

God's Special Time

Kairos Prison Ministry

Quarterly Newsletter of Golden State Kairos

December, 2002

C.I.M. Chino

C.M.F. Vacaville

F.C.C. Victorville

F.C.I. Dublin

F.C.I. Terminal Island

F.P.C. Victorville

Kairos Outside Desert

Kairos Outside S.F. Bay Area

Kairos Outside Sacramento Valley

Kairos Outside San Diego

Kairos Outside South

Ironwood State Prison

R.J. Donovan State Prison

San Quentin State Prison

U.S.P. Lompoc

FCI Dublin

With a heart still full and reeling from the experience of the latest English speaking weekend at FCI, Dublin, CA., I was gifted with the wonderful blessing of being Rectora for Kairos #31. It took place this past October 12th - 14th, 2002. The theme for our weekend was "Come to the Water." From the very start, I began my preparations with prayer, trusting completely that our God would lead the way.

I knew from the first telephone call I made in putting the team together, that those chosen by God would be the ones to respond with a yes, and bring His love to all the women He chose to participate.

And what a team it was! It's difficult to put in words, what I hold in my heart, for each woman on my team. They each, having a willing spirit, are such special Christian women, with so much love of the Lord, with the desire to bring that love to all the women incarcerated, that I felt so honored to be amongst them. My faith ever deepened by the sharing of their faith. Additional blessings were received by welcoming first time Kairos volunteers, a total of 8 out of a team of 30 women.

Our weekend began with great anticipation and excitement. The adrenaline was flowing as we greeted 41 candidates with open arms, knowing what the Holy Spirit was about to bring them, and us. Seeing the look of apprehension on their faces, not knowing what to expect, we attempted to put them at ease from the start. And so the weekend began, with the presentation of wonderful talks and meditations. With great music, which brought fun and gaiety, as well as thoughtful prayer. Our spirit team presented meaningful and spiritual worship services, which touched our hearts, and more importantly, our souls. From the first evening's poster party, it was evident that the Holy Spirit had taken over.

The candidates clearly heard the messages God was bringing to them through the voices of the team. The tears flowed when each candidate was presented with her bag of letters. They opened their mail and read, and read, and read. I overheard one candidate announce to the woman sitting next to her, "We have to bring this love to others!" Wow! What a revelation!

The sharing that came from the candidates at the end of the weekend was proof again of the presence of the Holy Spirit. One woman shared, "If coming to prison meant I was to go on a Kairos, then it was worth it." I've worked many Kairos's, and each time I am always amazed at the transformation of the women.

To sum up, I'd like to say that it's really foolish to believe that we who answer yes to His call to serve are those bearing gifts, when in fact He gives back to us more than we can ever realize. This Kairos was no different.

Penny Manchester, Rectora Kairos #31 FCI Dublin, CA.

Kairos Outside San Francisco Bay Area

The Spanish Kairos Outside weekend was November 15-17, 2002. Olivia Ramirez groomed her team to lavish the guests with love, care and support. It is safe to say that's what happened.

The Council is calling new members to its ranks. Several members' terms end in December, making replacements necessary. New members will step on board in January 2003. Plans are in process for the Council's winter retreat scheduled for January 13-15, 2003. The Publicity Committee has finalized their oral presentation and is now prepared for speaking arrangements when they arise.

The Publicity Committee

Kairos Winter Board Meeting

The Kairos Winter 2003 Board meeting will be held in Orlando, FL, Thursday, February 13, 2003 (arrival and check in) to Sunday, February, 16, 2003 (check out and depart). The Committees and Board meetings will occur on Friday and Saturday. Cost 'til January 9, 2003 is \$300.00 per person double occupancy.

Important matters will be on the agenda, including proposed By-Law changes, affiliation fees, and other financial matters.

The itinerary, schedule and reservation form are available from National or Fred Williams, Regional Representative.

All GSK members are invited to attend; especially the state officers, Advisory Council and Area Committee representatives and chairs.

If you have any matters you want discussed at the Winter Board meeting, send a written proposal to Fred and send a copy to Bob Denham for inclusion in the January 2003 GSK meeting agenda.

Fred Williams , Regional Representative

Terminal Island

After a wait of over a year, Rector Phil Bemis led his team back inside of Terminal Island and had a weekend that was worth every minute of the wait. After the long wait to put on the weekend there was a list of 51 candidates waiting for the team. The inside team did a great job of keeping the list full throughout the year. Hats off to Phil for keeping the TEAM together for over a year. There were at least four date changes throughout the wait that I know of and maybe more. Think about all of the vacation requests that had to be canceled and re-made. Think about the Clergy writing their schedules, and then after ANOTHER date change having to re-write the schedule. But it was God's weekend and the team heard His call.

One of the reasons for the long wait for the weekend was the fact that BOTH Chaplains had transferred to other institutions and there just wasn't enough staff for us to have a Kairos weekend. We have been blessed to have a new Chaplain begin work at Terminal Island. Chaplain Gerald Fitzgerald has taken the reigns and we look forward to serving with him for a long time to come.

