

This is the Text of Articles in the PMA Newsletter of January 2003

We're Not Just Playing Church Here!!

I remind myself often of the above statement as I minister with inmates in jails and prisons around the country. The correspondence courses, Bible studies, inmate visitation and other ministries in which PMA is involved are front line battles in the spiritual warfare that Satan is waging inside prisons and jails, and throughout the world anywhere he is given an opportunity to work.

The case of Abdullah Al Muhajir illustrates dramatically the type of spiritual conflict that we are faced with as Satan makes inroads deeper and deeper into our society. Al Muhajir was born in New York City and given the name Jose Padilla. When he was five Padilla moved with his family to Chicago where he spent most of his growing up years. While serving time in an Illinois prison he was converted to Islam through an Islamic outreach program and changed his name. After his release Muhajir came in contact with radical Islamic groups and he was recruited to be a part of a plan to blow up a "dirty bomb", radioactive material that is spread throughout an area using conventional explosives, in a major American city. On May 8, 2002 he was arrested at Chicago's O'hare airport after returning from Pakistan where he had met with members of the Al Qaeda terrorist organization.

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States and much of its growth is taking place in prisons throughout the country. It has been estimated that there are 30,000 to 50,000 conversions to Islam among American inmates each year. Dr. Bob Morey, director of Faith Defenders, a California based ministry says, "Muslim organizations from other countries are spending millions of dollars each year to infiltrate our prisons and carry out a massive campaign to convert Christians and non-Christians to Islam. They're setting up Islamic Study Centers with extension activities in the prisons, and placing chaplains in our penal system." The religion appeals to those that feel most alienated, oppressed and rejected by mainstream society. That would describe a very large number of people in our nation's correctional facilities.

Those facts mentioned above were confirmed through a conversation I recently had with a Bible Correspondence Fellowship student that is serving a long-term sentence in a Michigan correctional facility. He related to me how aggressive the Muslims were to proclaim their religion in the prisons and that they were very effective in reaching the inmates with their message. He pointed out as well that many of the Muslims in the facility were emboldened and became more aggressive after the events of September 11, 2001. Yet this man reminded me of a vitally important truth. When dealing with the Muslims in his institution he said that he constantly reminds himself that they are not the enemy, Satan is the enemy and the battle he is engaged in is a spiritual one.

With this information in mind we can see all the more how urgent the need is to be involved in bringing the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ to America's inmate population. Prison Mission Association is blessed to be part of God's work of

reconciliation which brings the good news of new life in Christ to a world in such desperate need.

From the Desk of The Diector

Dear Friends of Prison Mission Association

We at PMA believe strongly that ministry is the responsibility of every member of the Body of Christ. Being involved in the Lord's work of building His church should not be restricted to a handful of specially trained and paid professionals. God has called all believers into active ministry. With that theme in mind we wish to share with you a number of examples in this Newsletter of local churches and ordinary people that have answered the call to bring the gospel of grace to inmates in various parts of the United States and around the world. Take the time to read of the exciting work that is going on in **Minneapolis** through the outreach of the **Bethesda Church** in two facilities in Minnesota. There are also brief excerpts of how the PMA/BCF material is being used by a number of other individuals and churches.

Perhaps reading these testimonies might inspire your church to become involved in some type of prison or jail outreach. If so please contact us at PMA and we can give some suggestions as to how to go about starting an outreach in your area.

We are also excited to announce the appointment of **Arnie Selfors as the Field Representative for Hispanic Ministries**. Arnie and Sally have a tremendous amount of experience with both ministering to Spanish speakers as well as working with inmates. They will be a valuable resource in PMA's effort to reach out to the rapidly increasing Hispanic population in US prisons and jails.

I am sure many of the Newsletter readers are wondering about the results of my trip in November to visit the ministry in **Cameroon, West Africa**. The time I spent there I feel was very profitable and encouraging for both me and I believe to the Cameroonian leaders as well. I was pleased to see that despite the tragic death of Brother Lawrence Asong the ministry continues. I had the opportunity to get to know a number leaders among the several churches and I was impressed with their understanding of scripture and their commitment to preaching and teaching God's Word. The PMA board will be discussing the future of PMA's involvement in Cameroon during its upcoming meeting on March 6. PMA will publish a full report on the Cameroon ministry in our next issue of the **PMA Newsletter**.

I wish to thank Faith Desmarais, one of our PMA office volunteers, for her hard work in the layout and production of the PMA Newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading this issue and rejoice with us as you learn of the many ways the Lord is using PMA for His glory.

