Pen Name. This is for your protection, and why our program works so well that classrooms of children safely write to inmates.

LETTER TO INMATE

Here is an example.

Today’s Date:

Inmate’s name and number
Name of facility
Address of facility
City, State, Zip

Hi, (Inmate’s first name)

I was given your name by Someone Cares Prison Ministry. As a Christian I thought it would be great to write you. Now, I admit up front that writing a stranger is not easy and your help is needed. I know nothing about prison so your help will let our friendship grow. As a Christian I would like to share that with you, OK? Your letter to Someone Cares helps, but tell me whatever you feel comfortable writing. Let me tell you a little about me and my family...

Sincerely / or, Your friend in Jesus,
Sign your name or two-name Pen Name

Ask lots of questions. Keep in mind often these folks spend as much as 23 hours a day in a cell. They don’t have radio or TV and are restricted to what they can write about. Also they know that their letters to you are often read by prison staff.

A man or woman locked up easily mistakes friendship for romance.

1. Stay in control.
2. Ask lots of questions, but Never why are they in prison.
3. Be honored if they tell you.
4. Do not make a promise you cannot keep.
5. Keep their letters as a reference. 6. “Dear” and “Love” can open up a can of worms you don’t want to deal with.

MEXICAN GEORGE IS AN EXAMPLE

He was gang-raised in Los Angles, never finished grammar school. Killed a man in a drive-by at 12. Had gang tattoos all over his body. Was a drug pusher on the streets and in prison. Taught himself to read and write. He got tired of the madness of prison and asked for a Pen Friend.

Enter Donna. A nurse, a mother, and a solid church member. She had been to one of our Seminars, so she knew a bit about letter writing.

George was shocked that he got a friend, and this friendship grew. Donna and Jim, her husband, helped George finish school. It took two years. A bit here, and a little there, led George to asking about Jesus.

That was twenty years ago. George is near parole, and Donna and Jim helped him prepare for release. George was able to leave the gang style (not easy!) and we believe he will make it. ?

SINGLE FAITH PRISON PROGRAM

The Government seems to want to continue making mistakes. They want to set up cell blocks with up to a half-dozen prisons for a pilot program to prepare inmates for release. It wants a private group to counsel the inmates according to a single faith.

It’s neat that the government sees the need for religion prior to reentry, but there are many flaws in the program before it starts.

1. Inmates chosen may be moved to prisons farther away from home, meaning no family visits in the 18 month program.

2. They want to spend 3 million dollar$. They could do it for nothing with an entire volunteer work force.

3. Now, saying “Single Faith” makes no sense because, if the program works, these men, and maybe women, will attend which church upon release?
4. Do they have a choice, or does the State choose for them?

5. Are these inmates punished if they don’t “choose” the “right” church?

6. This adds to our prayers about whether to return to California. We helped start a Pre-release and Re-entry Program there almost twenty years ago, using volunteers from many churches and many organizations already working with prisoners.

7. We are not activists, but many groups are protesting.

8. We are told that the program is non-coercive and constitutional, participation will be voluntary.

9. That is fine, but they do not say who chooses or who goes. It would be better if there was an incentive to be a part of this program. We will keep you posted on what happens. Oh, yes: the Church and State issue is already on the table.

YVONNE’S CORNER

One of the first things you learn when working in prison is that you never make a promise you cannot keep! They have so little, yet when you say to them you are getting a pen Friend for them, that is one of the best things you could do for them. They are excited, so please keep us posted as to what you are doing, so we do not let these inmates down. They have learned to trust us, so commitment and following through is very special to all concerned. Be faithful in what you say you will do. God Bless.

JEAN’S JOTTINGS

It’s been a long, cool wonderful Spring. My partner and I have been blessed with publicity in a local paper, along with several other volunteers who serve at the prison. We all shared a two-page spread on our efforts. Six of us were specially honored, and we know there are more.

The farmer who rents my land put in at least 25 acres of organic popcorn this year, and my prayers seem to be answered. It began raining gently right after planting, and after two weeks, the little seeds have either sprouted or learned to swim.?

Just to let me know everything was OK, the Lord treated me to a gorgeous oriole one morning, within reaching distance of my window. There will be many blessings to share with our little group this week. These enthusiastic gentlemen are such a blessing to us, and appreciate our efforts to find food for thought, with extras to pass out in their cubicles. One will find something to put in a special place where they drop off these things. Next time they go by that spot, the materials are gone, to be read by other inmates. We know God multiplies the spiritual “loaves and fishes” in this way, to whom He will. It always brings a smile to our hearts to hear how well God works. We’re sure there must be good angels at work in every prison facility, bringing kindness unexpectedly to the surface of someone. Even a hardened criminal must have someone behind bars he can call a friend, even if it’s one he or she simply dislikes least.
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