

PMA
Outreach



The Newsletter of Prison Mission Association

Volume 9 Issue 2

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HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Perhaps others can relate to a predicament I find myself in from time to time. Occasionally I am driving someplace I have never been before and I am unfamiliar with the route. I believe I have my bearings straight and am convinced I am going the right way. Eventually after taking several wrong turns and failing to ask for directions I find myself hopelessly lost and I ask myself the questions, "How did I get here from there?" and, "How do I get back to where I came from?"

These are important questions that our society needs to ask itself as well. By examining the statistics of our criminal justice system we see evidence that as a nation we have wandered far off track and have now found ourselves someplace we don't want to be.

So where are we now? The Bureau of Justice Statistics says that in the United States there are 2.01 million people in prisons and jails. That is the highest incarceration rate in the world. Furthermore, there are an additional 4.7 million that are serving sentences on parole or probation. That is a total of 6.71 million adults currently involved in the criminal justice system. These figures do not include juveniles that are incarcerated or on probation.

While at any one time about 3% of the population is in the criminal justice system, these facts reflect more severe problems within our society that have led to these staggering statistics. Violent crime increased by 600 percent from 1960 – 1992. In the 1980's and 90's the United States experienced a prison construction boom unprecedented in the history of the world, yet today prison overcrowding is one of the greatest concerns of those that manage the corrections system. The criminal element of the population reflects much deeper issues which are endemic throughout our culture.

Christians understand that sin is the fundamental problem that explains how we got to this point, yet several specific manifestations of our sinfulness have become prevalent in our nation that must be identified. There are a number of wrong turns that we have taken over the years to leave us morally and spiritually disoriented.

Loss of Moral Absolutes. Since the late eighteenth century there has been an assault on the concept of ultimate moral authority. The rejection of an absolute standard of right and wrong has snowballed for over two hundred years to the point that now most people in western societies believe that moral decisions are relative and dictated solely by their present circumstances.

Disintegration of the Nuclear Family and Fatherhood Deficiency. The number of children born to unmarried women has skyrocketed in the past 30 years and is approaching 30% in the general population. The divorce rate in the United States is more than 50%. More than 80% of prison inmates were raised with no positive male role model in their lives. When young men cannot find the acceptance they seek within their own family they will seek for it in surrogate forms such as gangs, drugs and alcohol. Of course we all know of good parents whose children have made serious mistakes as well as children raised in horrendous home environments that have turned out to be upstanding citizens. Nonetheless the general trend is that, for most children, the lack of a stable family life is a major contributing factor to serious problems as adults.

The Erosion of Personal Responsibility and an Attitude of Victimization. Most of us are familiar with the famous lawsuits, such as smokers with lung cancer suing the tobacco companies, in which people have sought compensation from others for their own poor choices. The idea that people are not responsible for their actions, that their wrong behavior can be blamed on circumstances beyond their control, has become the norm within our culture. When someone fails to recognize personal responsibility for his actions he will not be inclined to change them.

We are tempted to ask the question, "How do we get back to where we came from?" In reality things were probably never as good as we think they were. A better question to ask is, "How do we get to where we should be?" The ultimate answer is found when individuals are transformed spiritually through a personal relationship with God based on faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, His Son. Therefore, the following suggestions are given with the understanding that any action we take must be done in the context of a Bible believing local church with a strong emphasis on evangelism and discipleship.

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A Note from the Director

If you have received the PMA Newsletter in the past you will notice that there is a new look to an old publication. We have renamed it **PMA Outreach**. We feel that this new title better conveys the purpose of the newsletter as well as the overall objectives of Prison Mission Association. Likewise the more dynamic appearance reflects the nature of PMA as an organization that seeks to be always moving and developing to improve our ministry to inmates and others as we proclaim the wonderful saving message of God's grace.

Our front page article addresses some of the factors which have caused our society to lead the world in the rate at which we incarcerate our population. We point out some of the important changes in thinking that have developed over recent generations that have created a state of spiritual bankruptcy in our culture that has resulted in greater lawlessness and disorder.

You will be blessed by the testimony of Terry Nida, a Florida inmate that has shown exceptional spiritual growth. He is a very accomplished Bible student and has written some insightful and intriguing Bible studies, one of which can be viewed at the PMA Website.

