SHOULD WE SAY NO TO GOD?

No or go! With very little effort our ministry has really grown. It seems each time one inmate gets a Pen Friend, another wants one.

We have reached a point where we are understaffed. We will make this the only issue totally dedicated to fund raising we have done. Nine other ministries have promoted our Pen Friend Program, causing a massive amount of inmate response. Not one of them was willing to help us make an appeal for folks to write. We found an ad in several Christian magazines, and a plug by some church organizations would help us get enough folks to write.

Along with the extra mail, comes a lot more mail to read. Hiring Ronna full time will give us the additional help we need.

Paying for the ads and her salary is an expense we need your help with. We also have the offer of several folks to volunteer. The additional work load is caused by the fact that we do not restrict the Pen Friend Program to Christian inmates alone. Handling the mail of hard-core inmates and regular inmates in areas we will talk about in this newsletter takes someone with a where-they-came-from back-ground. We have done very well over the years as my background, and our experience of years in prisons, has given us the talent and knowledge to handle most cases.

If any of you has expertise in Grants preparation, we need your assistance. We’re halfway finished with a video on our programs that we pray, when done, can be shown in all your churches. Please pray, and if the Lord leads, make a sacrificial donation to the growth of God’s work through Someone Cares.

HE WALKS WITH US, HE TALKS WITH US:

We thank God that HE does. I am amazed so often at the scope of this ministry that God placed us in

As a diversion to the mountainous job of moving mail, I love to work outside. We love color and beauty. I was out weeding some new flower beds. The weeds come often and it can be hard work. I often think of Jesus in the garden. We reflect on how HE asked others to stay with HIM. In the world we live in, God’s being there for us is so vital. One of the first songs I remember learning when I first became a Christian was “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.” So often we do that.
I think back so many years and reflect on how truly hard it was for me to understand what “Power In The Blood” really meant.

It is such a pleasure reading mail from inmates who are matched with Pen Friends. Prison is such a great place to minister, and the rewards are plentiful. The workers are few and many programs are being stopped. Sure, there are awful people there; some will abuse and try to use this ministry. I am amazed so often at the scope of this Ministry that God placed us in. I really believe that with a big effort anyone can change. Every time I read, and send on a letter I say a prayer. I am writing some of the hard core types and trying to explain we really do care. Low self-esteem is the ruin of so many.

I once visited a man in a prison hospital. He had been stabbed a lot of times. He was so full of hate. He really did not want to hear what I had to say, but he had nowhere to go. Reflecting the love of Jesus I told him of the journey we all had to take. I explained the pain-free, sin-free, hate-free journey to Heaven. I told him of changing into robes of white. He was shocked when I took his hand, held it firmly and prayed the sinner’s prayer. He tried to pull away, but soon his grip relaxed. Jesus moved in that day. The man did not die, but was born again. Thank you Jesus.

RETURN TO SENDER?

The note requesting an application for a Pen Friend and the application we sent him was returned “not allowed!” My first thought was no! not again!

Over the years we have had to fight very hard to get our programs into some prison systems. I called the prison and was told not only the application would not be accepted, but neither would letters from Pen Friends. I will not go into detail on the rest of the story, or the time spent to resolve the problem, but we are now allowed to send applications to that prison system.

PAUL AND SILAS:

The story of their attempt to get into prison where most try to get out is priceless. Acts 16: 20 to 31. Jesus is saying to all “I was in Prison and you visited me not” for which the penalty is severe. The really neat part of that story is: believe and you and your house will be saved. With this ministry growing pretty fast, we need to provide you some information about problems many states are having.

California’s Governor called a meeting to deal with a prison system that is so broken it’s a powder keg. Quote. This is a common problem nationwide The system has 85,000 inmates more that it was designed for; 75% of some of the inmates have no activities during the day. Inmates tell us they spend most of the time trying to survive. The cost to rebuild programs they once had will be paid by the taxpayers. A federal judge has ordered, (an expense again to taxpayers) of ONE BILLION DOLLARS on facilities for the mentally ill inmates With a 70% recidivism rate in California, and somewhat less in other states.

LET'S CHAT!
Since 80% of you getting this newsletter write inmates, we pray that each one writing will take one more name to write, and ask your Pastor to invite the church to join Paper Sunshine. Lots of programs in prison are being changed or done away with.

