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## Virtual Evangelism?

by Frank Zeidler, Jr, Executive Director



I am originally from the Philadelphia area and I still follow the hometown sports teams. One of the unique things about Philly sports is that the four major sports teams play in stadiums within sight of each other. In March, I came across an article announcing a new

venue planned for the Philadelphia Sports Complex - the \$50M Fusion Arena. The article detailed 10,000 square feet of training facilities, two balcony bars, club seats outfitted with USB ports, executive suites...all the amenities in many new stadiums, plus a "futuristic design." The home team will be the Philadelphia Fusion and they play...video games!

*Editor's note: Before all the gamers in The Saints family form a picket line outside our offices, please realize that was not intended to be disparaging. I recognize that much of 21st century culture has passed me by - so please read the rest of the article before hunting me down.*

Apparently, playing video games became a career path for some and the popularity has grown to monster proportions. The term for this is ESports, and the highest level of ESports - the Overwatch League - has teams all around the world. "This project places ESports alongside all the major traditional sports that call South Philadelphia home," said Joe Marsh, Chief Business Officer of Spectator Gaming and the Philadelphia Fusion.

I don't know if I agree that 3,500 spectators places ESports at that level, since the minor traditional sports in Philly such as Wings lacrosse and Soul arena football each draw more than 10,000 fans to a game. Nevertheless, the notion that playing video games is just something friends do on a rainy day to pass the

time is clearly obsolete. Now we get to why this is front page news.

Over my 20 years of traveling with The Saints teams, I have seen a downward trend in the size of the crowds watching our games. We do still see large numbers of men and women but, in painting with a broad brush, the average attendance was probably 30-40% greater when I started than it is today.

This is particularly true on crusades where The Saints Prison Ministry visit is a once-a-year special event. There was a time when our out-of-town team would draw averages of 150-200 inmates as we traveled to prisons in a new state. Today those spectator averages are closer to 75-125 (see page 4 for more on recent crusades). Less quantifiable but no less accurate has been the significant drop in attendance at morning events - we have almost reached a point where prisons don't schedule recreation time for the mornings because the level of participation does not justify the cost of staffing!

I was having a conversation about this trend with a Recreation Officer in Illinois, and his explanation was surprisingly simple - "the younger guys don't want to go outside nearly as much as the older cons used to; they want to stay inside and watch TV or play video games." It gave me pause and as I reflected on it, the thought occurred to me that we routinely see the evidence of his observation.

Even though the prison populations are overcrowded with 20-somethings, the teams we play against are often made up of much older men and women. Softball certainly skews much older since it is a boring game to many younger athletes, but even in soccer and basketball, we see men in their 30s and 40s taking the court or running up and down the field. Moreover, a number of prisons have chosen the softball field as a place to construct a new building because usage is declining.

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## The Inside Story

### A Chaplain's Perspective

by Chaplain Sterling Averett, Dodge State Prison, Chester, GA

I've been serving at Dodge State Prison for 28 years, eight as a volunteer and twenty as Chaplain. I've seen many wonderful ministries come through our gates, but one of the most solidly consistent groups is The Saints Prison Ministry softball team. The Saints have been making their annual trek to Dodge for the last seven years, and the men here always look forward to their arrival.

The Saints are like Chick-Fil-A - they do one thing, and they do that one thing really well. They bring the heat, then they bring the light. They attract the men with a highly competitive softball game. Then they present the gospel, using personal testimony and a short, strong biblical message to shine the light of Jesus from baseline to bleachers.

I am a pastor/teacher by calling, so I really appreciate the evangelistic thrust of The Saints. A lot of guys who won't come to a church service will gladly come out for a

good softball game, and some of them will even slip up and get saved if they're not careful!

Respect is a big thing for men in general, but especially in the chain gang. And by playing a tough, competitive game of softball, The Saints win the men's respect and earn the right to be heard by those who might normally turn a deaf ear to a gospel presentation.

Then it's up to the Holy Spirit, and He always moves in the hearts of the men as The Saints move among the crowd - passing out literature, praying, encouraging, and drawing in the net so that none are lost. Plus, not to be forgotten is the simple follow-up of a handwritten birthday card sent each year to any inmate who asks. The kindness of such a simple, yet profound, act is not lost on men who appreciate cards and letters more than you'd imagine.