Our next weekend is scheduled for June and Rector Jim Carlin is ready to go. If Phil Bemis was the longest serving Rector in Kairos history, then Jim Carlin takes the cake as the longest serving Observing Rector. Our prayers are with Jim as he forms his team.

God Bless, Alan Selmanaj

Lompoc

I don't know how David could work this into his report, but he did such a fine job as rector. He steadily focused on the big-picture items during our team formation meetings: Jesus, the residents, the team. All the details, equipment, schedule, agape, logistics got handled -- mostly outside of team meetings, and as a result, the team meetings were a little about talks and rules and a lot about Jesus, listening to one another, and preparing ourselves

to serve the men inside. It was a joy for me to watch because I know how stressed I get about details.

Another joy was the new team members, all of whom had very rich experiences.

- Ron Culmer, an Episcopal priest from San Fernando Valley who had such a natural way with the inside team;
- George Hooper, Methodist minister from Santa Maria with a big voice and a commanding presence;
- Milt Rosenberg, a Catholic deacon and converted Jew who joyfully retells his story of first meeting Jesus as if it were yesterday (it was more like 1985);
- Lalo Vital, a Pentecostal and a Mexico native, who deeply connected with the men at the Spanish-speaking table.

The inside team at Lompoc is a very dedicated, hard-working, group of servants of the Lord.

A new challenge ahead: bridging the language gap to Asians

Mike Fay

Deacon George Salinger

[In his quarterly newsletter George Salinger tells of visiting Juan, a suicidal inmate.] . . . His childhood with erratic and violent parents had been one beating or betrayal after another. He had little idea of any sort of God and didn't even know if he wanted to bother spending time with me.

"What good would it do me?" he asked bitterly. I spent some time explaining that as a chaplain it was my whole calling to care about people, both inside of prison and out, and to keep my word to them. But I did say that I knew God cared about and loved everyone, even men who didn't think they loved anybody. I also promised I would see him often. He hung his head in silence and said sullenly, "Whatever".

After that I visited Juan a minimum of three times a week. In a little while he began to brighten up at my arrival, and to show other signs of a beginning trust. He still spoke about wanting to die, to just "get away from here." Soon I came to understand that this was his way of escaping the direct experience of tremendous conflict and sadness he felt inside. But after four weeks of increasing openness with me, he suddenly asked, "Do you want to read my poems?" "Sure I do," I answered, touched that he could trust me with what were certain to be his deepest feelings. . . . They were exquisite, but terribly sad. They were printouts, so to speak, of what he saw as a blighted and worthless life. Up to now it had been I who prayed while he sat silent. Now I asked him, "Juan, would you pray with me?" He looked at me and nodded. Afterwards he told me it was the first time he had prayed in years, and even though he wasn't sure if it did any good, he did know one thing - it felt really good to pray. Juan continues to write his poetry and we pray each time I can visit him.

GS

Address Corrections?

Those who have address corrections for the Golden State Kairos database should send them to Bill Donaldson at his e-mail address: journewj@sbcglobal.net or mail to the PO Box referenced on the address page of this newsletter.

Retreat at San Quentin

On October 12, 2002, the Kairos San Quentin Advisory Council held a one-day retreat in San Quentin in lieu of the Short Course which was canceled because of a scheduling conflict.

The retreat was open to all Kairos graduates in San Quentin and was very well attended. The retreat was very ably led by Deacon George Salinger and was composed of about twenty outside team members, both male and female.

The day began with coffee, juice, and donuts, much to the delight of the guys in blue. We followed with an opening prayer led by Father Murray Hammond, and then we belted out a few songs to set the mood for the first talk.

The talks were centered on the Share and Prayer cards, and after each talk we split up into small groups and shared from our individual perspectives the theme of each talk. Everyone participated in the sharing and there was an atmosphere of openness and trust that was brought about by the excellent leadership of Deacon George Salinger.

The atmosphere was joyous and informal, and we all came closer in a short period of time. It is amazing how fast community can be established when there is trust and openness, and a willingness to be vulnerable. For that to happen, we need to feel safe, and I believe that happened.

After lunch, we had one more talk and small discussion, and then George had us close as a single group with one-line thanksgiving, followed by a prayer and the song 'Surely the Presence.'

All in all, it was a wonderful, spirit-filled day which brought us closer together. It was a positive experience for inside and outside people, and several men in blue requested that we do it more often.

Yours in Christ, Tom Dixon

Nurture in Prison

[The topic of nurturing is one that Kairos volunteers relate to. The following excerpts are from columns written by women serving life terms in prison. They are reprinted from the Catholic Women's Network publication.]

Nurturing is something I do a lot of in prison. This is where I learned how.

Nurturing is not something I got a lot of as a child. What I did get is criticism, rules, discipline, and a feeling that I was not very important in the grand scheme of things.