Prisons are setting new rules or enforcing old ones.

Sending items into a prison is getting harder and harder. Stamps, an item many inmates trade meals for, are not being allowed into some prisons, so inmates writing you may find it harder to answer. It does dress up an envelope, putting smiley faces on them, but your letter with stickers may be returned. Getting drugs into a prison on the glue is easy to do. No Stickers! If you send copies of something in your letter this might not be allowed and the prison will return all. We then take out what is not allowed and remail the envelope, costing us another 37 cents. If you want to send money, you MUST find out what the policy of the prison is. Books must come from an Approved Vendor book store. No used books. If you are not sure, Email us. Prison is a place were almost everyone has problems, they really don’t need yours.

**DOES GOD HELP THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES?**

Doing Prison Ministry as long as we have---one thing never changes. Inmates lose the ability, or the will, to do things they need to do. When I was locked up I started planing on getting out. Self-help programs are few and far between. Most prisons have libraries that can be directional. A common concern is: “I have no place to live when I get out.”

Believe me, the prison system does not care. States vary but here is what can happen if no planning is done. In California, when released for “Parole”, under supervision for a period of time, You are given $100.00 at the gate and another $100 when you arrive at the parole office, many never get there. Now if the inmate never worked in prison, and saved any money, that’s it. Few are willing to hire and ex-con.

We started, In California, a re-entry program. With skilled men, it was a bit easier. If an inmate had a solid trade, we got want ads or phone book listings and had them write about jobs. 22% got work. Finishing their education is also wise, but very hard to do. One State has a “Learn to read and write or no parole.”

We will deal with this more in the near future.

**RELIGION IN PRISON:**

Something that seems so easy can be almost impossible.

Volunteer programs are being cut way back. An inmate decides to change and get a Bible. I can tell you from experience that a Bible without direction is very difficult. Inmates can get Free Bible studies all over the place. Some have a massive number of certificates, but don’t know Jesus. Doctrine becomes a problem and most find many things “more important than the saving Grace of Jesus.”

In many cases some in-mates who have a little knowledge try to teach others. Find out what your inmate has access to in prison. Are there Chapel programs? Do they have free volunteer Bible studies? Is there a Chaplain?
Is there a Chapel Library? If your friend is in lock down what do they receive? Then think to yourself, am I helping my friend grow in Jesus or teaching them what I happen to believe.

WHERE THE RUBBER HITS THE ROAD

My Friend Pat;

I received your letter today and will answer your questions.

Starting with: I am writing you as a result of you writing Someone Cares and being interested in a Pen Friend. I listened to them on the radio and also became interested. As a Christian, I felt called to help in this area; we are assigned each other. From your letter you don’t know much about the Bible. That is fine---we can learn together, if you are interested. I realize you are in prison, and I know very little about prison. You can help me there. You stated that it did bother you that the letter you write may be read by Someone Cares. With out that ministry, we would not be writing. They are a buffer to help me help you. You might ask questions I can’t answer. Being very honest, I really did not want my address floating around a prison. I am not interested in romance and may or may not be able to provide things you may ask for. This is a learning experience for both of us. As a Christian, I am interested in your spiritual welfare. Since your sentence is life, the charge you were found guilty of must have been serious, but I do not need to know why you are there, I am interested in why you are here! What prompted you to ask for a Pen Friend? In your mind’s eye, what do you hope to receive with us, or someone else, writing you?

Marge
There was more to this letter but this is an excellent opening letter, or re-opening if you need to start over.

YVONNE’S CORNER

Never did I even think or imagine that one letter to a inmate would ever spread like a wild fire and grow this much! Recently when Don came home with a full box of mail, and looked at me and said, “Well, now what?”

I could only look at him and say, “I guess our work is not yet finished.”

Many years ago, I recall Don asking me to go to the prison just to answer the Chaplains’ phone when they weren’t in the office. Finally I said alright. Well little did I know then what God had in store for us. God is so awesome, and being able to tell people who are locked up, about God, is just so great! Before I knew it I was sharing with everyone.

I didn’t care where they came from, or what they had done, because I knew that God would make everything great! Don would sometimes ask me if I knew who the person was and if they were a gang member; well, how would I know that?

