

God's Special Time

Kairos Prison Ministry

Quarterly Newsletter of Golden State Kairos

June, 2004

Calipatria State Prison

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

Ironwood State Prison

Kairos Outside Desert

Kairos Outside S.F. Bay Area

Kairos Outside Sacramento Valley

Kairos Outside San Diego

Kairos Outside South

R.J. Donovan State Prison

San Quentin State Prison

U.S.P. Lompoc

Valley State Prison for Women

KAIROS COMES TO VALLEY STATE PRISON FOR WOMEN

They came with smiles. They came thanking the team from the moment they walked through the door. For a moment, I think they forgot that they were in prison. Who are "they"? They are the women at Valley State Prison for Women in Chowchilla, CA., who made Kairos #1.

Kairos #1 took place February 13-16, 2004. The theme was "Faith, Hope and Love". God brought together a band of 48 angels from the outside that began meeting in January to plan this weekend. This committed group of women came from as far north as Grass Valley, to as far south as San Diego and all points in between. For some, it was their first time working and for others it was one of many. For all, it was a spiritual journey beyond measure.

Each morning when the residents arrived, the team affirmed them by announcing each one by name, and then lots of cheering and clapping for them. Every evening when they left, the team lined up near the doorway and the residents hugged their way out. Many of the residents said that those were the most peaceful nights of sleep they had in a long time.

Cookies, cookies, cookies "does anyone want a cookie?" God blessed the weekend with an over abundance of cookies. The entire institution benefitted from the blessing. As a matter of fact, we left behind several 20-gallon plastic bags filled with cookies. The residents enjoyed the variety. Each night they took cookies back home with them, plus the extra bag of cookies to share with those that they had forgiveness issues with. One resident shared afterwards that she was able to renew a friendship with another resident that had not spoken to her for over a year.

The Agape for this weekend was overwhelming. First of all, prayers were prayed, from the beginning of team formation to the end of the actual weekend. Many of the team members commented on how they just felt the power of prayer the entire time. The residents saw the visible signs of this in the hundreds of colored symbols throughout the community room. Each resident received about 125 agape letters in their bags. One of the residents, after she had received her letters, her eyes red from crying, swore it was a "set up." Another said she couldn't believe all the letters with "my name on them." There were some so over-taken with emotion that they could only read a couple of the letters. And there were a couple that received "mail" for the first time in years.

The Spiritual Companions put on their "Listen, Listen, Love, Love" shoes, as they were in demand throughout the weekend. About half of the residents requested Spiritual Counseling, and of course they got it. There were clusters of two scattered about the gym, where the weekend took place.

Due to security reasons, the institution limited the closure to 30 outside community. As we all headed towards the visiting room for the closing, there were a few moments of hesitancy from a couple of the residents. They had never had a visit since being incarcerated, and had never even seen the inside of the visiting room. But as the residents and team entered, they were greeted with a resounding round of applause and lots of cheers. Many got up to share their experience and feelings. One woman said that because of what she had experienced, she was glad that she was in prison.

As the Kairos Ministry continues at VSPW, we are happy to report that 41 out of the 42 residents that made the weekend came to the instructional reunion two weeks later. They have committed to meeting weekly in small groups and have already set up days and times to meet.

Throughout the weekend lives were changed, hearts were opened and wounds were healed. Our "Faith" brought team and residents alike to this weekend. God's "Hope" and "Love" filled us all.

Jackie Cuneo- Leader- Kairos #1 VSPW (Central Valley Kairos)

Emma Jones- Advising leader

A Good Friday Reflection

on the First Words of Jesus from the Cross

The first words of Jesus from the Cross were "Father forgive them; they know not what they do."

The following is a reflection on Jesus' words as they relate to situations and events occurring all around us today. Perhaps there is some similarity between our attitudes and those of the Pharisees, as well as other leaders during the lifetime of Jesus. (continued on page 2)

Whose fault was it? It wasn't our fault, every one agreed. No blame, no individual responsibility. Who could imagine that we were wrong? Whose child is it? Does it matter if the child is sleeping in a one bedroom apartment with five adults, one teenager and an infant? He is only 12 years old and juvenile arthritis has him crawling on his hands and knees. It is not our fault.

We saw them hovering around the parking lot store begging for money. They are sleeping on park benches, church benches and on bus stops. The harder we work the more work there is to do. It is not our fault they are unemployed and homeless.

It's not our fault that women and men are incarcerated, both the guilty and the innocent. Our legal system is designed to protect our society. What does it matter that their children and loved ones are living behind bars not made of steel. It's not our fault that the good are swept in with the bad.

