



The Insider

A quarterly publication from The Saints Prison Ministry

Fall 2019

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A Warden, a Woman, and a Wake-up Call

by Ashley Couey, missionary-athlete and co-coach, Southeast Lady Saints

I want to share about our visit to Whitworth Women's Facility this summer, and I have probably made this statement a few times over my seven years with the ministry, but this was, BY FAR, the most amazing prison visit of my life!

Being very transparent, I have been struggling personally with a few pretty big things this year. Normally I just push through times like this, but these challenges have left me feeling overwhelmed. So, to set the stage, that was the mindset at the beginning of the day. In addition, we normally have one of the Saints' staff members or a pastor accompany us on each trip but due to an unusual set of circumstances, that did not happen on this trip.

On the way into the facility, my teammate, co-coach, and best friend Stacy and I saw the warden, an old friend from another GA women's prison. It was good to catch up with her and share thoughts on the difference between the two facilities.

As we were talking to the warden, a woman being released that day came out with a bag and a smile on her face. Beaming, she looked at the warden and said, "I want to thank you so much for everything, particularly that you encouraged me to get my education. I never would have done that without you." But it wasn't enough that the warden had shown some interest...the fact is that the warden was the **ONLY** person to show some interest!

Her mom won't take her back in - even temporarily - so the car waiting at the curb was to take her to a homeless shelter. These are the stories the public **NEVER** hears. The bad and the ugly get the headlines, but a simple act of genuine concern goes unnoticed...except to that woman.

Suffice it to say...my world may now be forever different as I look at it through this new lens. This ex-offender had real joy about her future, even though she walked out that door with nothing to her name and no one waiting for her to return.

Some moments just are life changing and this was one of them. I realize how much I complain when circumstances do not go my way. But #1...I know Jesus! I also have people who love me; I am clean, fed, have a place to call home; I have a great job and a litany of other things that are true blessings. She left with none of that! She was thrilled simply to be clean right then - and it was already hot, so that was temporary - yet her primary emotion was to be **GRATEFUL**. I cannot even tell you what it meant to encounter this woman and I think I have needed that for a while. Maybe you can relate...you catch yourself missing the blessings in your life because the focus is on what you don't have or experience, instead of what you do have.

Please notice - our visit was just beginning! We played a great game of softball, and even though we won by a landslide the inmates were all smiles all morning. Then my friends, Jess and Ashley, shared the love of Jesus through their testimony and a Gospel message.

We also had the opportunity to personally spend time and pray for inmates one on one. Y'all, I had no idea but one of the inmates asked me to pray for her, so I prayed to Jesus for her and she **THANKED** me - then told me she was a professing Muslim. It was like being in a different universe...seriously!

Our team then had the rare privilege of eating lunch in their chow hall with the inmates' softball team! I sat with my other best friend Julie and two inmates named Joanna and Jessica who had a kid the same age as one of mine (just another coincidence, I'm sure!). We had a great conversation about their lives and their hopes and their future **AND JESUS!**

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The Inside Story

He Just Gave Me a Book...

by Cory Blankenship, Recreation Supervisor at Mansfield CI, Ohio

The Saints softball team visited this facility in August of this year, but this was not the first time I have worked with The Saints. I was at Marion Correctional Institution when The Saints came in for a visit back in 2012. At that point in my life I believed that there was a God but really didn't know much about Jesus and thought I was a good person and going to get into heaven.

I was escorting the team out of the prison at the end of that day and one of the team members handed me one of the "special books" they gave out, which was a Sports New Testament, and said "this is for you." I had no idea what it was. When you guys travel into prisons, sharing with staff is so important. What I remember is he did it so non-aggressive and nonchalantly. The seed was planted.

I ended up going to a local church through my boy being invited to VBS in 2012. I accepted Christ into my life after about two years of going to church in 2014.