Put simply, The Saints do good, and they do it well. If you can help them out with prayers, encouragement or even a little piece of change, be assured that anything you can sow is going into good ground, helping The Saints as they're "bringing in the sheaves."

### Virtual Evangelism?

*continued from page 1*

That is why the Fusion Arena caught my attention. Our ministry's experience is mirroring today's sporting culture - a younger generation with different interests, different priorities, and different attitudes are making themselves known. On the business side of professional sports, some visionaries have noticed and embraced this shift in order to be on the cutting edge of what comes next. I believe that as a ministry we have a God-given responsibility to do the same.

I am not suggesting we form a Saints Prison Ministry Fortnite Team this week. However, I am suggesting that we should be prayerfully considering what comes next and how we are going to reach a lost and dying generation of prisoners who may not embrace what has made us so popular and successful for the past 30-plus years. It is not out of the question that The Saints Prison Ministry - God's ministry through us - will look very different when I come to our 50th Anniversary Celebration.

I just pray that during the celebration party I understand what they are talking about!

### Amazon Smile

The Saints Prison Ministry just deposited another quarterly check from Amazon! This donation was for \$60, representing just a handful of supporters taking the extra minute to type smile.amazon.com before signing into their account. Imagine the potential impact when ALL our Saints family gets involved!

Amazon has us listed as Saints Prison Ministries Inc. and you must only find it once to link it to your account. Take the extra step and the only thing about the shopping experience that changes is we get some of Amazon's money!



# FROM THE INSIDE OUT

*Correspondence from behind the walls*

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, Georgia

This is a heartfelt thanks to all those people who have been riding this train with me; the people who send the card on my birthday, the men who come to play ball and visit with us, and those who pray for me. The greatest gift ever is Jesus Christ but your kindness is also a special blessing!

Thomas T., Marion CI, Florida

To special friends, you guys are the ones who always know what to do and suggest. How lucky I am to call you guys my friends. Each time I wish upon a star...wish that I could be where you guys are. I miss you guys, and I thank you for the wonderful birthday card. I turned 75 years old on May 20th. I have a court hearing pending to be released from prison. Please pray for my release from prison. God bless you guys for the extraordinary work you are doing for the inmates in prison.

Robert T., Orleans CF"

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, South Carolina

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, New York

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.

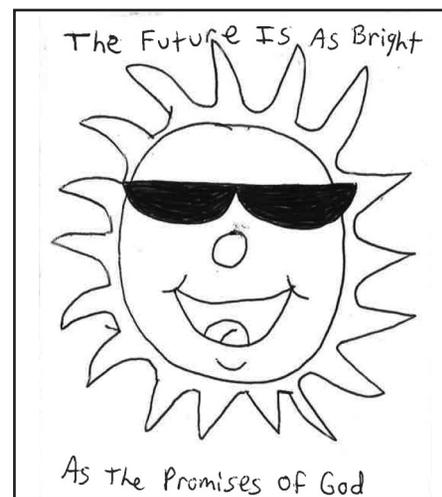
Leonard C., New River CI, Florida

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, Michigan

I thank you all so much for sending me a wonderful card and the sermon Facing Fears by Rev. Tom Cox. This letter acknowledging my birthday would be a third, and this letter is my first response back, sorry. Well, I wrote to say thank you very much and also for coming to play and compete physically and preach spiritually. Your sermons are always awesome. Seeds are planted, for many do come to me and share how it has impacted their lives. Heavenly Father, I thank you for establishing such ministries. I ask that you would bless Saints Prison Ministry to reach out to every prison in the United States, for there is nothing impossible with, or in Jesus' name. Amen!'

Jeromi D., Downstate CF, New York



by Faith H.

## A Divine Appointment

We are aware that not every person who supports The Saints Prison Ministry is active in social media, specifically the online gathering place that is Facebook. It is a significant reason our communication strategy includes continuing to print The Insider and send letters along with your receipt.

However, if you are active on Facebook we hope you have "liked" The Saints Prison Ministry page and are following the exploits of our teams through the twice-weekly posts. These posts offer both upcoming scheduled games and the Monday Praise Report, chronicling God's victories through our weekend events.

