



August 2021 Newsletter Jottings

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Prayer!

chaplains

Heinrich Botes
Rhonda Soland

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our mission

"Onesimus Ministries exists for the purpose of introducing prison inmates, ex-inmates and their families to the life-changing good news of Jesus Christ, as well as spiritually supporting and assisting anyone in becoming faithful in their daily walk as Christ's disciples."

The Chairman's Jottings

Vernon Myers

Onesimus Ministry at CCP in the Pandemic Year-2020

What a year 2020 has been! With the pandemic bringing very significant changes to the manner in which ministry happened at Chester Country Prison, we can look back in reflection; despite the difficult changes to which everyone associated with Onesimus Ministries needed to adapt, God has shown Himself faithful—

- No meetings for worship in the chapel.
- No volunteers from the outside to lead in encouragement and worship in the chapel.
- The chaplains could not invite inmates to the chaplain's office to respond to the spiritual, relational, family issues which concern them. They could only respond with written notes.
- Stress levels were high because no one was sure how best to protect the staff and inmates.
- Life and ministry at CCP was different last year.

Yet, as you will see in Heinrich's article, God used even the disrupted times to continue to speak into the lives of men and women who are open to the life-changing Good News of redemptive grace.

In the story Chaplain Rhonda tells in her article, God had a very wonderful way of "showcasing" the wonderful gift Onesimus received from Prison Fellowship International. I suppose Chaplain Rhonda felt a little embarrassment because she had not alerted anyone that the "gift of 220 Life Recovery Bibles" would arrive at CCP after hours.

As the pandemic restrictions are softening and hope increases ministry may be returning to "normal" in 2021, we look forward to continuing the ministry to which God has called us. God has showed himself faithful in providing needed financial support, even though we canceled the 2020 banquet.

What to do in 2021? Will 2021 permit us to resume with our fall banquet? We are happy to announce, the Lord willing, we will be having our banquet on Friday evening at 6:30, October 29 at Mt. Vernon Christian Church. Mark the date on your calendars. More information will follow.

We will continue to pray that ministry will continue to open at CCP so that the chaplains can resume their personal contacts and that outside volunteers will be permitted back in the prison for Monday Night Fellowship. Pray to that end.

Chaplain Jottings

Heinrich Botes

“I was just about to Lose my Faith and Lose Hope”

Reading Inmate Request Forms with messages such as these below inspire us as chaplains to continue being faithful to perform the seemingly mundane and insignificant tasks that a typical day in prison holds:



“I just want to thank you for your prompt reply and efforts to answer my request for the recovery Bible, and extra literature/materials you provided me with. I was just about to lose my faith and lose hope in having any success acquiring spiritual material to read and feed-on. Can’t express enough gratitude for your service, very much appreciated my friend!!! THANK YOU!”

— Samuel W (31 years old)

“I’ll be leaving soon. It’s been a pleasure to meet you. Doing Bible study helped me increase my faith and rely on God more. Thank you for everything. I will be going up-state (to State Prison for more than 30 years) and will try to stay in touch.”

— Jamane R (33 years old)

“Can you please send me a Bible so I can seek comfort in His Word and guidance from His Book?”

— Luis O (22 years old)

“Thank you for the Recovery Bible....it truly is what I needed.”

— Elijah T (25 years old)

I trust you read “between the lines” and sense that these expressions of need and appreciation speak both to you as reader and to the author of this article. Without your active involvement as partner and investor, there would be no chaplains at Chester County Prison and no one to respond to these kinds of messages.

Please pray for us and thank you for your support to keep us here.

God willing, we will have our Annual Banquet on Friday evening at 6:30, October 29 at Mt. Vernon Christian Church. Mark the date on your calendars.

Prayer Chain

Rick Chiavetta

Pray Without Ceasing

Prior to the pandemic on any given Monday evening at 7pm, you’d find a group of about twelve volunteers from different churches and different backgrounds gathered in the professional visitors waiting room at Chester County Prison. The purpose was simple, follow God’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mt 22.39) and, by conducting a weekly church service for the inmates, remember those in prison (Hebrews 13.3).

After a quick greeting, each service begins with a time of prayer. We ask the men what’s on their hearts - what they really care about - then spend time lifting up each prayer request to our Heavenly Father. But requests don’t stop there, because later that evening, those same requests are sent out via email to prayer chains across several churches, to be shared in prayer meetings and small groups throughout Chester County and beyond.

The pandemic shut down many things, including volunteerism in the prison, but it can’t stop God’s people from praying - a discipline highly encouraged throughout scripture. But what to do during the shutdown when we can’t meet with the men? Well, we applied the idea of recycling, reaching back through piles of old prayer lists (just can’t throw those lists away). In an attempt to keep us all in that spiritual habit of prayer for those in prison, we kept up the weekly emails.

