

# On Any Sunday

From Western Regional Editor Darlene Monroe



**A**s I walk through the parking lot designated for “Visitors,” it hardly seems as if I am a visitor. Standing at the entrance I feel God take my hand and lead me into worship. Just like scenes played out all over the world, millions of believers gather at their places of worship, take that same walk to the front door, are greeted by fellow church members, and select a preferred seat. It is one I have taken for granted at every church gathering. For most of us that walk is free of even a passing look by outsiders, but for thousands of believers in the United States, the walk to the front door of their place of worship is an open act of courage noticed by each person they pass: It is noticed by armed officers, fellow inmates, prison staff, and volunteers. Each one is counted and recounted by officers, mental notes made by onlookers at the gates, who protect the front doors of this place of worship. On a hot



Sunday in August I and four other female prison volunteers who go “inside” several times a week, joined about 100 men for one of five Protestant services at Greystone Chapel

inside the high security gates at historic Old Folsom Prison. We were invited guests and were welcomed as such, and I was amazed at the surprising contrasts between that place and my usual Sunday morning experience at church. I join with these believers in walking out that faith openly, but my walk hardly mirrors theirs. We walk through 120-year-old iron gates that slam shut and lock behind us. We enter a tunnel where we sign in and trade our civilian identification for a formal prison ID.



**W**e pass through yet another set of heavy, iron gates that again slam. We are guarded by alarms and personal whistles that sound at the slightest sign of misbehavior from any inmate. We walk within painted lines designated “Staff Only” and inmates scatter as we near. We are protected by armed guards looking on from above. We walk through long cell blocks past hundreds of inmates behind bars who dare not say more than a friendly “Hi.” We skirt the hospital wing, another long cell block, the open shower rooms, uncountable check points, the dining hall made famous by Johnny Cash, and out into the open “yard” where inmates take advantage of their limited time outside. Finally in sight is Greystone Chapel. The chapel appears across the yard where seemingly thousands of men dressed in prison blues and grey gather. The word PRISONER marking their status in this society is emblazoned on every stitch of clothing.

As we approach the front of the chapel, hundreds of inmates spill from its doors as the previous service ends. This is much like what I have seen at the end of services at any of the local mega churches, but here each inmate’s ID is checked as they enter and exit. As we are invited to enter we are greeted by each man with a “Hello Sister” and a welcoming hand shake that replaces the hug I usually receive from fellow believers at my home church. Chaplain Bill, the Pastor for both male and female populations at the prison, greets us and invites us into the church, then quickly retreats to “manage ongoing issues” at the gate. I think about managing the issues on a Sunday morning and am taken back at the thought of a “normal” morning for a pastor at any church outside the gates of prison. The issues in my church usually are along the lines of audio testing and solving computer problems. A smile comes across my face and I silently pray peace and protection over those who enter. An “issue” here can easily escalate to full prison lock-down and hours behind the locked doors and gates of the prison. Computer glitches on a Sunday morning fail to compare.

**U**pon entry into the main church I am struck by several sights: The first is the reproduction of da Vinci’s “Last Supper” papered across the entirety of the wall behind the pulpit. It is torn by the settling movement of granite blocks, but the beauty is overwhelming. The second sight is the guards on a mezzanine overhead watching carefully over everything in the building. The third is of three office signs painted over three distinct doors and each designating it as an “Office of...” the Jewish Chaplain, Catholic Chaplain, and Protestant Chaplain. The lines of denomination are blurred and this is the church.

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The image that comes to mind is that of a tent where a good old church revival is about to begin. From that tent a light beams out so brightly that it cuts into the darkness of the night sky. That tent – that revival – is being held right in the middle of the darkest corner of Hell.

The room fills slowly and finally the service begins. Old songs from my childhood church experience – simple hymns – rings out from the two-piece band and all join in singing from worn hymnals scattered about the room. Interesting how my heart remembers a favorite hymn from my childhood and, like an involuntary heartbeat, I sing out. As the song ends, there is a loud command: “Choir, please come forward!” A choir made up of six men in matching blue pants and shirts belt out four-part harmony as more hymns that fill the air. On the front of each singer’s shirt and pant leg bold white letters scream out “PRISONER” while songs of freedom float from their mouths. A little chuckle gathers in my throat and the reality of that word hits me: I too am a prisoner in my own right when I choose the ways of this world and ignore stepping into God’s story each day. The irony of the pastor’s message about our walk matching our talk brings conviction. I walked into the prison in freedom. At the end of the day and service, I will go home and back into a “free” country. As the service ends our group is greeted again by several men. One man, Anthony, introduces himself and announced that he was blessed by our presence on his last Sunday at Folsom State Prison. Many of us quickly assume he is to be paroled or released to a transitional living program. He tells us that after serving 10 years of a Life sentence, he has been exonerated due to advancement in DNA testing that confirmed his innocence. still hear his chuckle at the end of telling that story.