While at work, I kept that book that The Saints gave me but never even opened it. I moved offices and as I was going through my stuff, I grabbed that book to look at it. At first, I thought it was a book about athletes. To my sur-

prise, it was the New Testament. That was actually my first Bible that I have ever had in my entire life and was given to me by The Saints! I still have it to this day and it sits close to me on my desk while at work.

I feel that it was given to me so I could be equipped at work. What are the chances of an outside team handing me a Bible, me ending up in church and then accepting Christ into my life....but that's not all.

I thought it was crazy that your teams travel around, taking personal time and using donated money to come into prisons and share the Gospel with guys. It weighed heavy on my conscious that they are willing to travel out of state to share the gospel. Your ministry team motivated me to venture into a prison - as a volunteer - and share the Gospel. I recently joined a Christian Prison ministry group called H.I.M. - Hogs in Ministry, a motorcycle ministry out of Michigan. I just went in on 9-6-2019 to another prison and boy did it feel spiritually awesome!

Thank you, guys, for having the courage to listen to God and let him lead you, especially into prison. A majority of inmates will never step foot in a church, so that may be the only time they hear the Gospel shared. Thank you for the sacrifice that the guys, and those who send them, have made and continue to make.

South Carolina 2019

At the time of our first crusade to South Carolina in 2000, we played more than 20 softball games in one week, at 11 different facilities. The state couldn't do enough for us - to the extent of housing the team in the DOC training academy and providing state vehicles to transport the team each day!

However, like everywhere else we travel, budgets, staffing, and ideology change over time and, more than any other state we visit, South Carolina has changed dramatically in the ensuing years. In September, The Saints team from Virginia conducted a 3-day weekend crusade to five SC prisons - and would have been hard pressed to extend the trip to a fourth day because only seven prisons were even available to host our team! Some prisons no longer have softball fields, some don't have a Recreation Leader, and a couple that do have both are not inclined to invite outside teams in at this time!

As if that wasn't enough, two days before we were to travel one of the five that did schedule the team found it necessary to cancel the visit! Fortunately, one of the prisons gra-

ciously filled that slot on short notice...but the cancellation reflects the fragile status of recreation in SC these days.

Rather than be dissuaded, our team rose to the occasion and prepared for the trip as they have many times before. The crowds were smaller than usual, but that just meant more quality time individually. The teams weren't as good as usual, but that simply offered more opportunities to relax and joke around with the inmates. There was one constant - the Gospel is the same as it has always been and the Holy Spirit moved in those five prisons to bring 34 men to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ!

Please continue to pray for our DOC friends in South Carolina. The state recently appointed a new man to fill the vacant Chief of Recreation job and it is our hope that things may turn around in the future. And if not...we'll still be back as long as they will have us!



FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Correspondence from behind the walls

Wanted to send this letter out to you all, thanking you for the consistency in communicating with me on my birthday since 2009. I'm grateful for your faithfulness to Christ, and for your loyalty in doing His will. I can only continue to pray that God blesses you all on a daily basis and beyond human comprehension. Mostly I've learned to appreciate guys like you who do not have to do all that you've done, and do, to make my life better, as well as others. So I want to say thank you all for being my friend (Proverbs 17:17). I appreciate you all, if no one else does, and know that I love you all too. I remain a faithful, humble servant of Christ. God bless you! "More Lite!"

- Cameron L., London CI, OH

I pray all is well for each of you and to whomever God gave the thought of sending me a birthday card...God bless you! Just the thought of someone thinking of us at times like these is amazing. It lets us know that God is real and encourages us not to give up. I'm now in my 23rd year in prison and I finally come up for parole in two years - May 2021. I know this is all in God's hands and in His timing, but please keep me in your prayers because the prayers of the righteous avails much!

- John I., Wilcox SP, GA

I hope and pray this letter finds all of you in great health and spirits. My name is Daniel and I am writing to thank y'all for your genuine love and service. I wasn't saved when we played softball together a few years ago...or I should say I was saved but not being deliberate in walking with the Lord. My address has changed a few times since then but your message hit home, and somehow, some way, your cards and letters have always found me – and always at the perfect time! So from deep in my heart, thank you to all the beautiful Saints members who have never forgotten me! My walk with Jesus is strong and beautiful today, and it is because of your love, prayers, and Christ-like example that encouraged me to push my standards of living in Him to a higher level.