Chaplaincy was deemed an essential service, and our Chaplains continued to show up in the prison week after week, ministering to the many needs of inmates and staff, and doing so without volunteer assistance. Once direct contact with inmates resumes, we will again receive “live” prayer requests via Chaplains Heinrich and Rhonda. We are so thankful for our tireless chaplains, and all of our prayer warriors who lift up the inmates and their heart cries week after week. **Won’t you join us?** To receive the weekly prison prayer request email, just send a note to rick.chiavetta@gmail.com.

Chaplain Jottings

Rhonda
Soland

“Exceedingly, Abundantly More....” Ephesians 3:20

Sometimes God surprises us with how extravagantly and abundantly He meets a need. It stops us in our tracks and leaves us wide-eyed in wonder and amazement. But why should it surprise us, when we serve a God who can do the impossible?

We have been using the Life Recovery Bible as the main Bible at Chester County Prison for the past few years. At times, it has been a bit of a struggle to keep them in stock and there have been times, when we did not have any at all, and we had to generate a “wait list” for the residents who requested them, with a promise to send them a Bible once we received more. The Life Recovery Bible is particularly well-suited for use in the prison environment, as the majority of inmates struggle with substance abuse issues. It uses a very easy to understand translation, and includes notes to help the reader understand how to apply the Word to their lives, so it has been very popular among the men and women. Therefore, the Bibles would fly off our shelves very quickly and we would have to stretch to meet the demand.

A few months ago, Prison Fellowship contacted us with an offer of free Bibles. They were offering up to 220 Bibles for free (in English or Spanish), including free shipping! And the Bible they were offering? The Life Recovery Bible! We marveled at God’s provision, rejoiced, and jumped on the opportunity.

A few weeks later, unexpectedly, I received a call from the officer at the guard-station at the entrance of the prison, informing me that a delivery had arrived for me. I thought there must be some mistake. All the book deliveries for the chaplain’s office come in through the mailroom and are either delivered to our offices or we pick them up from the mailroom. So I was confused. He told me that a large truck was there with a delivery for me, and that it was Bibles. Then I remembered. He said he would send the truck through and I could come out and meet the driver at the second guardhouse.

By the time I got outside to the guard-station, they had the driver out of the truck, questioning him, the back of the truck was open, and officers were in the truck inspecting the pallet of Bibles. I was completely taken aback. I had not considered how heavy 220 Bibles would be or how they would be delivered. I had not informed anyone from security or administration that a shipment would be coming. They had no knowledge of it, were not expecting it, and were very suspicious of a truck

that showed up out of nowhere with a “delivery” that no one knew about. I wanted to kick myself. I apologized to the driver, who looked very nervous.

The officers did not want to allow the truck to pass through the gate into the heart of the prison to get to the loading dock. It was after 3:00, and no trucks were allowed into the prison after 3:00. There were many phone calls to higher authorities, and back and forth conversations, questions, and confusion. I offered to take the Bibles into the prison myself, if the driver would just be allowed to open the pallet right there. I could use a cart and, with multiple trips, carry them into the building. The driver informed me that there were over 800 lbs of Bibles on the pallet. I was deflated, but still determined to do it.

There were more back and forth calls and conversations between the officers and administration, as they determined how to handle the situation. I apologized to the driver again, feeling helpless and foolish. Finally, the approval came through to allow the truck into the prison grounds to unload the pallet at the loading dock.

I thanked the officers and the driver and went back inside, relieved, but still feeling embarrassed to have been the cause of such commotion.

Later, it came to my attention that, when the call had gone through from the officer at the guard-station to the administration regarding the Bibles, it was at the time of the afternoon briefing, when all the Majors, Captains, Directors, and even the Warden are present. They all were made aware and involved in the discussion of the 800 pounds of Bibles arriving in the prison. Suddenly, the Word of God was the topic in their meeting.

It is said, “God moves in mysterious ways.” He blest us with an abundant supply of Life Recovery Bibles, and in doing so, He broke into the consciousness of every high-ranking official in the prison. But why should we be surprised?

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10



41 Years of Sharing God's Love at Chester County Prison

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Monday Night Fellowship

Dan
Turley

(Due to Covid all family visits, church gathers in the chapel have stopped. Thus, outside volunteers have not been permitted to go inside.)

The Old Testament is filled with weak and insecure people God used for his purposes. Moses comes to mind and his calling is recounted in Exodus chapter 3. Standing before the burning bush on Mount Horeb God gave Moses his marching orders but Moses was not eager to follow them. He used every excuse he could think of: I am nobody, who shall I say sent me?, they won't believe me, I am not an eloquent speaker, and finally he gets to what he really wants to say: Send Somebody Else! After all his protestations he finally heard the one word he did not want to hear: GO! Moses was not a coward. He just understood clearly that he was not capable in himself of doing what God clearly had in mind. He could not see himself getting the results God wanted. He was right, but Exodus records that he did exactly what God sent him to do. That message is for those of us in prison ministry too. We're not capable of getting the results God wants either. We have to remind ourselves that God does not call people expecting results. He calls expecting effort. We are not responsible for results. That is God's domain. Our responsibility is simply to GO! He will take care of the rest.