It's not our fault that there is no peace in our inner cities, let alone the Middle East. Why should we be blamed for the starving people in Africa and all over the world? Since the one claiming the ability to change all this is hanging on a cross, we cry out: "Come down! Come down and make good your claim."

Excerpt from a Poem by Howard Thurman:

He was dying!
Jesus had come to the cross by a direct path
Despite the agony of all the pain
There was the sense of pure relief
That He and the dogging shadow were face to face
Nothing could reach him now.
He was beyond the violence of all his foes,
He thought.
He gripped the pain.
He established its place and bade it stay.
Death was at hand, he knew;
A zone of peace holds fast the place
Where pain and death are met.
Pinnacled on its lonely height, he waited.
Then came the crash of words:
"Come down! Come down!
If you believe your words,
Call the angels to do their work.
If you are God's son, make good your claim!
Come Down! Come down! Come down!"

In the silence of despair and grief, His words still ring true today at least for me and hopefully for you:

Father Forgive us; We Know Not what we Do.

By Sharon L. Ceasar, OPL

F.Y.I.:

Incarceration in U.S.A and Stalin's U.S.S.R.

U.S.S.R (1950) 1,423 per 100,000

U.S.A. (2002) 2,298 per 100,000

Incarceration rate of black men in South Africa before ANC rule and in contemporary America:

South Africa (1993) 851 per 100,000

U.S.A.(2002) 7,150 per 100,000

FELLOWSHIP BEYOND THE WEEKENDS

Everyone knows how a Kairos Outside Weekend brings togetherness to the entire team that works on it. It also gives the Guests memories to last a lifetime and new friends to get to know even better in the days ahead. As the years go by, our "family" of friends keeps getting larger and larger. To many of the women involved in Kairos Outside, the feelings gathered over the years seem to turn friends into "family," often the only family a person has. God's love is constantly being shown through the women we have around us. This is true at the Team Meetings, the Guest Weekends, the Reunions, the Fund Raising events, and so on.

Here in Southern California, our ladies have become so close in fellowship that the events we share together often go beyond the ministry. Such an event happened recently. It was a Slumber Party!

Shari Vogt of the Kairos Outside So.Cal.Council was trying to decide how to celebrate the 60th Birthday of her mother (Cathy Langston). Recalling how much fun and fellowship is had on our Overnight Team Meetings, plus the fact that most of Cathy's friends and much of her family are all involved in Kairos Outside, Shari decided to make it a Grown-Up Girls' Slumber Party!

The women got together and really had fun. They got a bit carried away playing "musical chairs" and the winner only managed it by getting a few bruises while diving for the last seat! The prize for "best pajamas" went to Dee Caraway, who came with a nightgown and nightcap made to look like a Court Jester. As Dee said, "She was coming to the party "with bells on" . . .and there were about 50 of them sewn all over on the gown! Cathy's 91-year old mother, Angeline Badame, also attended and she wore pajamas of Red, White, and Blue, and said she was there as "Old Glory."

There was plenty of food for dinner, and Hope Hogan made her delicious biscuits 'n gravy for breakfast. There's always plenty of food when we Kairos Outside girls get together! No one ever goes hungry!

Besides the ones listed above, other guests included Romayne Wennerstrom, Brynn Wagner, Joanne Gould, Debi Walquist, Sharon Becker, Marian McCauley, Sandy Garden, Sharon Allen, Audrey Campf-Dils, Pamela Walters, Helen Castaneda, Paula Cerney, Cyndi Brown (Badame), Carolyn Richards, Connie Smith, Cindy Vest, and Becky Noia.

Kairos Outside, South

PRISON ABUSE IN AMERICA

(from a New York times editorial, May 17, 2004)

. . . It is hard to quantify how many American prisoners are abused, or allowed to suffer from untreated illnesses, since the system operates largely in the shadows, outside public scrutiny. The maze of federal, state and local institutions defies easy assessment.

Things are more transparent in Europe, thanks to a powerful, independent prison commission, informally known as the Committee for Prevention of Torture. Established in 1987, The C.P.T. has unlimited access to places of detention, including prisons, juvenile centers, psychiatric hospitals and police station holding areas. Human rights violations - including medical problems - quickly become public. Such a system is long overdue in the United States. . .

The prison system can no longer be seen as the province of prison officials who cover up or mismanage problems that eventually come back to haunt the rest of the society. The country needs to formulate national prison standards and create an independent body

that enforces them, if only by opening prisons to greater public scrutiny.

IRONWOOD K-11 WEEKEND A SUCCESS!