In Christ's service,

Don

Prison Ministry at Bethesda Church

For a short time we had a woman attend our church who was married to a prisoner in a high security prison in Oak Park, Minnesota. As a church we opened our hearts to these dear folk and came to recognize their tender hearts for the Lord. It wasn't long after that that we began to sense the Lord prompting us as a congregation to be involved in reaching prisoners for Christ. Our Prison Ministry Committee developed an ambitious fourteen-point plan for ministry. It was a joy to see the Lord burdening the hearts of many folks towards personal commitments in this work. We began by holding quarterly worship services in Oak Park Prison led by Pastor Art Matychuk. Pastor would go four Sundays a year and take with him a worship team. These services quickly became the most popular gatherings there. God was working through the faithful preaching of the Word. We later began other ministries of letter/card writing to prisoners, we raised funds to buy hundreds of Bibles for prison evangelism, and we had a library project in another prison where we purchased and donated over 600 volumes of solid Christian reference, and Bible study books. It has been interesting to me to see the Lord open and close doors as we have grown in this area of ministry. We are excited now to have been given access to Stillwater Prison, (which is a medium security facility). Twice a month individuals from our church hold Bible studies there on Saturday afternoons. The process of the Lord opening doors for this study to begin has amazed us all. Several men have participated in this undertaking with Nathan Johnson being a key teacher in this work.

It was through our contacts and ministries at Oak Park and Stillwater prisons that we began to have a burden for even broader teaching and nurturing ministry. We established our "Bethesda Correspondence School" a year and a half ago and through the support of PMA we began organizing and providing an excellent course of correspondence study to the inmates. One fellow in our church, Don Koukal, became the Director of our Correspondence School and has carefully nursed this ministry to the point where now we are regularly working with over fifty inmates in three different prisons. It has been a joy to see men already graduate from the full course, completing all these lessons. Our Prison Ministry Committee has grown and developed in its thinking. Our fourteen-point plan has been pared down and made much more realistic. We feel the Lord has focused us on key essentials. What we have decided to focus on is a solid and expanding ministry of Bible Correspondence Courses that supports personal ministry in the two prisons the Lord has given us access to. In some ways our whole congregation has prayerfully been involved in caring for those in prison, but in wonderful ways we have seen the leading of the Lord as he has burdened many very giving and self sacrificing individuals to make this a priority in their service for the Lord.

In a recent Christmas card we received from an inmate a comment was shared that for us says it all. An inmate student wrote, "Thank you for all the wonderful Bible studies – they are the most positive things to happen to me in this dark place. They are a great gift. Thanks. Have a great holiday season!" We are so glad that God has led us as a congregation to take to heart Hebrews 13:3, "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body."

Mark Matychuk, Pastor – Bethesda Church, Minneapolis, MN

Others have shared with us as well how the Lord is using them.

I just wanted to let you know how we are using the Bible studies. We have seen about a dozen of the prisoners in the county jail trust Christ. We have five of them who have started the study. I have also been working with someone from a state prison at Spruce Pine, NC and recently sent one to the adult son of our church secretary at a state facility in southern Florida. I really appreciate your fellowship in the gospel. **Pastor Lynn Dulakis, North Carolina**

In the meantime our Gracious Father has opened a door to prisons in the most populous province in South Africa. The Grace Berean church in Pretoria has made contact with the chaplain in charge who would like the church to undertake correspondence courses as well as conducting physical training.

I would gladly like to take you up on your offer of the CD. It is an exciting prospect to have everything readily available. **Brother Kobus Schwartz – Nelspruit, South Africa**

I had a women in church this past Sunday whose son is in jail in Charlotte, SC. He has at least two more years. He has been actively witnessing and having his mother send the new converts Scofield bibles. I gave her some BCF cards for her son to distribute in the jail there so Lord willing we will begin receiving requests for Bible study courses. We continue to have a couple people working on the course outside of the church. The Lord has blessed those who have completed the course as well as those who have been correcting the lessons as they are returned to us. **Pastor Joel McGarvey – Duncansville, PA**

The Spanish Side

Practically since its inception in 1955 Prison Mission Association has had an outreach to Hispanics. PMA's founder, Joe Mason, saw early on the importance of reaching the Spanish speaking world with the gospel of Grace. Over the years a number of dedicated men and women have assisted PMA in reaching out to Hispanics. Most recently Eliacin Rosario was the director of Hispanic ministries, but he left PMA in 2001 to join the work of Camp Caribe in Puerto Rico. Currently we are being assisted by Ida Vasquez who volunteers to help with lesson correcting for Spanish correspondence lessons. Ida however, works a full time job and is a wife and mother of two (soon to be three) children. While her assistance as a lesson corrector is invaluable she does not have the time to more fully develop PMA's Hispanic outreach.