Admittedly, no single staff member reads every comment on every post but just recently one almost jumped off the page. Our Facebook administrator posted this on May 10, the Friday before a typical weekend, accompanied by a picture of the three teams involved:

### PRAYER WARRIORS!

*We are in full "swing" in softball as we have THREE teams heading out tomorrow, to take Living Water to those who thirst for it!*

*The SE Lady Saints will travel to Emanuel Women's Facility, the IL Saints visit Kewanee LSRC (Life Skills Re-Entry Center) - a first visit for any Saints team - and the NJ Saints will head to FCI/FPC Fairton.*

*A busy day indeed! Please pray for traveling mercies, fair weather and health for everyone. Most importantly, please lift up those who will hear the gospel, some for the very first time that God would move among the populations of all 4 facilities and that many would realize they need Jesus!*

*Thank you for your continued support and prayers!*

On May 22nd, a woman named Sarah posted the following comment on our page:

*Amazing people! I played May 11th in the Emanuel game and was saved!!*

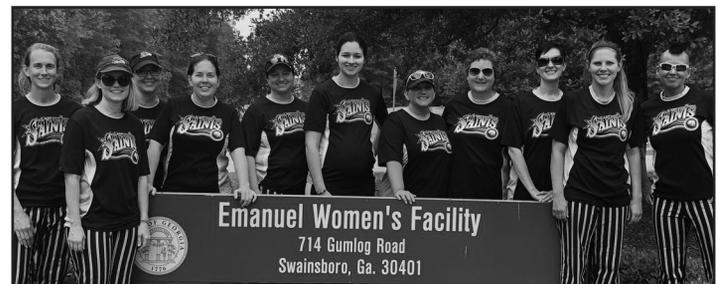
Clicking on the picture of our SE Lady Saints, I found another comment from Sarah, posted the same day:

*I played in that game and was saved!! We love y'all!*

We had the same questions that each of you probably had as you read this, so our Director did the research. Sarah (last name omitted intentionally) is not a joker, and inmates do not have access to Facebook. Sarah was indeed an inmate at Emanuel Women's Facility on May 11th. She did play in the game that day. By her own testimony, God intervened in her life through the testimony and message of our SE Lady Saints team that day.

**And she was already scheduled to be released in less than 10 days!**

Our SE Lady Saints play once a month, from May through September. When the schedule was made in February, we didn't know which month we would visit Emmanuel WF. Sarah had no idea she was going to be released the week of May 13th. But God knew both and orchestrated the timing of His work in Sarah's life in such a way that our Lady Saints were privileged to be a part of it. He created a Divine Appointment, put it on our calendar, and we'll see Sarah some day in Glory because of it!



## 10 Personal Commandments of a Converted Convict

*by Joe K., inmate at Northpoint Training Center, KY*

1. You shall glorify the God of all grace for His faithfulness and unending love.
2. You shall remember the Lord has blessed you with His abundant provision and His goodness is greater than man can measure.
3. You shall always be humble in heart and maintain an attitude of gratitude.
4. You shall always be happy to help your neighbor bear life's load.
5. You shall not neglect those in need and try to do friendly deeds for everybody.
6. You shall share your hope and happiness with everyone.
7. You shall look for a rainbow of encouragement to brighten up your day when the dark clouds of disappointment overcast the sky.
8. You shall remain unruffled by unpleasant and painful circumstances.
9. You shall not dwell on critical or discouraging thoughts, and never speak unwholesome words that condemn or curse.
10. You shall wholeheartedly believe and constantly declare - "I am a child of the Creator of the cosmos. Jesus provides me awesome strength and I can do all things through Him. I am well equipped and empowered to overcome any obstacle."

*This is reprinted as written to reflect the mindset of a believer behind prison bars. It is not a paraphrase or interpretation of the 10 Commandments as found in the Old Testament, nor should it be read as anything other than a Christian inmate utilizing a format known to all to share his heart.*

## Inside the Mind of Gibby

### The New Mexico Crusade That Never Was

by Tom Gibson, IL Saints Softball Coach

I was almost at the peak of my excitement level as I prepared for the New Mexico crusade this past April... when the email came telling me that the crusade had been cancelled! Thanks to the Crusade mode in the new "RBI Baseball 2019" video game, however, I was able to live out a week of prison ministry from my living room. Here's what happened...

