

God's Special Time

Kairos Prison Ministry

Quarterly Newsletter of Golden State Kairos

September, 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

Salinas Valley #1

In May this year the Warden at Salinas Valley State Prison called us and asked that we bring a Kairos to that institution. The Warden was willing to deal with some institutional resistance and is totally supportive. Salinas Valley is a level 4 prison in the California Department of Corrections and is located at Soledad, CA. It was opened in 1996 and is overcrowded at twice its designed capacity. In their relatively short history they have had very little program and almost continuous "lockdown" because of violence. We signed an agreement and will have Kairos #1 on October 8-11 2004 (this Fall). This will be held in the "C" Yard Vocational Training Center. Forty-two residents from that yard will be the first candidates.

About half the team will bring experience from San Quentin, CMF, Vacaville and Lompoc. The other half will be newcomers to the ministry from Cursillo and Walk to Emmaus communities in Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Luis Obispo and Santa Clara counties. Our theme for this first weekend is "God is Faithful". This theme is based on Lamentations 3: 22-23. Evidence of God's love is God's faithfulness to us. However, we will bake the cookies and we need 1,000 dozen cookies.

Bill Kell

Kairos Outside, Southern California #28

"Mi Fortaleza Eres tu Señor" -- April 30 ð May 2, 2004

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The weekend was so wonderful. It was full of love, peace, and many blessings. The guests returned home thankful with our Christ knowing that there are people out there who serve others, which in this case, it's through the ministry of Kairos Outside that makes it possible to recognize love and the special gifts of God. I will be forever thankful with my Christ for giving me this experience.

Carmen Manueles

Kairos Outside, Southern California #29

As Leader of Kairos Outside So. Calif. #29 May 21-23, 2004, I can say I was truly blessed. There were eighteen guests who were led by the Lord to attend. I'm told that eighteen is the perfect number because this seats three guests at each of the six tables in the talk room. There were also a few women who came back from the previous weekend to work on the team.

It was truly a spirit-filled weekend and I was in awe as the Lord moved throughout the facilities, as only He can. The guests were amazing when they were given the opportunity to participate in discussions and skits and were very open to the singing. The team members who were in the talk room had to admit the guests came up with some pretty great skits.

It was a surprise to find that one of the guests lives two blocks from me. And another guest that attended was my daughter-in-law who shared at Closing that now she understands why we, as team members, continue to come back to work the weekends and why we devote so much of our time to this ministry.

But most of all, I was touched and blessed to watch all my sisters and brothers in the Lord come together and work so hard as a team. I guess as a team member on previous weekends I could not see the physical hard work that is put into these weekends, because we just do what God has called us to do.

I was also given the opportunity to understand why our reunions are so important to attend, even if we did not work that particular weekend.

Thank you, Lord, for calling me by name to serve you.

Loraine Badillo

You can help reduce costs

The cost of disseminating God's Special Time, the Kairos newsletter for California, is decreased when subscribers choose to receive it by email rather than U.S. Post. Please consider sending your email address to Bill Donaldson at: journewj@sbcglobal.net. (It's also faster!)

Articles for the newsletter should be submitted to:

Jack Seybold at gael63@mind.net

Kairos Outside, Sacramento Valley and San Francisco Bay Area

A Reflection on My Kairos Outside Weekend

As I reflect over the memories of my Kairos Outside weekend June 11-13, 2004, I thank God for directing my path to the Kairos Outside Sisterhood. Since that weekend I have felt renewed and empowered with knowing this is my "time" or Kronos time. I face my life situations and circumstances in a new light.

The weekend assisted me in identifying the process of understanding myself and the steps I need to take to forgive, heal and move on in a productive way with my life. My awareness of the impact of my loved one's incarceration registered in my mind. I recognized how I could assist both of us in a more meaningful way of sharing our lives together. I also realized how to love in a more significant way. Through participation in the table family activities, listening to the stories of others, and the meditations in the evening I was able to identify my pain and sorrow. This led me to discover hope and forgiveness that opened the way for me to learn how to move on.

I have begun my journey to find knowledge with the anticipation of not knowing exactly what to expect and how I would receive the unknown. I was looking forward to not having chores, children, driving, or worrying about gas, food, and shelter. I was able to identify the pain and sorrows that led me to discover hope and forgiveness. I was not alone and my life circumstances were not as dire as I felt they were. I made some new friends. I learned a lot about my life, took some deep breaths. I looked at my life, connected the "what and why" and discovered new plans and steps to take.

