



FREEDOM THROUGH TRUTH

July - August 2007

From the Pen of Chaplain Baggett



The Process of Parole

One of the inmates that works in my office, we call them runners, will be coming up for parole in the next few weeks. This will be his fifth time to have his case considered by the parole board.

Through most of these hearings, he has worked in my office, and I have seen the anxiety that accompanies this process.

It begins with the anticipation of notification from the parole board that a date has been set. This date is supposedly determined by the board when one is denied parole. My runner was set off five years at his last hearing. That meant that he should have come up for a hearing six months ago. However the parole board is behind and thus he was delayed for six months. Inmates learn to watch when others come up before the board, and this helps them determine how far behind the board is. This is a time of great uncertainty for any inmate.

Then the inmate receives a letter telling him of the date of the hearing, usually thirty to sixty days prior to the hearing. This gives the inmate time to get any information to the parole board that he thinks is pertinent to his hearing and to try to make arrangements for his family, friends and supporters to attend the hearing. The inmate does not attend the hearing.

During the hearing, a representative of the family is given an opportunity to speak and occasion-

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ally they will ask if any other supporters want to make any comments. The opposition is allowed to state their feelings, either in writing or verbally. The board takes this information and then makes its decision. Usually the answer will be available by the end of the day.

This entire process, which can take several months, is extremely stressful for the inmate, and I'm sure for the victims of the crime that sent him to prison. We ask that you pray for my runner, and for the victims of the crime that sent him to prison. Isn't it great that we have a loving God to work such matters out. It is our prayer that His will be done in this and all matters.

(Chaplain Charles E. Baggett)

The Smallest Church at Limestone

Jesus promised His disciples that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He will be in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).

Every Sunday, members of the Lord's Church at Limestone meet in four separate locations. General Population brothers assemble in the main chapel, Faith-based Honor-dorm H meets in the dorm's chapel, the Special Unit meets in Dorm C, and the smallest Church at Limestone meets in Dorm E – Disciplinary Lock-Up. Most assemblies vary in size and make-up each time they meet. Only Lock-Up attendance remains constant – one brother and I represent the (whole) Lord's body.

This "special" brother was converted / baptized by Assistant Chaplain James Williams (Northwest Church of Christ) on October 30, 2006. Following his new birth, I was asked to begin meeting with this young child of God, to encourage him, and to teach him to "observe" all things Christ has commanded us. Our number may be small, but not our enthusiasm, conviction, and resolve to assemble regularly. We sing, pray, and study together. Without a song book, we usually sing the first verses of a few songs from memory. The central focus of our assembly is always the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Because of the high noise-level in the dorm, I must often raise my voice. Curious eyes and ears are frequently observing and listening through small openings of nearby cells. Please pray that God will prick the hearts of the men-in-white that are so close (physically), yet so far away (spiritually).

Circumstances can change quite frequently. My brother has spent many months in solitary confinement. During times of maximum confinement, our fellowship is conducted through a 10" x 20" opening in a solid steel door. I pull up a folding chair outside the cell and my brother sits on a rolled-up mattress inside his cell. At times, he is allowed outside his cell, ankles and wrists shackled, with an additional chain around his waist to secure his hands. But now, through good behavior, he has earned the privilege of leaving his cell and assisting with the distribution of meals. As a result, we can now meet

outside his cell without any restraints.

Because of the closeness of our fellowship, he has shared aspects about his “past” life, behavior, and especially temper. I constantly encourage him to be patient, long-suffering, loving, kind, merciful, and forgiving. I remind him that he must demonstrate to officers and inmates daily that he is a Christian, and that his lifestyle is changing. I see the changes in his life. On several occasions, officers have told me of the changes they see. They state that he is calmer and quieter. He was placed in Disciplinary Lock-Up (originally) because of his actions and temper. Men are placed in this location when they become disruptive and when they endanger other inmates in the General Population.

Our brother has been behind bars for over thirty years. He has no (close) physical relatives, no one that writes or cares for him. But he now regularly receives letters and cards of encouragement from spiritual sisters from the Madison and Skyline Churches of Christ. He always prays for and fondly speaks about his family in Christ at Madison.

I participate in three of the four Sunday services at Limestone on a regular basis. Due to the nature and setting of Lock-Up, this assembly has resulted in a most intimate and special relationship. Sadly, the members of Madison will not be able to meet the brother from Lock-Up as they have met other brothers and men-in-white from our Faith-based Honor-dorm H (Family Nights), as well as General Population and Special Unit (Annual Gospel Meetings). For this reason, your prayers are especially coveted on his behalf.

Even though our brother now has more freedom to move about, he has very limited contact with fellow inmates. His thoughts, nevertheless, are constantly on the spiritual welfare of others, and on sharing the Good News. And even when others in Lock-Up become children of God, services will (probably) always be one-on-one.

Please never forget the Smallest Church at Limestone. It may not grow numerically, but pray that it will continue to grow spiritually.