- Daniel A., Smith SP, GA

I just want to say "Thank You" for the birthday cards I get from y'all every year. The card is special but I really liked the Bible verse! It's always nice to just get mail, but to get mail from someone I don't even know means you believe I deserve a birthday card. Thank you for caring about me – it's lonely in here and getting mail makes it so much better. I've got 10 more years so it's nice to know I have some people thinking of me and showing me God's love no matter what.

- Julie M., Camille Graham CI, SC

I'm taking this time out to thank you and God for all my friends on my Birthday for more than 20 years. You never forgot me by making my birthday card reach me on time and I'm so grateful for this so thank you on my behalf, and for all the other inmates who your ministry makes sure they are not forgotten. Therefore may the Lord keep blessing y'all for making sure we are loved by Him and not forgotten. No matter what we go through in life this is the best gift ever. Take care and may y'all and your families be blessed forever.

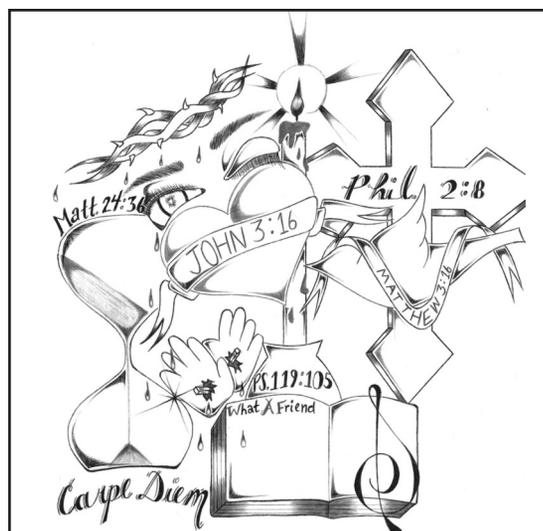
- Jorge R., Five Points CF, NY

I thank God for this ministry. The Saints Prison Ministry changed me to be a better man within and uplifted me when nobody else didn't [sic] by sending birthday cards through-out my prison bid. I have been down for over 13 years and it took most of those years for me to find my purpose and calling from God. I hope I get to see your team again before I get out in a couple years.

- Leonard C., New River CI, FL

Thank you for the birthday card and your kind words of love and appreciation. It's nice to be thought of on my birthday! My family and I had a sudden surprise come our way – on February 23, 2019, my Dad, Fred Rocha, went home to be with the Lord. As much as we will greatly miss him, we all rejoice that he made it home to be with Jesus!! That is great news to us as we know we will see him again. God has been leading us through our times of mourning, and ever present help He has been. Thank you all for your love, prayers and support. I love you all Saints!! We have it made with Jesus.

- Robert R., Gus Harrison CF, MI



by Dudley P., Florida

But I'm Too Bad...

by Tim Travis, Softball Missionary-Athlete from GA

I met Deatrick, an inmate at Madison Correctional Institution, Camp A (OH) on our crusade in August. This guy must have been the shot caller in this prison, because every man that came on the yard checked in with him. If an inmate sat on the bleachers unapproved, Deatrick told him to "get off my bench," and they would. No questions, no argument.

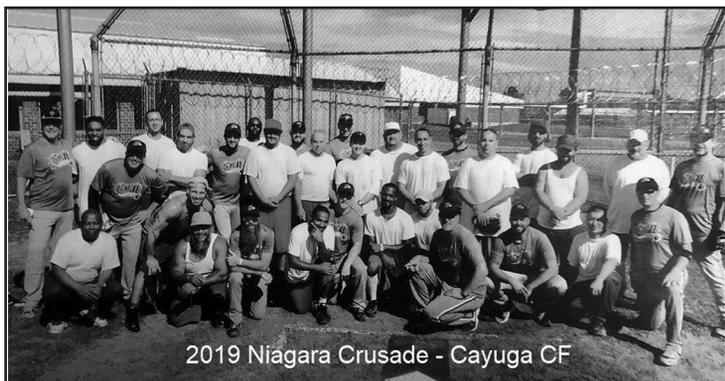
After I gave my testimony and Jimmy shared the Gospel, I was walking around talking to the men and collecting response cards. When I got his card, I noticed he had "Tennessee" next to his name, but more importantly had checked the first option on the card to indicate salvation.

