

Ministry Update - 3rd Quarter, 2007

Twelve Step Recovery Meetings

July, August and September means we were finishing studying Steps 6 & 7, and then studying Steps 8 and 9. That is working on getting rid of our character defects and shortcomings, and then making amends to those we have harmed. All of those Steps are really a life-long process, but we spend these months making this our focus in the word of God. Our meetings have been great, but we're not going to focus on them in this newsletter, because we have so much other good stuff to share.

Monthly Evangelistic Outreach to Venice Beach

Saturday, July 7, 2007 - Our outreach team was a little smaller this time, just Tom, me, Youbert, Dwayne, Leigh-Anna, and Tom Taylor. We were able to take all 72 lunches without any trouble, though, because we now have three of the little carts to carry them. Praise the Lord! Tom T. and Youbert went down by the beach and the grassy areas, and the very first couple they gave lunches to also asked Tom and Youbert to pray for them. The rest of us went down onto the Boardwalk itself, and for both groups, the lunches were all well-received. Youbert and Leigh-Anna also each brought some clothes, and Youbert had some toiletries to give out, too (one man asked specifically if we had a razor, and we did). Leigh-Anna gave her warm wool jacket to a young woman who was giving astrology readings, and also gave her a lunch. The woman was very grateful, because she said that she got cold at night. She asked what kind of group we were, and Leigh-Anna said, "Christians." The young woman looked over a little ashamedly at her sign advertising astrology readings, and said, "I only do this to make money." Youbert and Tom T. gave out their clothes, and when all the clothes were gone, Youbert even gave the socks he was wearing to a man who said he needed socks. They gave a jacket to a lady named Mary, and Leigh-Anna later talked to her for quite a while, and said that her story was very poignant and heart-breaking - being an alcoholic, a woman, and homeless and in fear all the time. After all the lunches were gone, we had a great time handing out well over three hundred gospel tracts, both in English and Spanish. Unless you've had experience handing out gospel tracts, you just have no idea how great a feeling it is to see so many people accepting the tracts. We realize that only the Holy Spirit moving on their hearts, and the Father drawing them to Jesus, will bring anybody to salvation, but we've been planting the seed, and we just leave the harvest up to the Lord. **"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'"** (Matthew 9:36-38)

Saturday, August 4, 2007 - Today's outreach was another successful one, with 75 lunches going out to the homeless, and probably three hundred or so gospel tracts going out to the people wandering up and down the Venice Boardwalk. Our team consisted of Tom, Dottie, Loren, Ezekiel, Leigh-Anna, Dwayne, Yvonne and her daughter Beatrice. The devil was out in force today also, as the Hare Krishnas had their tents set up for their annual "Festival of the Chariots" - a Hindu celebration of their god Krishna. We saw at least one other Christian group setting up a band down there, near the Hare Krishnas, and it was a group from Venice Foursquare Church, our friends Steve and Regina Weller's church. Praise the Lord! So, we went on our way passing out the good news of Jesus Christ in the midst of all the usual fortune-tellers and spiritual darkness, plus the bright-colored tents and advertisements for the devil's festival (spiritual darkness can come in an alluring package at times, can't it?).

Leigh-Anna had brought some bags of toiletry items: toothpaste, shampoo, soap, and razors. We came up to one group of three men and a woman (and one man was in a wheelchair) who were washing up in the drinking fountains by the restrooms. We asked if they needed a lunch, which they were glad to receive, and then Leigh-Anna asked if they needed some toothpaste

and other items. They were so happy to get those toiletries, as well as the lunches. Dwayne and I were handing out lunches, when one man asked if we would pray for him. His name was Paul, and Dwayne and I put our hands on his shoulders and prayer right there. We gave him a lunch, and also told him about the Bible Tabernacle, if he wanted to go there for a place to live. As we got up to the end of the Boardwalk, we were able to give quite a few tracts to the men at the Phoenix House, a secular recovery program. On our way back down the Boardwalk, one couple asked us for more tracts. They had already gotten one on our way up, and we gave them several more titles. Dwayne said three young girls also came up to him asking for more tracts. They told him they really liked reading them. We gave out many Spanish tracts, and I gave one in Russian, two in Chinese, and one in French. Hallelujah! Finally, a man came up to us and wanted us to give lunches to two young women sitting on the steps of a building. They were so happy to get the food, but we also had one last shampoo, and asked them if they could use that, too. They were thrilled to get the shampoo.