Another inspirational story in this issue is of the ministry of Pastor Cal Lowder of Winchester, VA in the county jail located in that city.

Please take note of the request we are making for prayer partners for our inmates. This is one other way we hope to develop our ministry and to involve more people in helping us reach prisoners for Christ.

We hope you take the time to read our regular articles as well; Prison Echoes, The Spanish Side, Prayer and Praise and Karen's Korner. These will help give you a better idea of all that PMA is doing .

Thank you for taking the time to read this edition of **PMA Outreach**. We at PMA hope that you will join us in praise to the Lord for how He is working in the hearts and lives of inmates in the US and throughout the world.

DM

From Death to Life

By Terry Nida, Sumter Correctional Institution, Florida

On March 3, 1994, incarcerated I was pronounced "dead." That's O.K., though. I was also "raised from the dead" that day as well! I'm speaking of that glorious positional truth of Romans 6 that we all experience the moment that we "heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation" that "Christ died for our sins" and believed (Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:3)

What an incredible ride it has been since then! For the first five and a half years I was on a roller coaster, "tossed to and fro" constantly up high and down low and going around and around in a continual theological loop, dizzy from contradictory teachings. Which were true?

Praise be to God that He led me to a facility with a mid-Acts dispensational Bible study class going on. I'd never heard such teaching before but with the Lord's hand upon a heart that truly wanted to know only what was true I understood the glorious truth of the message the ascended Christ gave to the Apostle Paul for me. After that the roller coaster simply smoothed out.

I am so grateful to the volunteers of Grace Bible Fellowship of Hernando, Florida who take the time to come in each week and not only share with us according to 2 Timothy 2:15, but to see that we are being trained for our own ministries as well according to 2 Timothy 2:2

Prison is my mission field. Now that I have been taught the truth of the Dispensation of God's Grace I can confidently know I'm sharing the right gospel

Editor's Note: You may read a Bible study written by Terry called "The Sheep of John 10:16" on the PMA website, www.pmabcf.org

PRISON ECHOES.....

God bless all of you at Prison Mission. I pray that God will continue to strengthen you and use you for His glory. I am truly blessed and grateful for these study lessons. Please continue to send them.

C.C. - Wisconsin

Once again I would like to thank you for allowing me to do the studies that y'all send supply to inmates. I, as always enjoyed completing this study. I would like to ask for continues prayer for our world as whole. Let man not destroy what God has given us. Also for my family, may God bless all the little ones.

R.Z.- Georgia

This lesson was enlightening, it showed me and revealed a lot of finer points that I would not have picked up. It was awesome!

W.P. - Connecticut

I just wanted to write and express how thankful I am for your ministry. It means a lot for me when there are ministries out there that actually teach the gospel to inmates so they can increase in their knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ. I can't thank you enough for what you have done for me.

L.G. - Idaho

These lessons showed me a lot and in the verses I see where each one spoke of the same thing but at different times.. It is helping me also learn to whom God is speaking and why.

D.W. - Florida

I enjoy doing these lessons that I get from P.M.A. taking me through the Bible. I have learned so much from doing the lessons that I have when I have done one I am already looking forward to do more of the lessons from you.

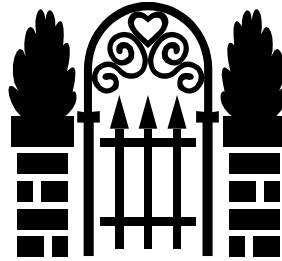
F.A.- Pennsylvania

Prayer Partners Needed

The above testimonies show how so many inmates are blessed through the Bible Correspondence Fellowship lessons provided by Prison Mission Association. Along with such comments thankfulness we also receive a significant number of specific prayer requests from inmates for themselves and their families.

We would like to be able to assure these individuals that someone is praying specifically for their needs. PMA would like to have groups and individuals that would be willing to commit to praying for some of these specific needs. If you believe the Lord is leading you to be a part of this team of prayer warriors please let us know and we will put you on a list to receive regular lists of requests from inmates.

Just contact us at PMA by e-mail, phone or letter to let us know that you would like to be a prayer partner for inmates.



"It's Great To Be In Jail"

by Pastor Cal Lowder

I started in prison ministry in the 80's when I was pastoring at Grace Bible Church in Mobile, AL. An inmate from the local jail called and wanted a Bible. I took one to him, and since then I have worked in local facilities wherever I have lived.