I asked Deatrick what part of Tennessee he was from. He said he was from Memphis and spent a couple years in the juvenile detention centers. After chatting a little bit, I got serious, looked at Deatrick, and said "did you really make this decision today?" Believe me I was not ready for the response.

He nodded his head and with tears in his eyes said that he had murdered five people and he couldn't believe Jesus loved him. He was broken to the core and the Gospel demolished his strongholds. I told him that God absolutely loves him and that the blood of Christ had washed him clean. That it didn't matter what he had done because the God who created him loved him so much the He sent His Son for him.

He was in awe that Christ still loved him even after everything he had done. He gave me the biggest hug I've ever had from an inmate! Deatrick got saved in that prison yard that day!

Even the hardest of the hard can be captured by the truth of Jesus Christ. There is no one too far gone that can't be reached. After a bit of prayer and encouragement Deatrick went off that field justified, forgiven, and a brother in Christ.



2019 Niagara Crusade - Cayuga CF

"...And I'm Even Worse"

by H.C., a federal inmate, current location withheld

Thank you very much for the Birthday card. It was almost two or three years ago when you guys pulverized us on the softball field here. Your card could not have come at a better time in my life.

I am currently in the SHU, not for disciplinary or anything such as that, I am in what I like to call mental cleansing. I checked in on Wednesday August 14th. See I have come to a point in my life that I realized I need to change my whole process. I have been a white supremacist for the last 13 years. I just really feel in my heart that's not the right way for me to believe.

For the last year, I have noticed that these people "black, Mexican, Jews" that have been my sworn enemies have been the nicest and most helpful people to me. I have just ran that through my mind over and over. I really am tired of being the way I have been and would like to confess to you and God that I wanna change myself and become what God wants me to be. It's gonna be a long, hard road. The other gang members ain't gonna like it very much. But I really don't care. But I would ask that you put me in your prayers. And I welcome any inspiration that I can get. As well as any spiritual guidance.

I have and do read GOD's Word but I have been brain washed pretty good. I have just turned 45, I wanna do the rest of my years for GOD.

A Warden, a Woman, and a Wake-up Call

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Turns out that Jessica has a smart mouth (good thing my teammates aren't commenting here!) and so her and I talked smack the entire afternoon game. She kept yelling "easy out!" when I would come up to bat, and I in turn thoroughly enjoyed telling her that I was so sorry I couldn't deliver that easy out as I crossed the plate about five times that game. We won that game too...but the score didn't matter.

The whole day was amazing. We shared the hope of Jesus, our own stories, and discussed how life does not have to be a repeat cycle. We played a lot of softball, talked a lot of trash (in good fun of course), and built some relationships that will not soon be forgotten.

"Your words, your time commitments, your finances, your emotional highs and lows, your relationships, and your spiritual habits together form a portrait of what is really valuable to you."

- Paul Jeon

Inside the Mind of Gibby

A Wife's Thoughts

by Tom Gibson, IL Saints Softball Coach and his wife, Kelly

Here at "Inside the Mind of Gibby," we enjoy opening fan mail. There are often some nice notes encouraging us to keep telling the stories of sharing the Gospel in prison, as well as some less than nice notes from prison food service workers letting me know that they do not appreciate my criticism of prison food. But, one of the biggest requests we get, is to introduce my wife Kelly and hear her thoughts on the ministry.