I often felt in the way, out of place, unloved, and uncherished. Hugging, touching and listening were things my parents did not receive as children so did not know how to give as adults. What I did learn from my childhood is what didn't work and what makes people feel lonely, unworthy, anxious and afraid.

I never had children of my own. I was still an emotionally-needy child in my late 20s when I came to prison. Before I had anything at all to give someone else, I had to learn to nurture myself, and that couldn't happen as long as I was

desperately seeking fulfillment outside myself.

. . . I didn't realize I had all the resources within myself to be self-nurturing until God showed me that I did and how to draw them out.

I asked God how one woman in prison could begin to nurture others in this sea of suffering and woundedness.

. . . God's answer was simple. . . just do what you can using your feminine intuition. Start where there is the greatest need. And so I did.

[Jeri Becker gives examples of giving massage, giving hugs, giving assurance of the friend within, and seeking her own self nurture through prayer, meditation and Yoga.]

When I need help I ask for it. When I am tired I take a nap. I can cry when I'm sad and ask for a hug when I'm vulnerable. And someone is always there for me.

For God, who is all nurturing, always provides a real hand to hold, a human heart to care, a real shoulder to lean on when I need it.

[Jeri Becker offers nurturing in her Yoga classes and addiction-support groups while serving a life sentence in Corona, CA.]

[Vonda White describes passing the Mental Health Trailer on her way to work in the Support Care Unit.]

Every day I watch several women being hand-cuffed and taken to an observation cell for days or sometimes weeks. Some of these women are basically reacting to too much on-going trauma -- digging in their heels at a cost that normal people cannot comprehend.

Others are depressed, and perhaps suicidal or psychotic. All are deeply unhappy and dissatisfied with life.

From this treatment they may get a form of attention that is better than the usual institutional indifference and being herded into meals, showers, med-lines, or outside into caged yards for an hour or so a few times a week.

None of this is healing in the sense that most people consider such places should be. When the women come back into the unit once more, there is always hope they will be normalized enough to respond to the therapy groups and particular kindnesses that are especially extended to this group of women.

There is not a lot of visible success here; in the two years that I have worked on the SCU, I have seen almost every parolee return - often several times. The recidivism rate is probably double or triple what is seen in the general population. . . . I have heard staff say that these women aren't going to get any better and the best thing for them is to be kept locked in as much as possible. In my experience the best thing for them is to be loved and given as much freedom as they can handle. . . . These women are not to be thrown away; they are to be cherished and nourished until they bud and flower once more - and they do.

[Vonda White spiritually nourishes others while serving a life sentence in Corona, CA.]

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What is your Advisory council up to? Encourage your Council members to share with our readers by submitting articles to the newsletter!

John Brown's Body at San Quentin Prison

The following is taken from the program handed out to those attending the play "John Brown's Body" at San Quentin on October 31 and November 1, 2002. I believe it best describes the event:

The idea was simple - to put on a play. The inmates came to the first meeting of the San Quentin drama workshop out of curiosity. Twelve men returned the following week. The work began. Once a Week. Week after Week. Through lockdowns, foglines, transfers, dropout, parole dates, solitary confinement and all of the necessary rigmarole that ensures security in a big time prison. Through grit, determination and a growing appreciation for the poetry of Stephen Vincent Benet and the story of America's first great attempt to right our great wrong, slavery, ten individual men started to love the language and to make the words their own. Now, two and a half years after the first meeting, and by the grace of an enlightened warden and a community of helpers, ten men have become a company. Tonight, before an audience, they will put on a play.

I was fortunate along with Kathy Hauck to attend this play. It was a wonderful performance and also a gift to see several of the Kairos graduates among the cast. Warden Jeanne S. Woodford, her staff and everyone else who had a part in putting on this event are to be commended.

Liz Tregaskis

R.J. Donovan #44-46

Kairos at R.J. Donovan might be unique in having three Kairos weekends simultaneously in three different "yards." The practice calls for a great deal of manpower and commitment from the Kairos community. The following are excerpts from recent rectors' reports:

"As a second time rector, you are able to really enjoy the magic that happens. You are able to watch the change in the men, watch the change in the atmosphere in the chapel. All without worrying about how the weekend is going. Because after doing the first time, you realize that God is in charge. He is running the weekend, regardless of what schedule you have made up and must follow." Richard Gaffney, Yard 1

"We had one Muslim attend. His stated opinion was that he thought he would be a lamb among wolves, but instead he experienced Christian love and acceptance. He enjoyed the weekend and has a newfound respect for Christians." Pete Gerber, Yard 2

"We had five new men who observed their first weekend. They were to observe, but I decided to put them at a table where the real Kairos weekend begins. They worked very well with our table leaders and will be ready for their first weekend in February." Fernie Martinez, Yard 3

Deadline for articles for the March newsletter is February 15. Please e-mail submissions to Jack Seybold at a new email address, unknown at this time. Best to send them to Bill Donaldson for forwarding! journewj@sbcglobal.net or mail to the PO Box referenced on the address page of this newsletter.

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