(Siegfried Bill, Assistant Chaplain at LCF, Madison Church of Christ)

REGISTER TODAY

Register today for the NewLife Behavior Conference being held at the Prestoncrest Church of Christ in Dallas, Texas on 12-13 October 2007. This conference is designed for jail and prison ministry workers and is hosted by Dr. Hillery Motsinger, the founder of NewLife Behavior Ministries and Buck Griffith, the current president of NLBM. For more information and a registration form go to “nlbm.org.” If you have questions contact Bill Edwards: e-mail wcedwards@knology.net or phone 256-772-8739.

NLBNOA EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

The NewLife Behavior Network of Alabama (NLBNOA) held its first annual business meeting at the University Church of Christ in Montgomery on August 18, 2007. Almost a hundred were in attendance and enthusiasm was high. Martel Pace did an excellent job hosting the event. It was encouraging to meet many jail/prison workers for the first time and to see their enthusiasm and interest in networking with others and learning how to be even more effective in their work. We want to extend special thanks to the Roebuck Parkway Church of Christ in Birmingham for the delicious lunch they prepared.

The following summarizes presentations made and actions taken.

- Ray Cox, State Director, NLBNOA opened the meeting by welcoming the group and giving a brief report of accomplishments after one full year of operations. One of the major mission fulfillments is that we now have classes or worship services in 20 of the 29 state facilities and permission to teach in at least two more. Other accomplishments include establishment of a web site, publishing a bi-monthly newsletter and conducting the first NLBNOA Southeastern Regional Jail/Prison Ministry Workshop with over 150 attending from seven states.
- Chaplain Charles Baggett gave a training session for those who wanted to become qualified to enter the Alabama DOC facilities to minister to the inmates. In addition to the training on rules and regulations he also gave the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) training.
- Jeff Johnson announced the NLBNOA database now has more than 1400 incarcerated members of the church listed.
- Chad Roberts presented two models of halfway homes that could be used by congregations in establishing aftercare facilities.
- Workers from throughout the state gave reports on jail/prison ministry in their areas. What is being done is impressive.
- In addition to continuing to emphasize getting into the prisons, in the future more emphasis will be placed on involvement in county and city jails.
- The areas of work within the state will be increased from four to fourteen. Area directors are asked to analyze their areas, determine a work plan to get ministry in every facility and take “ownership” of their area to get our mission fulfilled.
- The eldership of the Rainbow Church of Christ in Gadsden was reaffirmed as the overseeing eldership of NLBNOA.
- Ray Cox, who has done an outstanding job as State Director, was named as State Director for another year.
- Materials from NLBM headquarters and NLBNOA were made available on a wide variety of subjects.
- Chaplain Baggett announced that the Beltline Church of Christ in Decatur, AL will host the NLBNOA Southeastern Regional Workshop February 22nd —24th, 2008.

Everyone is looking forward to an increasing presence of the church of Christ in the jails and prisons throughout the state.

(Bill Edwards, volunteer assistant chaplain at LCF, Madison Church of Christ)

WORKING WITH INMATES WHO HAVE BEEN RELEASED FROM PRISON - PART I

Working with inmates who have been released from prison can be a challenging event for most congregations. Most Christians don't understand the psyche of those men that have been incarcerated for a period of time. And now that they've been released, the faith of the church will be put to the test.

Ours hopes are high, we have great aspirations; we've been working with prisoners for a while and we think we know a little about them. We expect too much sometimes though, and we want them to act like us, like they have been in the church for the last several years, though they have been attending and participating in worship at the prison. I believe that their faith is sincere, but they return to an environment that's not conducive to spiritual growth.

The environment that a Christian is in is critical to the Child of God. Jim McGuiggan made this statement in his book **The Power To See It Through**: "*Environment isn't all-powerful, but it's very powerful! It wears people down or raises them up.*" Sometimes we fail to see how the environment has played a significant part in the lives of those men and women who have been beat down by society itself. And here come some Christians into prison who want to conduct a service but a lot of the time never have the heart for a real commitment to changing lives.

In an unselfish way we want the recognition of the Christian community as someone that goes into the prison and wins souls for Jesus, and that's good. But when they are released we fail to realize that we might have to accept them into our church family, now *here* comes the test of faith. Most of these men and women have adapted to the lifestyle which they have become accustomed to while in prison. And when they are released most of them are burdened down with prison life - and it's still bearing down on them after release.

Most congregations aren't **preparing to handle the baggage (the behaviors)** that have impregnated the mind of these men and women. Christians need to come to the understanding that these people have lived in a world of degradation like nothing the average Christian has ever experienced (which I will discourse in more detail later). We need to understand the intensive care it will take, and that these men and women need to make the adjustment in their lives. Then and only then can they live a normal life in a FREE MORAL SOCIETY.

When I speak of a "**free moral society**" my thoughts are on the church, for that's the only place we will find freedom from this sin sick society we live in. The sin which is being propagated everywhere and everyday in this world. The only escape for the inmate is the Christian community. Only here is he free from the influence of the world and the power of Satan; here in the body of Christ, the teaching of the scripture and the obedience of the individual faith.