Hello, Saints friends! I'm Kelly, chief editor and comedy guinea pig for "Inside the Mind of Gibby." Even though I miss commas and can't always tame the run-on sentences in his articles, Tom has asked me to contribute my thoughts on being the spouse of a Saints missionary athlete. While I've certainly not been a part of The Saints ministry as long as other spouses have, I would like to share some things that I've learned, things that have surprised me, and things that I would be ok NOT knowing about being married to a Saint...maybe.

While I'm not the one who is sharing the Good News in the yard, stretching a single into a double, or trusting my life to a questionable source of transportation, I have acquired some unique skills on The Saints home front. Does this stack of Spanish Gospels of John have 20 or only 19? I can tell by looking from across the room. Are the holes in the knees of Tom's baseball pants fixable? Don't look closely at my stitching, but you bet they are! Where are the batting gloves located at the local sporting goods store? I can even find them in Hawaii during football season.

In addition to skills, Saints spouses are almost guaranteed weekly and sometimes daily surprises. If you're one who enjoys online shopping and who glows with the sight of packages delivered to your door, you will love being the spouse of a coach! Don't be discouraged if the large UPS and FedEx boxes on your doorstep are filled with support envelopes and baseball pants, though. You may also be surprised to learn (from a husband who slides a lot) that you have all the tools to be a pedologist. My laundry room has soil samples from Georgia clay to Indiana topsoil. If you would like tips on removing said Georgia clay from light-colored baseball pants, contact Susan Zeidler for her secret weapon!

If it seems I'm making being a Saint spouse too good to be true, I'll include some insider information to balance my thoughts:

- If you have a husband who is happy to eat anything you cook, encourage him to not attend a crusade with Hugh Dwyer. Nothing you make will ever compare to the "fantastic eats" Hugh will find for the crusade teams.

- I'm pretty sure overnight hotel stays on Saints crusades are pretty much the equivalent to a bunch of 5th graders having a sleepover.

- If your spouse is a Saints coach, just resign yourself to the reality that you won't have a meaningful conversation the day before a visit as his or her phone will be blowing up with texts and emails.

Washing baseball uniforms is a pain (whoever is talking Tom into sliding so much needs to knock it off!) The bus is frightening. The stories are entertaining. There is nothing quite as fun, however, as saying "My husband is going to prison this weekend!"

Striving to Give God Our Best

Every year we include an article in our newsletter and online to let our supporters know we have earned renewal as members of ECFA – the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. This watchdog organization regularly monitors the stewardship practices of thousands of Christian organizations, including many of the largest in the world. Renewal is earned by meeting the ECFA Seven Standards (<https://www.ecfa.org/Standards.aspx>) and the review is quite thorough.

We not only boast continuous membership in the organization since 1997, but throughout the year we also take advantage of many resources they offer to make the Saints Prison Ministry stronger and more effective. To that end,

several our Board members recently attended an ECFA Forum on Board Governance, on their own time and in various locations, to ensure that we are doing all that we can to give God our very best efforts. Even though they are entirely volunteer, those charged with overseeing the organization do not take the responsibility lightly.

Shown here is Rev. Jim Korth attending the event in Charlotte, NC. Rev. Korth was instrumental in the formation of the ministry in 1987, has filled a few roles in the ensuing years, and recently joined the Board again after a few years serving the Lord in other capacities.





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*“But I’m Too Bad...”
See page 4 for details*

Crusade Updates

<u>Date</u>	<u>Sport</u>	<u>Location/Results</u>
January 19-20	NJ Soccer	11 decisions/220 Gospels
March 5-10	FFBC Softball	54 decisions/1,532 Gospels
March 7-10	*Open Basketball	73 decisions/330 Gospels
June 20-23	RCCC Softball	25 decisions/280 Gospels
July 10-14	Open Softball	23 decisions/670 Gospels
August 8-11	CCMC Softball	13 decisions/179 Gospels
August 13-18	Open Softball	82 decisions/1020 Gospels
August 14-17	CAC Softball	129 decisions/1050 Gospels
Sept. 27-29	VA Saints Softball	34 decisions/230 Gospels

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