While in Mobile we had a Bible Correspondence Fellowship ministry. Fifteen of our church people graded the lessons that I collected each week in the three facilities. That weekly contact with each of the inmates taught me some valuable lessons about jail ministry. First, inmates want something to do. They have lots of time and little to do so the PMA Bible studies were very helpful. Secondly, the church service/group Bible study approach produced limited lasting results. Thirdly, the best approach is the one-on-one contact that they request.

Since being in Winchester, VA I have offered my services as a volunteer chaplain and have gained the privilege to work with both staff and inmates; but I have limited my ministry to one-on-one counseling. I still offer the PMA lessons to individuals.

I know jail ministry is not for everyone; but for those who sense God's call, it really is a needy field. There is much spiritual confusion and darkness, and the best way to help them is be there, show them the unconditional love of Christ and share the Word. Remember, most inmates will be returning to your neighborhood. We are trying to help them return spiritually healed.



GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

This is the fifth in a series that examines references to prisons and prisoners in the Bible. This time we will look at Manasseh, King of Judah whose life we can read about in 2 Kings 21:1-18 and 2 Chronicles 33:1-20.

Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah, one of the few righteous kings to rule Judah after the nation was divided. Manasseh did not follow in his father's footsteps in the first years that he ruled over God's people. We are told that he did evil in the sight of the Lord and he engaged in detestable practices, including idolatry, witchcraft and child sacrifice among many other evil activities. We are told that Manasseh led the people of Judah and Jerusalem astray. What's more, God tried to get Manasseh to change his ways but he refused. 2 Chronicles 33:10 says, "And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken."

This passage goes on to describe what happened to Manasseh:

Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD

he was God.

2 Chronicles 33:11-13

It took the personal tragedy of being captured, taken away from his home and becoming a prisoner to get him to look to God. This is not uncommon today as many people live their lives in reckless and ungodly ways, all the time ignoring the call of God. Perhaps they have heard the gospel from people the Lord has brought their way but, like Manasseh, they would not listen. However, when a person's foolish and selfish behavior ends them up in a prison cell they find themselves calling on God and giving attention to Him in a way that they never had in the past.

We can read later in 2 Chronicles 33 that although Manasseh tried very hard to get the people of Judah to return to the proper worship of God they refused and continued offering sacrifices to foreign gods from the altars built on the high places. So although Manasseh, the king, had turned to the true and living God, the wrong influence he had on the people of the kingdom could not be reversed. Thus we see that if Manasseh had obeyed God from the very beginning, as the Lord had willed, it may have protected the nation from sinking to the low levels of depravity they reached. Therefore we see that it is far better for an individual to turn to the Lord sooner than later. While God is always willing to accept any one back to His arms, the impact one might have on others to cause them to stray away from the truth of God might not be able to be undone.

THE SPANISH SIDE

AN UNHEARD OF PACT!

Marcelo is an Uruguayan young man who accepted the Lord in the Spanish congregation of Grace Bible Fellowship of Pinellas Park, Fl. Marcelo has reason for his dislike of and refusal to return to his native country...it was there that he had been dragged through many unheard of things while being trained as a spiritist medium. He never wanted to see his country or his countrymen again.

After learning of the forgiveness that comes with Salvation, and that forgiveness is a part of the Christian life, Marcelo wrote to his family, after a silence of about 4 years. How excited that family was when they received his letter after such a long silence...their answer was that they would do ANYTHING to get Marcelo to come back home, anything to have the family united again!!

After many refusals, he finally made a pact with them. He would send his father and mother a set of Bible Correspondence Lessons (in Spanish) and if they could get 20 members of the extended family to do these lessons, send them in and continue on until the set was finished, then he would go back to Uruguay.

Delicias Balbuena de Acevedo had been a catechist for many years and had trained a large group of young children in her small town. After these had grown up they came to her as a group just recently and asked if they couldn't continue on studying the Bible... Did the lessons arrive in time? Yes, right on time.

Delicias, Marcelo's mother didn't know of the Pact, but she now has 30 people, those young people and several family members, who have finished with the Basic Lessons, and are beginning the Knowing Jesus series of lessons.