What makes this worship, this church, and this place any different than what I usually see? Three things come to mind: The first and most striking is the example of humility. These men of God know exactly how broken they are and do not hide it. There is no reason to deny it; they have been tried and convicted by a jury of human peers. This example is not always present in my experience of the modern Church. Every day these children of God choose to stand up and walk out their baptism in a place where evil plays actively and visibly. They visibly show their belief in the truth that, “For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). They are living proof that the word “Us” means all of us and with no limitations on the word “sin.” Those men, these saints, know that even as society continues to condemn them to a human life in a worldly prison, they are free through the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. And they show it.



**A**nother highlight that comes to mind is the walk through the prison halls into the chapel. It is the walk that takes prisoners through the hell of daily life in a state-run prison where they do hard time for the sins of their past. It is a walk through endless cell blocks, a yard filled with hate, gangs, rules, and a harsh inmate justice system that condemns even to death for stepping a toe out of line. As I think about my regular walk to church through a parking lot in a quiet, upper-middle class neighborhood, I remember no fear, greetings (or taunts), and no one watching to see my next move. I walk through glass doors instead of chain link, barbed wire fences. I don’t have to check in. No one makes note of my coming and going, and I don’t have to worry about any issues at the door as I leave. I arrive in peace.

Finally, I am struck by sameness. When we came together in worship as believers in Christ, the signs of “Prisoner,” “Volunteer,” and “Visitor”– the signs of difference– disappeared because we were but one body gathered in Christ’s name. In that meeting of saints we were the church gathered to worship Him.

And so I reflect back on the question so many of the prisoner asked us, “What on earth would bring these five women to this place?” I find the answer in this chapel. It is the same thing that brings us all into the body of Christ. It is God’s story as it is played out inside the lives of these men and my choosing to join in His Story where He would have me.

Photos: [www.ancientfuturefaithnetwork](http://www.ancientfuturefaithnetwork)

## CR INSIDE EASTERN CANADA REP SAYS Hello

by Kathy Deane, Eastern Canada CR Inside Representative

Living my life scripture one day at a time with Jesus has been and still is an incredible journey..... **Hebrews 13:3 "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoner and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."**

I have been in and out of prison since 1989, visiting two younger brothers and my youngest son. I have personally seen results of volunteers in my families' lives and now since January 2009 I have had the privilege of being one of a team taking C.R. inside Grand Valley Federal Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ontario. In September 2011, I had the joy of taking the journey further and became the Eastern Canadian Rep. Not feeling worthy and worried that I had big shoes to fill I am reminded daily that I am not alone and again one day at a time with Jesus I am in awe of what God is preparing us to do and pray His continual support as we move from one stepping stone to the next.....

### **Breaking the chains of incarceration, one transformed life at a time.**

As mentioned before we the team have been in GVI since Jan 2009 and many women have gone through step studies and are now co-facilitating. We started a team in Vanier Center for women provincial jail in October 2011 and offering the program Life's Healing Choices to the bail, remand, trial and short term unit. We have now been asked to go into the sentence unit to provide Step Study. We will be starting this on June 7<sup>th</sup> of this year. ANSWERED PRAYER Thank you Jesus

Life's Healing Choices is in Hamilton Wentworth Detention Center, Hamilton Ontario on the men's side and in Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre in the City of London, Ontario on the men's side. Six weeks ago a Team of women started to take it to the women's side of the same Detention Centre. Nova Institution Federal prison for women in Truro, Nova Scotia has been running Life's Healing Choices for a couple of years. As we write these words there is a team meeting with the Chaplain at Ottawa Correctional Detention Centre to take Life's Healing Choices inside and we rec'd a call from the volunteer coordinator at Maplehurst Detention Centre Milton, Ontario "We want Celebrate Recovery" And we have 4 men ready to go in.

As a result of our Church (Yes, church, Brantford, Ontario) having a CR Sunday just this past month I rec'd a request from a lawyer that was there and has shared the program with a client in the Brantford Jail and she has asked me to contact the Chaplain and counselor and use her name to send literature or a person into her client. We have heard from this Chaplain and we are getting ready to take Life's Healing Choices to the Brantford, Ontario jail in July and August.

So those are the stats as to where Eastern Canada is now and we would like to share some wonderful information about the teams that go into these facilities. The Grand Valley Team is amazing and their love and support of the women inside is tremendous. They have trained to be escorts and escort the women out on short and long term E.T.A.'s. The last couple of One Day's in Guelph, Ontario we have had what Hector calls "satisfied customers" come from inside the Federal Prison a half hour away and spend the day with us.