Saturday, September 8, 2007 - We had a great outreach this time, although only a small group showed up to go down to the Boardwalk and hand out the tracts and lunches. Our group consisted of Tom, me, Loren, Petra, Amelia, and John. But, we know from Scripture that God doesn't need a large group to accomplish His purposes (1 Samuel 14:6, "...for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."), and that He will use whoever is there in the "suit up and show up" mode. John took off to reach the people down on the beach and in the alleys, and the rest of us went down the Boardwalk. We gave out lunches to a group of young people, and one young man saw the gospel booklets and said, "Is that a little Bible?" We told him it was not, but that we had Bibles, if he wanted one. He said the booklet would be fine for him, but then a young woman asked for a Bible. We told her we only had the New Testament, and in very small print, but she said she could read it, and was very happy to get it. Later, we saw two young people opening up a tattoo parlor, and we offered them tracts. At first they said no, but then the young woman changed her mind and took one. In fact, we had several people who refused one at first, but then took one after all. Maybe that was the Holy Spirit working on them? One man took a lunch, but when he saw the other people we were giving them to, he came and gave us back the lunch, saying that he didn't need it that bad, and others probably did. We gave out lots of gospel tracts in English, and Amelia and Petra spoke with many people in Spanish, and handed out Spanish tracts. Other than English and Spanish, I gave out one in Chinese. A young man in another tattoo parlor asked for all different titles of the tracts we had, saying that he liked them. I was able to find six or seven different ones to give him, and he fanned them out in his hand and said, "Cool!"

Prison Ministry

Daniel Barker, Pleasant Valley State Prison, Coalinga, CA- "The tracts you sent are great and are working out fine - we use them well. I should say "used" them, because they go out as fast as you send them to me, on the yard, when we go out and evangelize at night and on the weekends. But a brother has asked me to ask you if you have access to the "Crusader" comics from Chick Publications. Of the Crusader comics, we have the first four, and would really like to get the rest of the series. Please know that I appreciate all that you have done for me. May our Lord and our God continue to bless and protect you in great abundance, and may His grace and mercy be upon you always." (From a 2nd letter after he received a large package of comics and tracts) "Hello my friends, and greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Thank you so much for the package of "Crusader Comics"..... they are great. People that would never let us talk to them about the Lord are reading these comics. I will be walking in the gym, and see someone reading one whom I would never have thought would ever be interested, and I just smile and thank the Lord for His love and kindness. It is awesome to see the Spirit work on a group of men. So again, thank you so much for the comics and tracts.... they are being put to good use and the Lord is using them. Yes, the Spanish comics and tracts could be put to good use, too. We have a large population of Spanish-speaking inmates here. I know the brother that runs the Spanish-speaking fellowship, so could give them to him and they could use them as we do on the yard to evangelize. Your brother in Christ, Daniel"

Ronald Blum, Chuckawalla Valley State Prison - "Thank you for sending me the Bible study and the personal letter I received. I enjoyed it very much. I want you to know that while I was reading your letter it took me away from this concrete nightmare I live in, and into your world for a minute, and that was nice. I want you to know I love the Serenity Bible you sent me. I especially love the history of the 12 Steps. You see, back in 2002, I was sent to a prison in Norco, California called California Rehabilitation Center. Up until that time I was somewhat of an agnostic. I had been sent to prison 4 times before that. Every time I made these sincere promises to my mom and myself, how I was going to stay out and stay drug-free, but every time, sooner or later, I relapsed and eventually ended up in prison. In CRC I was made to go to a drug program. There were some counselors who had been heroin addicts, crack addicts, tweakers, junkies, hookers and convicts. I could tell they were who they said they were, because it takes one to know one! But there was something different about these counselors. They had a happiness words can't describe and money can't buy, and they had integrity. You know, when you do the right thing even when no one's looking. After being around them for awhile, I could tell they'd been in prison as many times as me, but they had found an answer that had eluded me - how to stay out and turn your life around! I became curious and envious of these people, so one day I pulled this one girl named Carolyn to the side and I asked her how she did it? And she said, "How did I do what?" I said, "You know, turn your life around and get your integrity back." She said that she had gotten so tired of being locked up and having her kids taken away, and prostituting herself, that she decided to take some advice from some people who had figured it out. And I asked her, "What was that?" She said, "To surrender my will on a daily basis and seek God's will!" So, I pondered what she said, but at that point it didn't have much impact, because I was still agnostic. As time went by, and I got exposed to the other counselors, I saw they had that same happiness that she did, so I singled them all out and asked them the same questions I had asked Carolyn. And you know what? They all pretty much gave me the same answer..... Soon after that, God revealed Himself to me. I realized there was too many of them for it to be a coincidence. I realized God was using these people to show me I'm just like them and if I want what they have, I'm going to have to surrender my will daily and seek His. So, I got a New Testament and read it, and I started going to Step study meetings, but I was still having a problem with this "disease" concept. So I asked this guy Bernie, who was running the Step study meetings, "How can this be a disease? I mean, after all, I just like to get high - how can that be a disease?" So he asked me, "Remember when you wee a kid and you learned to tie your shoes? Do you think you can un-learn that? Well, Ron, I hate to break it to you, but you learned how to like drugs and you are just as powerless to unlearn that as you are the tying of your shoes! Addiction is like a life-long, incurable, progressive disease, but recovery is possible. God will give you the awareness and will power you can't muster on your own, but you need to surrender your will daily and seek His." So, I learned about my disease and I thought I had it all figured out. But, I made the mistake of thinking I had to wait till I was released to do recovery. So, when I got out, I made the mistake of thinking I could do recovery and still have those people in my life. It didn't take me long to relapse and end up back in prison. I found out the hard way that half measures will get you nowhere. God wants all of me and He'll accept nothing less. I realized the reason I kept relapsing and returning to prison was because I made the mistake of paroling the same spiritually bankrupt person I was when I was arrested. They say insanity is repeating the same mistake and expecting different results. So, now instead of wasting my time in here, I'm using it to work on my relationship with God. Jesus said to build your house on the solid foundation, so when the storms come, you won't be washed away. Now I know He is the Rock and my foundation, and the answer to all my problems. I realized that life without Him has no purpose or meaning. I wrote you guys because I'm tired of living an empty life, and I'm tired of breaking my mom's heart and everyone else who cares about me. I know God created me and put me on this earth for a reason. I know that to do God's will I have to quit being selfish with my time, get out and fellowship, and tell my story, in hopes that other people won't have to learn their lessons the hard way, and hurt their loved ones the way I have. I thank God for giving me another chance, and I thank God there are people like Tom and Dottie in the world who care enough to make a difference. May God bless you and keep you. Sincerely, your brother in Christ, Ron."