#### Day One: Travel and Atomic Springs State Prison

Six Saints show up in New Mexico. Why is that? Because the rest of the team is stuck at O'Hare, Hartsfield-Jackson, and Philly International! Ted Schnitzel (PA) was ticketed on a different flight than the rest of the team but he assures everyone he knows what he's doing, and he will meet them in NM. The six Saints that did make it win the game that night. Unfortunately, Cogs (the only man to make it out of Atlanta) had to play left-center and right-center field and is now on the injured list for the rest of the trip! One highlight is we fed the team all day for \$67 and Frank is now pushing for six-man softball teams as the new model going forward!

#### Day Two: El Guapo Correctional Center

Most of the team arrives and even with 10 guys, Tim Travis has to play all four outfield spots, run for three injured teammates, and ultimately racks up 84 total miles on the day. In other news, he ended up qualifying for a spot in the Boston Marathon to be held a week later!

During dinner, Rodney (GA) and Gibby (IL) get into a bench-clearing brawl over sweet tea vs. unsweet tea at the local Cracker Barrel. Warnings were issued to both sides of the tea debate and Gibby and Rodney are ejected from the Cracker Barrel! They are forced to only order water the rest of the trip.

As the rest of the team is sitting around a cactus and doing evening devotions, Teddy is still stranded in Philly. He tried to pass the time by serving free soup to stranded travelers...until the TGI Fridays manager found him and kicked him out of the kitchen!

#### Day Three: Mulder County Correctional Facility

On our way to the prison, we pick up a bearded man with

a cardboard sign who is looking for work and appears to be homeless. We get him a jersey and let him drive the van. He insists on pitching overhand and we win three out of four games on the day! Later on after dinner, we find out the bearded stranger is unemployed free agent Craig Kimbrel. He tells us that he has to leave because surely the Chicago Cubs will be calling at any moment. There is no way they can start the season with the bullpen they currently have: they would get to June tied for 2nd in blown saves...which of course they did! Gibby agrees and says "adios"!

Teddy is still stranded in Philly but he finally talks the ground crew into hitting him some ground balls on the runway.

#### Day Four: Woodrow Wilson Middle School



Unfortunately we couldn't find a prison in which to minister but after working the phones, we did find an elementary school that had a special speaker cancel at the last minute. We take the gig without knowing much about it. It turns out the topic is a "birds-and-the-bees" talk with a bunch of 8th graders. As we discussed our options, an Uber pulls up and out steps...Teddy! He pulled off a Planes, Trains, and Automobiles journey just in time to draw the short straw and deliver "the talk" to a

group of mortified teens - and immature, giggling softball players. We go 2-0 against the 8th grade kickball team.

#### Day Five: Airport...or...?

Checking out and catching our flights was the plan. As we began the checkout process a Mustang enters the parking lot, driven by none other than Cliff Goller. Cliff was working in El Paso, TX overseeing the building of The Wall. The Wall is off to a slow start because work is stopped every few hours as Cliff takes batting practice, hitting the ball over the wall and into the nearby village of Palomas, Mexico. At that same moment Cliff pulled up, we received a frantic call from Estevez Prison Facility. We accept the invite and hastily try to add Cliff to the roster but the prison official replied, "Say no more, we know who he is!"

We arrive at the prison on time, but several guys go through security in shorts and flip flops, while others brought their boarding pass instead of their license! Despite the confusion and hustle we manage to split the doubleheader!

Alas, the tale of the Crusade that never was... but we did well in my living room!



PO Box 681  
Moorestown, NJ 08057

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
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CINNAMINSON, NJ 08077

Ten Commandments...  
prison version!  
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	Indiana
July 10-14	Open Softball	Colorado
August 8-11	CCMC Softball	New England
August 13-18	Open Softball	Michigan UP
August 14-17	MPC Softball	Western NY
Sept. 27-29	VA Saints Softball	South Carolina
October 2-5	Open Softball	Alabama

## THE SAINTS PRISON MINISTRY STAFF

### DIRECTORS

**FRANK ZEIDLER, JR.**  
Executive Director

**JIMMY COCHRAN**  
Director of Team Operations

**DR. JAY THATCHER**  
Director of Ministry Relations

### PROFESSIONAL STAFF

**KAREN BROWN**  
Personnel Manager

**LEIGH ANN BUSTARD**  
Office Manager

**REBEKAH BAILEY**  
Communications Manager

### COORDINATORS

**TOM HAYDEN**  
Virginia Coordinator

**TOM GIBSON**  
Illinois Coordinator

**REV. DALE GLADING**, Director Emeritus