One of our newest volunteers **started June 2012 at the age of 80.** She worried about what she had to offer and to see her today and the love and support and fun she brings to that community is truly miraculous. As well we have a new volunteer from A.A. inside, the girls shared about the program she asked to join us and she will be starting a step study in June with the women and will be able to become a future leader at Celebrate Recovery. As for our Team in **Vanier it is small but mighty.** In 2011 when we started I had a gal call me from New Life Prison Ministry and asked me what Celebrate Recovery was. I told her to come on Friday morning and have a look, and she has not left. She just celebrated her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and she has volunteered for 8 years and has fallen in love with Life's Healing Choices. Talk about the Hand of God –

Last June, Deb Jones our Eastern Canada Director and I traveled to the Maritime's for 2 net workings. While there we met a gentleman who has done prison ministry for years in Newfoundland. He purchased Life's Healing Choices to take back and start with the men. At the very same networking Deb and I were introduced to Brent Bishop author and board member for Bridges of Canada as well as Monty Lewis, the founder of Bridges of Canada, previously Cons for Christ and a member of COPE. They had just got back from Ontario evangelizing and promoting Monty's second book on our Christian television station. On their journey home they were praying for the men and women that gave their heart and lives to Christ while they were evangelizing. Their prayer was who will go in and disciple



these men and women. That is where CRI could come into the picture.

**Our Goal is to have CR in every correctional institution in Canada and a healthy CR group in each of their communities. - through your prayers, God hears and God knows our hearts and let's live these scriptures together one day at a time with Jesus**

*(Pictured at left, "Joey" from the Federal Detention Center poses with CR founder John Baker at One Day in Guelph, Ontario, Canada)*



## FIRST EAST COAST SUMMIT OPENS NEW DOORS



By BOBBY PEPPER, Southeast Regional Editor

Jenna Shetter came to the Celebrate Recovery East Coast Summit (ECS) seeking guidance and information on how to launch CR Inside at Pinellas County Jail in Clearwater, Fla. She wasn't disappointed. After returning home with what she learned at Summit, Shetter saw many opportunities open up as she began taking the steps toward going "inside."

"It was a great experience witnessing the power of God (at Summit). I love to watch him show off," said Shetter, who attended Summit with her CR group from First Baptist Church of Indian Rocks in Largo, Fla. "I gained so much knowledge and he placed people in my path to help me accomplish my calling to take CRI into the jail on 49th Street in Pinellas County. I now have four CRs in the area behind me with at least one volunteer from each."

Shetter was among 2,000-plus participants who attended the first ECS on July 10-12 in Spartanburg, S.C. For the attendees interested in CR Inside, there were six sessions where they could meet and learn from National Director Hector Lozano, state representatives and others already inside or considering it.

"Two CR summits opens the door for more CR Inside groups by providing a means to help more CR groups get introduced and established at more facilities throughout the U.S.," Lozano said. "My impression of the first ECS is that there is not only a great deal of interest, but a great deal of activity inside jail/prison facilities. Many of the questions related to how to improve on the CR curriculum delivery as much as how to start a CR 'inside'."

The first day of Summit at Restoration Church featured Inside connection gatherings for anyone interested in one of three areas: jails, prisons and re-entry programs. Lozano was excited to see the large turnout for the connection events.

"State reps did an awesome job at facilitating connections," he said. "I am so proud of our Eastern state reps who demonstrated their unique qualities and character for service. Of course, the feedback from the connection participants told the whole story."



Day two featured separate presentations on how to start CRI and how to help inmates make the re-entry transition to the local CR community. The final day included an open forum involving CRI state reps. Lozano and the state reps also answered questions during Summit at an information Table under the dining tent outside the church.

"(The forum) provided a great opportunity for even more specific questions and answers from participants themselves on how best to introduce an effective step study inside," Lozano said.

Nancy Dowd, the New York CRI state rep, spoke at the forum about her early experiences in CRI and offered encouragement to anyone considering the same route. "Following your heart is the first thing," she said. "You have to know the Lord has put it in your heart and He will bring it to pass. You have to have the heart to remain faithful, and I always say you need prayer, patience and persistence to keep CRI going."



The Rev. Todd Love, a United Methodist Church district supervisor from Kentucky and first-time Summit participant, said he'd like to start an Inmate recovery program in his region. "It's clicking with me. This is the way to go," said Love, who oversees churches in the 10-county Columbia District of the Kentucky Annual Conference. "I want to get some wheels rolling and find the leaders. I'm not thinking I can be that leader, but I see the need. I know I've got people in some of our churches who visit prisoners every week or month.

"We have one church in our district that is doing CR and doing it quite well," Love added. "I knew about CR before going into that district, and everything about it was positive. But I didn't know anything in depth about it."

Summit, Lozano said, allows people like Shetter and Love to learn how to start a CRI program and organize their volunteers. He says more inmates will come to know Jesus as their Higher Power and begin their recovery with the aid of those who attended the first ECS. "Just when I think God has blessed us beyond our expectations like He did last year, He does it again at Spartanburg," Lozano said.