The 39 graduates of Ironwood State Prison's K-11 concluded their weekend on April 18, 2004, and gave praise to God for the wondrous changes he made in them in the few short days they shared with the Kairos team of 26 men from San Bernardino and Riverside counties. The graduates also wrote letters to children at the end of the weekend, telling the youngsters how moved they were by the expressions of love that were part of their agape package. The May reunion was packed, demonstrating the commitment of the new graduates and new Kairos team members to the idea of fellowship and prayer and share that continues to mold us into Resurrection people. K-12 begins November 11, 2004.

Tom Green, K-11 Rector

A CATCH-22 FOR EX-OFFENDERS

(from New York Times, April 6, 2004)

As the Bush administration focuses attention on ex-offenders with its modest program to help them return to the community, an eye-opening new study shows that the effort will require a lot more than re-entry programs. Not only do all 50 states continue to punish and marginalize convicts after they leave jail, but most also have laws that punish millions of people for crimes for which they were never convicted.

The new study, from the Legal Action Center, a criminal justice policy group, identifies laws in all 50 states that hamper former offenders' ability to re-enter society. These excessively punitive laws, which must be modified or repealed before ex-convicts have a real chance at jobs, homes and mainstream lives, bar them from scores of professions that require state licenses but are unrelated to their crimes.

The study, which will soon be available on the Web, ranks the states based on the stringency of laws that bar former offenders from whole professions, or strip them of driver's licenses, parental rights and the right to vote.

Colorado, South Carolina, Georgia and Virginia are rated worst, which means that ex-offenders in those states have the least chance of becoming productive citizens. In some states, a person who commits a vehicle-related crime as a teenager can go to college and grow into adulthood, only to be barred from, say, the real estate business, which requires a state license.

A similar brand of punishment is being used against people who have been arrested on suspicion of crimes for which they were never convicted. Thirty-seven states permit prospective employers and all state licensing agencies to ask about and weigh arrests that never led to conviction. In addition, employers in most states can simply fire anyone who is discovered to have a criminal record, regardless of the circumstance.

Congress worsened matters during the 1990's with a series of new laws that use federal aid to punish former offenders and arrestees. One of the most damaging laws withholds highway funds from states that do not punish drug offenders by suspending their driver's licenses - whether or not the original offense had anything to do with a car.

Many states were smart enough to opt out of this law. But 27 actually revoke or suspend driver's licenses of some or all drug offenders. Those who leave prison in desperate need of jobs cannot legally drive to work, to school or to drug treatment programs. In states

where public transportation is nonexistent, ex-convicts have no choice but to risk returning to prison by driving illegally.

This country only harms itself when it traps ex-offenders at the margins of society and forces them back into prison.

Forwarded by Bill Olson

More on Recidivism

[The March issue of God's Special Time included an article on recidivism research. Kairos claims to make a significant impact on the problem, and might be an important adjunct to the solution suggested in this April 16 editorial in the New York Times. Ed.]

California Reinvents the Wheel

The tight economy is forcing states to re-examine the mandatory sentencing laws that have filled prisons to overflowing with long-term inmates - who can cost as much as \$30,000 per person each year - while having a marginal impact on crime. Faced with a choice between building prisons and building schools or roads, the states are searching desperately for ways to get prison spending under control. That means stemming the tide of inmates who are arrested again shortly after being released.

The search for a way to curb recidivism is leading right back to the prison education programs that were discarded during the 1990's, when teaching illiterate inmates to read and training them for jobs outside prison were suddenly viewed as being "soft on crime." The de-emphasis on prison education is being rethought by some legislators in California, a financially strapped state that currently spends nearly as much on its corrections system as it spends on the system of public four-year colleges for which it was once famous.

The inmate population was driven up by a series of mandatory sentencing policies that placed prisoners behind bars for longer and longer periods of time. The most famous of these was the "three strikes and you're out" law that California voters approved in 1994, which requires a sentence of 25 years to life for any felon with two previous convictions.

Despite a bankrupting outlay of more than \$5 billion a year for prisons, California has one of the highest recidivism rates in the nation. That's not surprising, given that 50 percent of the inmates are illiterate and therefore unlikely to find jobs once they are released. California law requires that these men and women be given remedial education in prison until they can read at a ninth-grade level. Yet figures made available by the State Legislature show that fewer than 10 percent of the prisoners are enrolled in academic education programs.

Civic groups and die-hard lawmakers are pushing a new bill that would take prison education out of the hands of prison officials - who tend to see it as a low priority - and give control to a prison education board that would create a master plan for the entire state. The bill would ensure that inmates who had a reasonable expectation of being released would have the opportunity to become literate.