My Kairos Outside weekend placed me in the company of a very special group of awesome women who frankly "love-bombed" me into action. We were of one accord. I felt held and nurtured while I was being transformed. I was able to define my future by looking at my past. The comfort of God's word, prayers of others, deep belly laughter, cleansing tears, abundant love, joy, gifts, and good food helped restore my faith.

My weekend gave me a chance to "exhale" all the stuff I had hidden in my heart and "inhale" the faith I needed to re-energize me and plan a new slate. I regained a new positive view of hope and ideas on how I could move into my future. I left the weekend dreaming and setting attainable goals. I felt relationships improve before my eyes. Relationships I needed to redefine were easier to face. I returned home with a new knowledge to create a better life and memories for my children and those I love. I am not afraid to take the actions needed to make a different meaning for my life's journey, particularly with my incarcerated loved one.

I thank God for Kairos Outside, its mission and purpose. Through all the love I received I am able to find significance in everything life places before me. It's not easy but it is so do-able now. I look forward to assisting others find and feel the love I found on my weekend journey.

God bless and keep you.

Pamela Mchombo

Letter from Chuck Boucher

Federal Correctional Complex Victorville has added a U.S. Penitentiary to the complex. The buildings were completed this year, and the staff has been brought together in the normal Bureau of Prisons manner. Therefore everything is new and untested, crew and facility. Due to the uniqueness of this situation we are considering not following

the normal Kairos guideline of 1/3 new team members, and trying to conduct #1 with an all veteran team. I asked for feedback on this concept at the GSK meeting, but alas have had no response. If your readers would please email me with their comments I would be very appreciative. boucher@cyberhotline.com Chuck Boucher

Taking Back the Prisons

(New York Times editorial, August 2, 2004)

The nation can no longer tolerate prisons operated as the fiefdoms of wardens who do what they wish with little oversight from state authorities. The states will need more direct control - and clear reform plans - if they intend to address recidivism, the AIDS and hepatitis epidemics, and court orders mandating humane treatment for inmates, especially the mentally ill. Courts in several states have tired of waiting for compliance and appointed special masters who push prisons toward reform. California, which has a special master at its Pelican Bay prison, could see its whole system come under court control unless Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger makes swifter progress toward reforms ordered by the courts starting nearly a decade ago.

The takeover threat came last month from Judge Thelton Henderson, who made his reputation on prison issues by putting a stop to the abuse of prisoners that prevailed in the 1990's at Pelican Bay in Northern California. Judge Henderson installed the special master there, and mentally ill patients who once were abused and placed in solitary confinement are now referred to a mental health unit. Shootings and acts of official violence are handled promptly by an investigatory panel. Brutality by guards has declined.

The court believes that reform at the prison level has gone as far as it can go and that the state's notoriously weak prison authority must be remade. A recent report by a panel led by George Deukmejian, former governor of California, described that authority as sprawling, out of touch and powerless. It argued for replacing it with a simpler agency responsible to a secretary of corrections and overseen by a civilian review board. The judge also said, in essence, that the prison guards' union had seized control of the disciplinary process and had too much influence in corrections department operations.

The union, however, did not seize power at gunpoint. It bought it the old-fashioned way - with hefty contributions to politicians. It then expanded into the administrative vacuum left by a prison authority tangled up in its own bureaucracy. In addition to keeping the union in check, the governor and Legislature should restructure the state prison authority, perhaps along the lines suggested by the Deukmejian panel, so that the state can reform the prisons statewide, not one at a time. That's what Judge Henderson was saying by threatening to take over. It is advice that other states should follow.

MY KAIROS #21 WEEKEND (LOMPOC)

Prologue: The week prior to Kairos, I was at my Wednesday night men's group. Another man in our group, a prison guard at the federal prison in downtown Los Angeles, told me of a time when he worked at a federal prison in Texas where, as the Kairos group was being led, an inmate was stabbed 37 times by 2 other inmates. The following day, I was watching a documentary of Attica prison which documented the riot where several inmates and guards were killed by gunfire. I had wanted to work Kairos since I had heard of it but was not asked because I was not ready (a story too long to tell here). I felt if God had gotten me this far, He had a plan for me and I was comfortable with whatever it would be. Bring it on.

Friday: I arrived at a church in Lompoc where I and the rest of the team met and prayed. Most of us went to the guards' recreation hall to leave our gear (I packed way too much), and rode to the front gate of the maximum security unit of Lompoc Federal Penitentiary. I went to the reception area where all of the team filled out a form with our name, address and car license number (even if we didn't drive), signed it and checked many boxes affirming that we didn't have guns, drugs, narcotics, and so many other things. I had to give my eye drops and Chap Stick to the Chaplin as I couldn't even bring that in.