Delicias tells us that she has around 100 people who want to do these lessons, which she is now directing from her home. She has come to Christ through these lessons and is just excited to carry on this wonderful work. She says that these lessons came at precisely the right moment, they are orderly and organized, and very clear, with the answers right from God's Word.

A PACT is a pact....Marcelo has a trip planned...Uruguay for Christmas, 2003

Prayer & Praise

Praise— For the nearly 300 inmates that requested Bible correspondence courses through contacts made by the *Freedom Team*, an evangelistic strength and power team, that had revival meetings in Idaho prisons.

Prayer— For the continued ability of our wonderful volunteers to correctly review and correct the growing number of Bible lessons that we do. Pray for a few more volunteers to help in the office.

Prayer— For our office equipment to continue to function well. Our photocopier is at the heart of our ministry and if there are ever problems it upsets our complete operation

Praise— For our inmate students that pass on sign up cards for lessons to their fellow inmates. These contacts are the most important method we have of getting our lessons into the hands of prisoners.

Praise— For Arnie and Sally Selfors that are working in Florida as the Hispanic ministry coordinators. They work alongside Ida Vazquez who corrects our Spanish lessons.

Prayer— For more opportunities to minister in jails and prisons. Don Sommer holds lessons and services in two county jails and hopes to be able to work in others.

Prayer—

Praise—



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PO Box 2300
Port Orchard, WA 98366-0690
Phone: 1-360-876-0918
E-mail: pma@pmabcf.org
Website: www.pmabcf.org

KAREN'S KORNER

By God's Grace,
Karen



Special Thanks

Prison Mission Association is a volunteer based organization and it would be impossible for us to do the things we do without the faithful service of our dedicated team of helpers. In the past few months we have lost two of our most faithful volunteer workers in the PMA office, one simply moved on to do other things and the other went home to be with the Lord.

Faith Desmarais assisted in the PMA office for three years helping primarily by keeping track of our financial records but also assisting in a number of other areas. Faith's contribution to the ministry was immeasurable. She organized much of the accounting system we used and found a variety of ways to help the ministry cut costs. One of her most significant jobs was to help PMA convert to using bulk rate mailing for sending lessons to inmates, this saved around 70% in postage costs. Faith has moved on to serve the Lord in other ways but her work with PMA was highly appreciated and her help will be missed.

On May 3, 2003 PMA's most faith volunteer worker went to be with her beloved Lord. **Marian Lemon** volunteered for 11 years in the PMA office, working with four different directors.

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Prison Mission Association
P O Box 2300
Port Orchard WA 98366-0690

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SPECIAL THANKS

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The Church Must Embrace the Fact that It Alone Has the Solution. The typical response of most people to the social challenges our nation faces is to build new subdivisions farther away from the areas of perceived danger, to keep "them" farther away from "us." The Church, the Body of Christ, alone offers the only solution to the moral and spiritual poverty of our contemporary culture. Until individual believers recognize that "them is us" we will be powerless to have any significant effect on the current situation.

Encourage and Support Efforts to Create Awareness and Effect Change. We should do what we can to help the Church and society as a whole understand the current situation and what needs to be done to help solve some of the problems we face. Organizations such as *Focus on the Family* play an important role in bringing these issues into the public spotlight. While the government cannot change the hearts of men, it can send an important message regarding what society deems as important. Christians should be in contact with politicians letting them know that they should enact and enforce laws that recognize the importance of strong families and personal responsibility.

Do What You Can Where You Are to Help Someone. "Think Globally Act Locally" has long been the mantra of the environ-

mental movement and has been appropriately adopted by Christians regarding world evangelization. We should be involved in outreach programs within our churches, such as children's clubs, youth groups, and other activities that make it possible to have positive impact on lives during the important developmental years when their characters are being molded. If possible it is good to seek out mentoring opportunities in which a significant amount of time can be invested in a single individual.

We have a long way to go before we can get from where we are to where we should be. The picture painted in the scriptures of the last days of the Body of Christ indicates that we will not get there this side of the Rapture. However, we must nonetheless heed Paul's command which says, "And let us not grow weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Galatians 6:9)

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Marian was responsible for a wide variety of jobs in the PMA office including preparing mailings, packing Bibles and literature, preparing tracts and basically anything we asked her to do.

Marian and her joyful spirit will be tremendously missed at the PMA office