The politically powerful union that represents prison guards, which has usually opposed measures like this one, should not be allowed to dictate the outcome of this debate. Legislators are naturally worried about the costs, given California's budget problems. What lawmakers need to understand, however, is that people who leave prison with marketable skills are much less likely to return. A prison education program that cuts recidivism by a substantial percentage would also cut crime and save hundreds of millions of dollars, so the program would pay for itself.

Novel Features a San Quentin Inmate

You are now able to order your copy of a novel by Kairos State Newsletter editor Jack Seybold and Oakland attorney Tom Pollock. *The Rising: Journeys in the Wake of Global Warming* is the story of a catastrophic collapse of Antarctic ice sheets and a resultant rise in sea level, which leads to panic and destruction in populations around the globe.

Eli Barnes, the principal character, is an inmate in San Quentin State Prison as the story opens. He escapes and works his way through the rising chaos, struggling to hide his identity as an escaped felon and to transform himself into a productive member of the post-catastrophe culture. A San Francisco homemaker and her psychic mother, an Air Force surgeon, a science professor, a farmer couple, and others, converge with Eli at a remote Northern California homestead. They face their limitations and maximize their strengths to deal with fear, villainy, abandonment, the forces of nature, the weaknesses of society and the mysteries of each other, their enclave and their mission.

Forgiveness and Redemption are major themes in the novel, evidence of the author's many years of experience in the Kairos movement, which is depicted in the novel, but not by name, and Kairos veterans will recognize much of Eli Barnes' struggles and hopes.

The environmental wakeup call in the book is as timely as tomorrow's headlines, and is echoed in the recently released mega-million dollar film "The Day After Tomorrow," which is doing well at the box office and sparking debate about the human factor in global warming and climate change.

The Rising: Journeys in the Wake of Global Warming has its own web site: www.risingglobalwarming.com, and is available at the web site of the publisher, Authorhouse.com, or on BarnesandNoble.com or Amazon.com, or by ordering from your local bookstore. Here is an excerpt:

"You know how beautiful it is out there." Eli nodded toward the wall as if he and Johnny could see the sunset glow out beyond San Francisco Bay and the amber and green mass of Mount Tamalpais. "When the economy picks up, they're gonna picture stacks of condos right here." Among the ironies of life in San Quentin was the fact that the AIDS unit exercise yard faced, through several layers of cyclone fence and barbed wire, one of the best scenic views in the Bay Area, with Mount Tamalpais thrusting its bulk into the Pacific sky across an expanse of the North Bay. Standing in that exercise yard earlier in the afternoon, he had watched a beam of bright sunlight pierce between heavy clouds, as if God were reaching down with long golden fingers to enjoy the water that lapped the stubby peninsula on which the prison sat. He waved at passengers on the boats skimming into the nearby Larkspur Ferry dock. Taxpayers. Solid citizens whose heads were filled with family, picket fenced yards with golden retrievers, weekend golf, salmon and chardonnay. Eli tried to put it into a haiku poem:

Blessed are you O men
sailing on golden waters
loved ones on the shore."

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

Article Guidelines

At the January 2003 meeting of the Kairos State Committee, I volunteered to write some guidelines for submissions to the newsletter, in order to encourage contributors and make their task perhaps more manageable.

First of all, I suggest deciding on a focus for your writing. Writing a first paragraph that determines what the rest of the article will center on actually makes the writing easier, pulling together what might have been amorphous or unwieldy. On the sports page, by way of analogy, the account of a basketball game might sound like every other basketball game -- there's a winner, a loser and a score -- unless the writer creates a central point that organizes the rest of the story. For example, this game is the last one of the retiring coach's career; or it's the turnaround game that shows that the team, although losing, is beginning to come together and play consistently. What fact or observation about a Kairos or Kairos Outside weekend made it different, or significant to the writer? Establish that in the first paragraph, and then later paragraphs might begin, at least implicitly, with "For example..."

Secondly, consider other topics for submissions besides accounts of particular weekends. For example, readers might enjoy reading a "personality profile" of a Kairos volunteer or leader, an inmate, graduate or chaplain. Accounts of events such as fundraisers, leadership trainings, advisory council meetings or expansion news might be helpful for volunteers in other areas of the state. What about an opinion piece?

There is no need to be concerned about the length of the article, or about grammar, spelling or punctuation. I can deal with all of that. I try to keep editing to a minimum, and generally articles appear pretty much as they were written.

The deadlines for submissions are February 15, May 15, August 15 and November 15. It is best to submit articles by email addressed to: gael63@mind.net Jack Seybold, editor