Chaplin Burke led us into the first of two holding areas, a space about 6 feet wide by about 20 feet long. At one end was a locked gate that led to the parking lot and on the other end was a sliding metal gate leading to another holding area of about the same size with another sliding metal gate. Beyond the second holding area was a walk of about 200 feet, up some steps to the heavy doors of the institution. Directly above us was a guard tower where, I am sure, the guards were heavily armed. I could also see towers at each end of the fence. I was told that we were only allowed to enter or leave when the guards could see both towers unobstructed by fog.

Waiting in the first cage, I noticed 3 fences 12 feet high and 20 feet apart. Each was topped with reams of closely spaced razorwire about 3 feet in diameter. The inside of the fences closest to the outside and closest to the inside had razor wire stacked 4 high and 4 long on the ground so it was a triangle shape. I was able to reach through the chainlink and touch the razorwire. It was sharp as a knife and at 6 inch intervals had sharp, pointy, spike like pieces that would slice someone to pieces if they were unlucky enough to come into contact with it. How foolish and desperate would people have to be to risk their lives climbing through such a man-killer?

The fences and gates didn't bother me; surrendering my driver's license bothered me intensely. I drove a truck until I retired. The prison took my identity and my life; my driver's license: I was no longer me. That was my first true understanding of what it was to be a prisoner and the second was when I realized I couldn't leave an area until the guards allowed me to and the final realization came when I was in the lunch hall, needed to use a restroom, and realized I couldn't leave to use one until the doors were unlocked from outside. I don't think I want to know more about being a prisoner.

The team was escorted, after several checks of our identity by the guards, to the prison library which had been emptied and transformed by prior Kairos pilgrims; prisoners who are called the inside team. We are the outside team. They greeted us warmly.

Some time went by and the candidates began to come in. There were faces showing great anger, fear, bewilderment, curiosity and other emotions but not happiness. Richard and Calvin (all inmates names changed), the men to whom I had written sponsorship invitation letters, were introduced to me. One man was guarded and the other bitter. We talked for a long time and began to make some connections.

Eventually we grouped at tables. My (our - there were 3 table leaders) table had 6 candidates and all stayed to the conclusion of the weekend. We had 2 Hispanics: Manuel, 19 or early 20's with a face free of anger or fear, and Javier probably in his late 30's or 40's with eyes just slits of rage, a tight face, no smile or pretense of any and gang tattoos all over his neck and head. We had a Native American, Derrick, stoic and hard to read - he surprised me. We had a black man, Leon - he worried me. For the first 2 days all he did was color the shield on the front of his folder. Many, many times I wanted to ask him to pay attention to the speakers and take notes, but I remembered our

instructions: listen, listen, love, love - glad I did. We had 2 white men: Paul, in his mid 20's and a former member of a US National team - long fall due to drugs; and Joe, probably in his mid-to-late 30's and I think very handsome. These two were open and friendly and started the table to open up to each other and to us that very first night; some of the men much more slowly than others. Our Rector, Eric Ortega, told us it was unusual for men to be so open so soon. We got back to the rec. hall about 12:30 a.m. and I got about 4 hours sleep - as I had for several days - but I was refreshed the next day.

Saturday: I was scheduled to give my talk, "The Church," at 3:30 p.m. I didn't hear much that day as I was going over the talk in my mind. I wanted to do the best possible job. The closer I got, the more nervous I became: I was scared! Thought I was going to throw up. I was clammy and the muscles in my arms got very tight. Eric tells me we are running late and I won't give my talk till after the dinner movement. Great! Prolong my agony. Finally my time arrives. I am taken to the prayer room to be zapped by some of the inside team. I went in scared - I wanted to run; something not quite possible in the circumstances I was in. I was being prayed over, I started to weep uncontrollably, and suddenly peace and calm came over me that lasted throughout my talk. At one point, I opened my eye for a moment during the zapping and saw one of the prayer team prostrate in front of me in prayer and, at the same time, I was hearing a buzzing in my ear similar to a swarm of hornets - I think he was praying in tongues and that is the time when I began to feel the great peace I described. I gave my talk and several team members said I did well. I don't take the credit. The following day an inside team member told me that what I said helped him. Wow!

I learned the dynamics of our table leaders today. The other two were experienced and I was the nubie. Avery was the person of knowledge who would suggest better ways to handle a situation. Jim, also a musician, would open the time after a speaker with an elaboration of the instructions and an example of what we were to accomplish. As we got going, it seemed to fall to me to ask the pilgrims a question such as, "What do you think of what Jim is saying?" or "Do you have a similar experience?" Me, the one who talks endlessly and pointlessly - God does work in mysterious ways!

