First Hand Insight to a Kairos Closing

GraceInside’s chaplains are the hosts to all religious events that take place inside the walls.

Without chaplains, religious volunteers could not come in.

Valuable, transformative volunteer programs like Kairos would be unable to do their ordained work. Lives would remain unchanged and untouched – tragic for the inmate, family, community and Kingdom of God.

You can read one testimony from a prison volunteer to his home parish (edited for privacy only) right here!

“Over the past few years, you all have heard M. and R. stand up in front of you asking for your prayers and support for the Kairos Prison Ministry. You all have been incredibly generous in your donations of cookies, cards, hand-drawn pictures and money. On three separate occasions, I have had the opportunity to attend the closing ceremonies of the Kairos Weekends at the Correctional Center. I’d like to share a few of my observations with you.

Background:

Kairos means God’s Special Time. The Kairos weekend offers a short course in Christianity which begins on a Thursday and lasts through Sunday. The weekend is based on several short talks on the Christian life and personal testimony by volunteers. Two cardinal rules for Kairos volunteers: Don’t Judge and Listen, Listen, Love, Love. Throughout the course of the weekend, the prisoners are introduced to the person of Jesus Christ the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of the Kairos volunteers (their brothers). At the closing ceremony, each one of the 42 new Kairos Candidates is allowed to get up in front of the gym and describe his condition before the weekend and impressions at the conclusion of the weekend. Also in attendance are the Kairos Alumni who previously attended a weekend.

The environment in [the prison] is harsh. I heard Kairos volunteers describe the overwhelming sense of hopelessness they feel when they deliver your cookies to each cell. Prison terms run from 15 years to life for many of these men. I met several who had already served more than 30 years. They are treated harshly by the prison staff, they treat each other even more harshly and cannot demonstrate any sign of vulnerability lest they become the focus of physical threats. Most of them are completely abandoned by their families and friends. This means no visits, no mail, no email…just forgotten. Food is described as “nourishment” since it brings none of the pleasure we enjoy in our meals.

Comments about life before prison:

- “I was spiritually dead. “
- “I had no faith foundation since early childhood.”
- “I had no real family, parents, or role models…I spent plenty of time in crack houses. “
- “I hated myself.”
- “I once took a fake gun to a real gun fight, hoping that I would be killed. “
Life in Prison:

- “I never drop my wall…I need to keep my wall up to survive.”
- “I was full of nothing but evil and hate.”
- “I absolutely hated myself after how I lived my life and treated my family.”
- “I had no faith at all.”
- “I would cry myself to sleep every night hoping that I would just die so that I wouldn’t have to commit suicide.”

Comments about the Kairos Weekend:

- “I only agreed to this weekend so I could eat cookies and drink coffee, but I have experienced love for the first time since I was a small child.”
- “I now know that I am made for more than this. I am a child of God”
- “If these volunteers are willing to give up their time to some here and spend time with us and eat our food, I know there is a God who could love me at least as much as they do.”
- “I was very doubtful at first, they I finally dropped my wall and started to talk. It was then I realized that God really could love me”
- “I am incredibly moved that anyone would take the time to write a card or draw a picture for someone they don’t know in prison.”
- “I am incredibly thankful that the Judge sentenced to 13 years in prison. I understand that God was able to work on me here.”
- “I am incredibly grateful to know that God wants to make me His new creation.”
- “I forgive they person who I hold responsible for the death of my sister. I was planning to have him killed, but now I forgive him” (speaking about another prisoner present in the room).
- In the very least, each one of these men expressed a new found hope they never possessed before.

Comment from a Kairos Volunteer:

- “I have never felt closer to God than I have working with these prisoners.”
- “I heard one prisoner with a life sentence claim that he has never felt more free in his entire life than the freedom given to him through his faith in Jesus Christ.”

My Conclusions:

- Most of these men are in prison not because of a single act, but because they continued to walk down a road that was spiritually void.
- These men all clearly know they have sinned and are broken. Christ can heal them once they acknowledge their shortcomings and repent. Too few of us (good Christians outside of prison) are unable to acknowledge our failings. Remember, Jesus came to call the sinners.
- The Holy Spirit does in fact work through us to build His kingdom, we just need to cooperate.
- People experience the love of God through the love that we show to them.
- The message of the Gospel truly does have transformative power.
- We were never meant to make our journey of faith alone. We need to discuss it with our fellow travelers.
- The seemingly small things that we often don’t do make a huge difference to those on the fringe of society: acknowledging them, listening to them, spending time with them, writing to them.
- We can experience the true joy of the Lord in the most harsh, hopeless, miserable environments. God’s light shines in such darkness.
- These transformations over the course of the weekend are nothing short of miraculous. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to perform such healing.