

CHRISTIAN LIFE REPORT

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMISSION

July/August/September 2008

VOL. 18 No. 3

I Hate Prisons

by Joe Bob Mizzell

When I was a little boy, my mother told me that if I did not obey the law that I could end up in prison. I could only imagine how awful it would be to be locked up all the time away from family and friends. I am a person who enjoys the outside, and to spend all my time in one room seems worse than death.

Well, my mother made an impression on me. I have never been in prison—except to minister, and never arrested. My only run-ins with the law have been a few speeding tickets, which I paid quickly and, oh yes, a couple of parking tickets.

When I was called to preach at 18, I took every invitation I could get to preach.

Among those invitations was one by an older preacher to speak in the Maplesville road camp, a place of incarceration for men who involuntarily worked on the road without pay. I remember talking with them about their crimes and the length of their prison terms. *I hate prisons.*

My next encounter with prison was to visit a church member and help get him out of prison. He wasn't a church member when he got out of prison, but when his son became a preacher, he became a Christian and attended church faithfully until he died. *I hate prisons.*

About 15 years ago, Ray Baker, my associate and the guy at the Baptist Building who knows everything about prison and prisoners, asked me to go with him to the jail in Enterprise and observe a conference he was doing for volunteers in jail ministry. I didn't get to observe the class because when we got there the sheriff, who was in the National Guard with me, asked if I would talk to a young man who had just been arrested. The young man, who had played football at Troy University, was crying his eyes out. He was arrested for killing his friend in a car wreck while he was intoxicated and on drugs. His life would never be the same. I stood that night on the observation deck inside the prison and my spirit said, "This is an evil

place for evil people. I don't like prisons! *I hate prisons!*"

My next encounter with prison was to go with Ray to Angola Prison in Louisiana to observe what New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is doing there with ministerial education. I sat in a circle with about 15 men who had just graduated from college through New Orleans Seminary. One prisoner was being released and was going to seek a Master of Divinity at NOBTS, others were being given ministry assignments throughout the large prison. It was a day of rejoicing and I rejoiced with them until I asked one of the graduates how long before he would be released. The 37 year old prisoner informed me that

unless the law changed he would be there the rest of his life. He must have seen the hurt on my face, for he quickly added, "I found Jesus here and I was called to the ministry here." *I still hate prisons*, but I am aware God works even in prison.

It was in 1975 that I served as treasurer of the pastors' conference of the Southern Baptist Convention, a job no one wanted. I did get to preside over a part of the meeting which was a special privilege, but

the best part of having that position was having dinner one night with Chuck Colson. As we walked to the restaurant with the officers of the pastors' conference, Colson asked my wife where we were from. When she said, "Alabama", he replied, "I spent some time in Alabama." He was factiously referring to his time in prison at Maxwell where he found the Lord and discovered a new life. *I still hate prisons*, but God reached into prison to retrieve one of the greatest Christians in America today.

God doesn't give up on a person who is incarcerated and neither should we. Churches in Alabama need to minister to prisoners and when they are released they need to accept them and continue to minister to them.

(Mizzell is Director of Christian Ethics/Chaplaincy Ministries of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions)



*The articles in this issue were gathered from various sources
The opinions in the Christian Life Report are not necessarily the opinions of the Christian Life Commission*

"Miss Lillian" to the Rescue

by Michael J. Brooks

Mary Kay Beard has spoken on the Judson College campus a number of times. A former inmate who had been on the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list, she was the first female director of Prison Fellowship in Alabama, and the founder of the Angel Tree ministry which provides gifts for children of inmates at Christmas. Angel Tree began in malls in Montgomery and Birmingham in 1982 and now includes every state and 45 countries around the world.

I read her biography, "Rogue Angel," recently and found an interesting story.

Male inmates at the Draper Prison in Elmore, Alabama, had educational opportunities in the mid '70s that Mary Kay and other females at Julia Tutwiler Prison in Wetumpka, Alabama (near Montgomery) didn't, so they lobbied for change. Governor George Wallace approved the changes—an election year, she added!

Mary Kay and several inmates were given permission to enroll at Auburn University and live in a halfway house near the college. One inmate abused a pass privilege and the commissioner announced he was canceling the program at Auburn. One of Mary Kay's friends talked with Katherine Cater, the dean of women, who had been a bridge partner of Lillian Carter when "Miss Lillian" was a residence director at the university. Cater called Carter.