I went back and addressed the letters I had written. Got to bed about 2:30 a.m. and up at 5:00 a.m.

Sunday: The long walk and daily surrender of my identity. I'm thinking about how many times I have been told we have to surrender ourselves to God before we can become His servants - so true and it seems so literal to me. Without giving away the ending, I'll tell you, I have gotten so much more than I gave. Today there were talks, meditations, skits and something new: they received our letters. Paul spoke of how much time it must have taken to do what we did. The gratitude was out of control. Andrew, from another table, was walking around in the back. (I had to get used to the fact that the men would come and go as they pleased, even if a talk or another activity was in progress, and I began to do the same when the pressure got too great or I became overwhelmed.) Andrew was beaming and grabbed me and told me he had gotten letters from women he didn't know. He talked about this new kind of love he had never heard about, "This Agape Love. It's wonderful. I didn't know there was such a thing." He told me about a letter he had gotten from a woman who must have known him because she talked about his choices and decisions and love. He said, "I thought her name was Granny but then I looked again and it was Ginny." My wife Ginny - a blessing I can pass along. Just a coincidence that it was me he told. Yeah, sure! The men got up that night and told

of their experience. Much like an Emmaus closing and there was still another day. I am emotionally drained and I expect the best is still to come.

Haven't said much about the men at our table. I must be general because of confidentiality. Leon, the man who spent the first days coloring, was an on-fire Christian; going home soon to be a drug counselor. Derrick stayed but missed some of Saturday's events. He is a Jehovah's Witness and at times he shared his beliefs which aren't exactly ours. I watched him as we sang some of our songs; stress and conflict showed in his eyes. I think he was trying to make sense of what we said and our actions and what he had been taught at his church. Their beliefs force him to lose so much if he were to embrace our Jesus. I respect him enormously for staying. I think we became friends. Paul and Joe both came with the desire to change their lives and rid themselves of drugs. Paul was glad he got seven years because it gave him time to get off the drugs. (But he told me that drugs are available in prison, as is home-made alcohol.) The Hispanics were limited in their words - Javier gave a moving and impassioned talk expressing love, forgiveness and a new beginning at the closing - and Paul and Joe helped them with their lifelines. Javier told one of them that he had never had a good day in his life and had been homeless all his life. I was moved and honored and blessed to be able to show love to the forgotten - life's throwaways. Time was short and we never did get to discuss the lifelines, but I saw all the men helping each other. Race and color were not an issue -- just brothers-in-Christ helping each other. So much good had happened in three days. Even Javier's face of hate and rage had begun to soften. Manuel was a quiet one. He was young and Javier was watching over him somewhat like a big brother - so even behind that mask, there was humanity all the time. Manuel finally opened up and fully committed. He has a double burden. When his time is up he will be deported as an illegal. I expect all he knows will be foreign to Mexico. I will pray for him. I will pray for them all. Each one has a heavy burden. They will only make it with God being

with them and protecting them constantly.

Monday: My last time to go in. Same surrender of self. I'm getting used to it but I don't like it. The 4th Day talk is given by one of the inside team. Powerful! Powerful! Powerful! At the chapel each of the men is given his cross after hearing, "Christ is counting on you," and saying, "I am counting on Christ." Powerful! Powerful! Powerful! New members of the outside team are given a cross after we hear, "Christ is counting on you," and say, "I am counting on Christ." I am given my cross. I cannot begin to describe how much it means to me. Everyone goes back downstairs where the guests are singing. I can see the emotion on the men's faces. Their testimonies bear me out. Men came in with hate, and leave with love and the knowledge of Christ. Four days and a miracle is done. Four days in our time but probably an instant in Kairos time. God works fast when prayer is abundant.

I need to mention our food. Friday after the prison, we all came back to a church and were fed generously by some men who do this each Kairos. Each morning at the rec. hall, another group fed us a wonderful breakfast and each night at the rec. hall we were over fed by yet another group: talk about the Body of Christ and its many parts. Another wow. We also ate the prison lunch (10:30 a.m.) and prison dinner (about 3:30 or 4 p.m.) - OK food served in seven-day cycles. Lots of starchy foods and sugarwater drinks, but also salad stuff of a limited variety and some reasonably good meats. I ate five meals a day. The evening meal at the rec. hall had gourmet desserts such as cheesecake covered with apple pie filling - I'm bloating just thinking about it.

Conclusion: I hate the word awesome. It is trivialized by its overuse. My Kairos weekend was incredibly, amazingly, overwhelmingly, bodaciously awesome.

Omer Murray

[This article was originally published on the Kairos Lompoc web site: www.kairoslompoc.org]