The NT has determined that if people are left to themselves they cannot conquer sin. And this is a fact of life for the inmate who has lived in an environment that's contaminated with the refuse of this world. His soul everyday of the week has been infected by it's influence. **Just as righteous Lot in 2 Peter 2:6-8 was oppressed and tormented by the wickedness of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.** Some of those prisoners have an earnest desire to do good, but evil is powerful and they can't escape it seductive control.

Church, we cannot overcome the powerful influence of sin ourselves! We want to do good but too often find evil in attendance with us. On our own we can do nothing. **The Children of God need Jesus to overcome** (Rom 7:18-25).

If sin is a problem for the Christian how much more difficult is it for the man who has just been released from prison? He or she is exposed to desires and wants that they haven't felt in a long time. Things that we see every day could have an overwhelming effect on a person that has been in prison, such as a cooler full of beer sitting on ice out in front of the counter at a convenience store. Free world people see this all the time and it has no affect on some of them but to a person who hadn't seen beer in a long time it's like cool water in a dry desert, and a person's throat is parched from the heat.

Most of these men that I have had the opportunity to work with have come from troublesome backgrounds. They have no idea of what it would take to make it in the real world as an honorable person. From the very start of their childhood they were lost in this dark world and they became even more lost while in prison. You can lose your sense of identity as a Christian while in prison; its evilness can reach to the depth of a person's soul.

They have no direction, no indication of who will help guide them in the ways of a responsible life. Some Christians are so fearful of ex-inmates. They become an automatic turnoff in our Christian churches for these men or women that are trying to jump start their life again. They haven't had any responsibility for the last several months or years, and they have been locked out from the real world. Prison has taught them some habits and they have seen some things that we would be in absolute shock at.

D.O.C has had control of their lives for the period of time that they were in prison. If you saw the movie "Shawshank Redemption," you saw the old man who made parole and who wanted to cut another inmate's throat because he was being released from prison. Morgan Freeman made this profound statement, "*he became institutionalized*".

We are seeing inmates coming into prison as young men and leaving as old men having no real rules but prison rules, and no godly discipline with any responsibility. So many things can change in just a few months when you have been separated from the free world and making the adjustment for an inmate can be traumatizing. (*part 2 will be in the next issue*)

(Assistant Chaplain James E. Williams, Northwest Church of Christ)

The Beltline Church of Christ in Decatur, Alabama will host the annual *Southeastern Regional Jail/Prison Ministry Workshop* on February 22nd-24th 2008. The workshop is sponsored by the **NewLife Behavior Network of Alabama. Plan for this extraordinary weekend!**

NEW TRIMESTER BEGINS

Honor dorm classes for the last trimester of 2007 began the 11th of September, 2007. Below is a list of classes taught by Church of Christ volunteers. We welcome new volunteer Grant Azbell from the Highland Park Church of Christ in Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

CLASS	CONGREGATION	TEACHERS
NLB 1 A Sense of Self	Madison	S. Drake
NLB 2 A Sense of Family	Madison	M. Hester, J. James
NLB 3 Parenting Matters	Madison	L. Smith, S. Drake
NLB 4 True Freedom	Cox Blvd., Highland Park	J. Rhoden, G. Azbell
NLB 4 True Freedom	Madison	S. Drake
NLB 7 Attitudes and Behaviors	W. Fayetteville	D. Wallace, B. Watkins
NLB 7 Attitudes and Behaviors	Madison	M. Houts
NLB 7 Attitudes and Behaviors	Madison	C. Lamb, R. Peck
NLB 8 CASA	Madison	S. Bill
NLB 10 The Seeker Series	Cox Blvd., Highland Park	J. Rhoden, G. Azbell
Searching the Scriptures	W. Huntsville	B. Skipworth
The Church	Madison	J. Walton III, J. Walton IV
1st Book of Samuel	Shiloh	J. Dryden
Firmly Rooted in Truth #1	Madison	S. Drake
Life Skills	Hartselle	T. Reynolds
What Did Jesus Say	Madison	L. Cockerham

***BAPTISMS TO DATE AT LIMESTONE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY
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NEWS FROM NEWLIFE BEHAVIOR

Over the years we have been asked for material to assist the sex-addict. We have recommended Course VIII—*Christians Against Substance Abuse (CASA)*, suggesting that “sex” be substituted in references to drugs or alcohol. Few have done so and some have even been offended since they are not drug addicts or alcoholics! This may seem strange to you but drug addicts and alcoholics would likely be equally offended if told to study material on “sex addiction” and substitute drugs-alcohol in the place of the reference to sex.

Thus, we have completely gone through the Course VIII material, revising it into Course VIIIb *Christians Against Sex Addiction (CASA)*. We anticipate refining, editing and significantly upgrading the material to meet the specific needs of sex offenders. Your ideas and suggestions are welcomed. In addition, the new tract by Lyonald Marston will be renamed *Hope for Healing*.



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P.O. Box 1271
Hartselle, Al. 35640
Bus. (256) 773-8417