Beard writes, "When Jimmy Carter was governor of Georgia, a prison inmate was his daughter Amy's nanny. When he became president, the inmate was paroled and went to Washington with them. 'Miss Lillian' believed Miss Cater when she said Mary Kay was reliable. 'Miss Lillian' called Governor Wallace. 'George, don't you have enough guilty people over there?' she asked. 'Do you have to start locking up innocent people?'"

The governor contacted the commissioner and the program was reinstated.

Mary Kay graduated from Auburn and went on to work with Prison Fellowship. She's had opportunity to share her testimony of new life across the country and on nationwide television on "The Hour of Power" with Robert Schuller. This may not have happened had it not been for a scrappy woman from Plains, Georgia, who cared enough to call Governor Wallace!

I recommend this inspiring book to you. It's "Rogue Angel" by Jodi Werhanowicz (Phoenix: Ezekiel Press, 2005).

(Brooks is Assistant to the President for Public Relations at Judson College)



You Can Go To Prison

by Ray Baker

Have you ever thought of what it would be like to be in prison? Anyone can go to prison, not just to visit, but to be sentenced to serve years behind locked gates and razor wire.

Anyone driving on America's highways or streets can accidentally kill someone. Social drinkers, casual or recreational drug users can find themselves in prison for years. But that could never happen to you. Who are the incarcerated in Alabama's prisons? I have met preachers, lawyers, doctors, commissioners, teachers, deacons, a judge or two, several police officers and a few former Alabama State Troopers. All NEVER thought they would be locked up in prison. All of these and others need ministry. They all have family who need ministry, a visit, a friend to sit talk and listen. Someone to care!

With a few hours of training you, too, can go to jails and prisons to minister—to show your love and God's grace and mercy to those behind the bars, locked doors and razor wire fences. Chaplains provide training for volunteers who will come into the prison to teach or facilitate a support group study, even help preachers learn to be effective in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The greatest need for someone incarcerated is to have a true friend, someone who will come visit him or her as an individual. Jesus said, "I was in prison and you visited me..." He said nothing about "preaching to me"—my interpretation,

the visit is the important part.

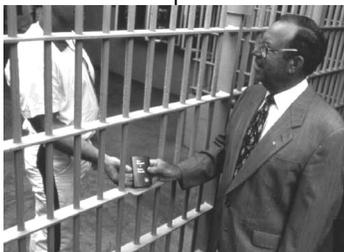
Former inmates who have been out, usually two years time requirement, with pastoral recommendation, are permitted to return to jails and prisons to minister. The two years can be waived in many cases.

Family members of prisoners need ministry. Some say, "I just cannot go through those prison gates." Well, contact a chaplain at the local jail or prison and volunteer to work with the family of a prisoner who needs help.

Prisoners become believers in prisons and many want to be forgiven and seek to be reconciled to their victims. You can work with a victim mediation group to assist in this ministry. Victims or criminals need ministry and you can become an advocate for them. However, you must begin where you are as law keepers respecting and obeying law enforcement officers. Remember NEVER pass one person to minister to another, that person you pass needs Jesus just as the convicted behind bars. There are only two kinds of people in our world—those who *HAVE* Jesus as Lord and Savior and those who *DO NOT*.

For information and help in getting trained and involved in jail and prison ministry, contact Ray Baker, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 308, or e-mail rbaker@alsbom.org.

(Baker is an associate in the Office of Christian Ethics/Chaplaincy Ministries of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions)



Helping Former Incarcerated Persons

Southern Baptists have always been mission-minded. Whether it is ministering to an elderly neighbor down the street or to lost and needy children in Central America, we are there to minister to the needs of others. We now have another avenue for home missions right in our back yards. There are approximately 29,000 people incarcerated in Alabama correctional facilities, a vast majority of whom are lost. This provides Southern Baptists a great opportunity for evangelism and this evangelism is relatively simple and straight forward.

As part of Governor Riley's Plan 2010, which addresses several issues facing the state, the Community Partnership for Recovery and Reentry (CPR) is designed to help previously incarcerated persons transition successfully back into society and become active and productive citizens. "Our mission is to provide a network of resources for these people to utilize, become productive, and not fall back into old habits and risk return to prison or jail," said Joe Thomas, who directs Governor Riley's Special Projects staff. His staff consists of six Special Projects Coordinators who work the state, which is divided into eight regions for the CPR network.