Eric K. Brown, Solano State Prison - "I have found myself in a position of sharing your ministry with other Christians, and as a result four of us meet twice a week in the form of a support and self-help group, Theodore, Ron, Artarlio and me. All of us now have our own "Serenity" Bibles and we have committed ourselves as men walking in the loving care of Jesus to hold each other accountable. Tom and Dottie, my vision is to, with your permission, start up a Christian-based weekly meeting just as the other prisoners are provided for by NA and AA. What do you think about this vision and idea? Would this be disrespectful or inappropriate towards you or your God-given ministries? Of course, as a minister of the Gospel, I would oversee and our pastor/chaplain would support this as a vital outreach ministry of the church. Please give me your thoughts and approvals or disapprovals. As a brother servant, I would desire nothing less than this be done decently and in order. This would only be accomplished through your blessings and guidance. Brother and Sister Hooper, God has given you a ministry which is so needed in this environment, especially among the Christian community. May God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ continue to bless you both."

Of course, we wrote and gave our approval to Eric, Theodore, Ron and Artarlio to start a LLMR group inside the prison.

Linda Rodrigues, CCWF, Chowchilla - "I sent for your 12-Step study a few months ago. When you sent it, I had begun a college semester which was really hard. I didn't want to begin the 12-Step until I could give it 100%. My summer semester is now over, and I'm not taking on a big load this fall, and I hope you don't mind if I begin now. I have my Serenity Bible, and I am enclosing the lessons you mailed me on March 7th. I love the Serenity Bible! Thank you. I commit to this program now, and I will work the Steps and mail them back as soon as I am finished. Today is the first day of the rest of my life, and I want the last half to be so much better than the first half. Yours gratefully, Linda Rodrigues"

Donna Anderson, CCWF, Chowchilla - "I cannot thank you enough for your ministry. I have been praying to understand co-dependency for years, and somehow came to my own mistaken impression that it's pretty much un-treatable, at least in my case. The definition of it in the Serenity Bible opened the door for me to join with others with addictions and dependencies of all kinds, and opens the door to recovery through the 12-Steps now that I have completely surrendered to God and invited Jesus to be Lord of my life. The Holy Spirit has also taught me, through the "Serenity Bible" you sent, that freedom from attitude sins, such as bitterness, resentment and self-pity will be freedom for me from very deep-seated unconscious sins. The healing is already becoming evident in my daily life. Spiritual rebirth is a whole new wonderful world that I never imagined existed! My first step is enclosed. Thank you again for your beautiful ministry. Your sister in Christ, Donna"

James McPhail, Montana State Prison - "I wanna thank you guys so much! I think it's wonderful there's people like you. I'm in a maximum housing unit, I have a couple of "brothers" back here with me. Is it okay to give your address to those who I think won't waste your time? Thanks again. I gave it to my buddy next door. He really needs it - I hope it's okay. You guys are truly the best! I just received your Serenity Bible you sent. God bless you guys. Thanks a lot! I hope my answers are right - came from the heart."