In response to that need the board of PMA has appointed **Arnie Selfors as its new Field Representative for Hispanic Ministries**. Arnie and his wife Sally are veteran missionaries to a number of Latin American fields. They have served in Bolivia, Uruguay and Puerto Rico (where they first met Ida). A few years ago they moved to Largo, Florida where they planned to retire. Their retirement has been in name only. In reality they have been actively involved in ministry and outreach in their newfound home. Arnie and Sally have been instrumental in starting an Hispanic ministry through the Grace Bible Church of Pinellas Park, Florida. Sally translates the sermons for the

Sunday morning service into Spanish and they have a regular weekly Bible study that meets in their home on Tuesday nights. Through these formal outreaches they have had several opportunities to minister individually with people from throughout Latin America that have settled in West Central Florida. More recently Arnie has started an outreach to Spanish speaking inmates in a nearby correctional facility.

Arnie's new responsibilities with PMA will be to coordinate PMA outreach efforts to Hispanics. He will work side by side with Ida in the oversight of the correction of Spanish correspondence lessons. He will help in the development of our Spanish language Bible studies. He will also help to encourage the growth of our outreach in reaching more Hispanics in the US and around the world.

Prison Mission Association is currently accepting gifts for the ministry of the Selfors. If you feel the Lord is leading you to support the work of Arnie and Sally either through a one time gift or on a regular basis please mail your donation to the PMA office at PO Box 2300, Port Orchard, WA 98366 with a note designating that the gift is for the ministry of Arnie Selfors. Your gifts are tax deductible.

God's Perspective

This is the fourth in a series that examines references to prisons and prisoners in the Bible. This time we will look at Saul, King of Israel whose life we can read about in 1 Samuel 8-31

Saul is an unusual character to choose for an article such as this since there is no record that he was ever physically imprisoned. Saul's story is appropriate, however, because it describes how he lived in a type of emotional prison for much of his life, one that is shared by a very high number of inmates in our country and around the world. That is the bondage of mental illness.

The introduction we have to Saul in the Scriptures is very positive. He was chosen by God to be Israel's first king. We learn that Saul was a very handsome, well built man. The prophet Samuel recognized God's blessing upon him and anointed him as king. Saul demonstrated himself as a man of both great courage and compassion, when he refused to have his critics executed after winning a decisive battle against the Ammonites. We can read in 1 Samuel 13:1 that Saul was thirty years old when he became king and that he ruled Israel for forty years.

Saul's situation changed dramatically, however, after an incident in which he disobeyed God by offering sacrifices prior a battle against the Philistines rather than waiting for the prophet Samuel to arrive as was agreed upon. Because of that event Samuel declared that Saul's descendants would not rule over Israel. From that point on things in Saul's life went from bad to worse. Eventually in 1 Samuel 16:14 we read, *But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.* (Note: It is likely that the Lord permitted the evil spirit to torment Saul, rather than that He directly sent the spirit to him.) This "evil spirit" tormented Saul for the rest of his life.

Many commentators have noted that Saul demonstrated the symptoms of a number of common mental health disorders, including manic/depression, paranoia and schizophrenia. Modern medicine and psychology have tried to tell us in recent years that severe mental health problems are entirely associated with chemical imbalances in the brain. We can see that at least in Saul's case, the cause of his troubles came from a spiritual source. While there is no question that mind altering drugs can ease the most severe symptoms of many of these severe psychological problems, the patients themselves will openly admit that the root causes are often a complex combination of emotional, psychological and spiritual factors.

According to U.S. Department of Justice statistics nearly 15% of all inmates in the United States are being actively treated in correctional institutions for mental health disorders, most of them receiving some type of psychotropic drugs to alter their behavior. Such quick fix remedies as prescribing pills to the mentally ill may pacify and temporarily calm an individual but it does not treat the root cause of the disorder. We read in the Scriptures that the only thing that could give Saul peace was when David would play his harp for him. David probably sang as well while he played and it is likely the words of his songs were the very ones that eventually were recorded in the book of Psalms. So it was the Word of God, set to music that had the effect of calming Israel's king when he was troubled by the evil spirit that tortured his mind and soul.

I am not implying that the example of Saul's situation explains every case, or even most cases of mental illness today. It does however, give us insight to show that we are engaged in a spiritual battle against "spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). The relationship between the physical nature of the brain and the soul and spirit is deep and complex. Emotional and psychological problems should be viewed from a holistic perspective that takes in every aspect of the human nature.