The Special Projects staff works with the Department of Corrections, the Board of Pardons and Paroles, churches, ministerial associations, transition homes and counseling centers in this effort. The Reentry Program of the Department of Corrections and the critical work of the Board of Pardons and Parole form the framework for the preparation and release of inmates from state correctional systems and individuals from our criminal justice system. Collectively, these efforts can be effective in breaking the vicious cycle of repeat offenders. When we include our faith and community



based organizations, the potential for success increases dramatically. Bill Johnson, Director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) oversees the work of the Special Projects Division and has a heart for this effort and ministry. "We all became aware during Hurricane Katrina that faith based groups are extremely competent and effective in delivering resources in catastrophic situations. These faith based groups are effective in ministering to people on a daily basis and will be instrumental in the success of the CPR program," said Johnson.

The CPR Network has compiled a list of ideas which churches and individuals can use in this effort. "80 Ideas for How Churches Can Help" includes everything from establishing funds for rent subsidies, providing mentoring services to previously incarcerated citizens or establishing a transitional home to welcoming these people to worship each Sunday or adopting a child of an inmate at Christmas. In Matthew 25, we are challenged to action in this ministry. Jesus spoke in verses 35-36, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Southern Baptists are encouraged to take the first step in this ministry by visiting the CPR network website, www.alabamacprnetwork.com. Check out the "80 Ideas", pray about it and let God guide you in this area of home missions. The CPR Network office can be reached at 334/353-2043 or 334/324-2071.

(Prepared by Alabama CPR Network Staff)

WORLD HUNGER SUNDAY

October 12, 2008

100% of all money collected through the World Hunger Fund is used to feed hungry people around the world and share the "Bread of Life" with those who hunger for the good news of salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

"Great Commission Ministries"

Call 1-800-264-1225 ext. 233, or email jfarmer@alsbom.org for information

This ministry is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention

FACTS & ISSUES

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INMATE COUNT IN U.S. DWARFS OTHER NATIONS

The United States has less than 5 percent of the world's population. But it has almost a quarter of the world's prisoners. Indeed, the United States leads the world in producing prisoners, a reflection of a relatively recent and now entirely distinctive American approach to crime and punishment. Americans are locked up for crimes—from writing bad checks to using drugs—that would rarely produce prison sentences in other countries. And in particular they are kept incarcerated far longer than prisoners in other nations.

The New York Times, Adam Liptak, April 23, 2008

PRISON

"After three decades of explosive growth, the nation's prison population has reached some grim milestones: More than 1 in 100 American adults are behind bars. Nationwide, the prison population hovers at almost 1.6 million, which surpasses all other countries for which there are reliable figures. The 50 states last year spent about \$44 billion in tax dollars on corrections, up from nearly \$11 billion in 1987.

The key, as some states are learning, is getting smarter about distinguishing between violent criminals and dangerous repeat offenders, who need a prison cell, and low-risk offenders, who can be handled with effective community supervision, electronic monitoring and mandatory drug treatment programs, combined in some cases with shorter sentences.."

PEW Report, RSA Advisor, April 2008

PRISON GIRLS AND WOMEN

The Commission on Girls and Women in the Criminal Justice System has issued a report addressing gender disparities in the criminal system. The Commission found that most women and girls in the criminal justice system in Alabama are there for nonviolent offenses and would be better served in community-based rehabilitation programs focused on mental health, substance abuse treatment, family assistance and other services that address the issues that pushed them into the justice system.

Expanding these services and "community corrections" programs into every county has the potential to save Alabama millions in tax dollars. A system with a smaller high security prison and several low- to medium-security facilities would provide public safety at lower costs. The full report is available at parca.samford.edu/commission/report2008.pdf.

Source: PARCA—RSA Advisor, May 2008

STATE'S SUICIDE RATE

Alabama's suicide rate has climbed to its highest level since 2000 and appears to remain above the national average as it has since 1990, a state health agency study showed.

Recently released statistics show that the state's suicide rate was 12.5 per 100,000 people in 2006. National rates for 2005 and 2006 aren't available, but the country has maintained a rate near or below 11 suicides per 100,000 for several years, the agency said.

The Montgomery Advertiser, Associated Press, June 24, 2008

Anti-Gambling Sunday - September 21, 2008



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