I was a Minister’s daughter raised in the church; I just took for granted that I should talk to anyone who would listen, and so I did and still to this day I do take every chance I get to witness for God. It is very important that you know your Pen Friend and try to establish some common ground. Don and I stand looking at Calvary; will you join us?
PRISON MINISTRY & BAPTISM

Monty Meyer wrote:

Brother McClure,

I'm a head deacon and have been active in prison ministry for one year. Something is deeply troubling me and I'm needing advice from someone with experience in this situation. My wife and I have been in prayer about this and it keeps me up at night. I study two nights a week at a federal prison in our town. There are seven men in our group. They've studied the church's baptism studies and are now more than half way through Seminars Unlimited studies of Daniel & Revelation. The men are requesting baptism and are more than ready and want to join our church (if not at the local level, at a conference level or any other). They feel the need for baptism and desire to be a part of the Family of God.

They've requested offering envelopes so they can send tithes and offering. The problem is, our local church board will not allow them to be baptized into our church, nor will the conference accept them.

They feel like lepers. They feel like the "unclean". They understand this is not my decision. I can't read Acts 10 & 11 without being convicted that this scripture also refers to men and women in prison.

How can we pick and choose who to baptize and which sins are so severe they should exclude someone from baptism?? God has not forsaken these men. Jesus' blood was shed for them too. He has called them back into His fold. These men have repented of their wrong doing and continue to do so daily as needed...same as me. I see the Holy Spirit working on them and through them. They realize they have a work to do for God right where they are and they can reach others who I can never see.

When they leave our study, they go back to a mission field only they can enter. Their prayers are sincere. Some of these men, due to their age, health and sentence, will not see the outside of prison unless our Lord and Savior comes before their passing. The church/conference fears seem to be "it would make our church look bad if they become repeat offenders" or they're worried about church members becoming victims by allowing them in.

Can these men be baptized? If so, how? If not, why? Anything you have to share with me is much appreciated. Thank you so much for your time.

In Christ,
Monty Meyer

JEAN’S JOTTINGS

Have you ever tried to get a job completed and it seemed the devil was putting up a road block no matter which way you turned? Welcome to the club!

One of the recent joys I’ve been blessed with is the return of my son, a changed man. He has
brightened my spirits and helped to bring me out of the pit of despair. Today is a bad day for
him, so please keep him in your prayers.

I was very upset over the letter from Mr. Meyer, who is trying so hard to follow God’s leading,
encourage his group of inmates, and contend with adversaries in his own church! A group in my
church is going into LAST DAY EVENTS, a small but powerful book. The encouragement is
wonderful, and straight from God’s lips. We’re told that those who don’t join in to do the work
Jesus set out for us, won’t get into the kingdom!

OUCH!!!

If God is love, shouldn’t we be, also? Go back through the stories of the early church with God
using common folk willing to put themselves out for the sake of their beloved Jesus.

The most prominent spent the most time in prison! Times are no more tough for today’s church
than the early church and its struggling members, but as they spread the gospel (Good News),
the earth was covered, and no demons could stop it.

Jesus told one of his disciples when asked about how many times to forgive: up to seven? Jesus’
answer was 70*7! What would our churches look like if we forgave on that scale, freely loving
the “repeat offenders” back to Himself? They would be full!!!!

I give thanks to Don and Yvonne for the work they do. Shirley and I marvel at what our little
prison group accomplishes in spreading the good work just where they are. They happily take
back to their units the studies Shirley prepares for them, along with extras to hand out.

I have personally heard an elder tell a church member that we mustn’t hand out a little book that
has brought many to Jesus, because the recipient might be offended. Is it better to be informed
and offended, or to be ignorant and lost?

Jesus was not a wimp! He was meek and mild, attracting many souls to the comforting message
he spoke in love.

We’re told that a time is coming when people will understand God’s message for our time. They
will take their pastors to task about the false doctrines they have been preaching, and crying out
to them because the truth was withheld from them. TO GOD BE THE GLORY!!

SPECIAL PRAYER

When this newsletter goes out we will have had special prayer for everyone receiving it. Extra
special for Mona H., Michelle J., Bob & Betty. May the families of those who were such a big
part of this ministry, who now rest in Jesus, receive the blessing that SOON and VERY soon we
all will be with Jesus!

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