



The Insider

A quarterly publication from The Saints Prison Ministry

Summer 2021

Inside This Issue

The Inside Story

Meet our newest team members.

- page 2

Inside the Mind of Gibby

- page 2

From the Inside Out

Artwork and letters from men and women behind bars.

- page 3

A Story of Courage

By Frank Zeidler, Jr., Executive Director



Courage can be demonstrated in many ways, and it seems most people have their own definition. Most of those definitions would bear some resemblance to this: the strength or bravery to do something in the face of danger or difficulty. The tenacles of that definition stretch many directions; the danger could be physical, emotional, or psychological while the level of difficulty can vary depending on skills, aptitude, or capacity.

In early March, our Director of Team Operations, Jimmy Cochran, stumbled across a tweet from the Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) stating that, for the first time since the COVID pandemic shut down the FDC, they were looking for volunteers to begin programming. Not reluctantly admitting volunteers, not finally accepting volunteers...they were *actively seeking* out volunteers to resume programming for the inmate population!

This was not "just another announcement" - this was *courageous*. At the time, Gov. DeSantis was well ahead of the curve in charting Florida's path to recovery, with no regard for how the rest of the country viewed him. FDC Secretary, Mark S. Inch followed the Governor's lead equally courageously. So, while the Departments of Corrections in most states were just beginning to plan the method for in-person family visitation; Secretary Inch had already addressed that issue and was now ready to return to providing the volunteer programming that FDC values so highly! In the face of national skepticism, potential ridicule, and the risk of a virus outbreak that challenged his credibility and leadership, Secretary Inch determined the FDC would *pursue* volunteers!

By any reasonable definition, Secretary Mark S. Inch demonstrated courage in the face of national scrutiny by placing the best interests of the inmates above his own career comfort.

The Saints Prison Ministry responded to the announcement immediately. While it typically takes six weeks to build a crusade, this one had to be ready in less than four weeks. However, one aspect of this preparation stands out - the people involved.

In an effort to streamline the process, the ministry

opted to limit the roster to MAs who already have a Florida approval. This approach limited the pool of available participants, yet 14 missionary-athletes responded positively, and none took longer than 72 hours to join the crusade team!

Leadership, supporters, and our missionary-athletes only cared about one thing - God opened the door, it was time to walk through it. Not one of the men on the team asked about Covid protocols, positive cases in prisons, or what type of mask to wear - they just said "Yes!"

Fast forward a month to mid-crusade. It was at that time that we learned two interesting details of our trip. The Saints Prison Ministry was the first "*volunteer outdoor event*" the state of Florida hosted post-pandemic AND the Saints Prison Ministry was the first "*large volunteer group*" welcomed back by the FDC post-pandemic.

Courage is indeed defined in a variety of ways, but biblical courage is more easily defined. The apostle Paul sums it up this way, "*What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:31, NIV). In Joshua 1:9, the Lord uses these words "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (NIV). Using those verses as a barometer, the Saints Prison Ministry demonstrated biblical courage, from the moment of the first phone call to the last out of the last game played. Everyone involved laid claim to the verses in Joshua and Romans without hesitation.

Secretary Mark S. Inch would probably deflect any notion that he showed courage in moving the FDC forward. I know everyone involved in planning, supporting, or conducting that crusade team most certainly would - they were just doing what they felt called to do.

Apparently, courage is only evident when you are looking in the rearview mirror!



APRIL 8-11, 2021

Results

Attended: 740
 Stayed for Gospel: 382
 Professions: 23
 Gospels Distributed: 737

The Inside Story

Meet our newest team members!

Sandra Skurla

Office Manager



I had been looking for a role with a Christian ministry when my pastor, Rev. Bill Cook, informed me the Saints Prison Ministry had a position open. Having worked for many years as an Administrative Assistant at Central Baptist Church, I knew I would love working where I could serve the Lord and I was familiar with the Saints ministry from their relationship with that church.

Coming to the Saints is an answer to prayer for me. I am grateful to serve God with a team that loves the Lord and to be part of a ministry that reaches out to the prisoners is very fulfilling.

I have three grown daughters and I'm greeted by a wonderful dog when I come home. I enjoy outdoor activities such as the beach, trail walks, and seeing beautiful sunsets; all of which I can appreciate since I live in an area of NJ that is full of beautiful wildlife. Beholding God's glory has become my favorite past time!

Yasmeen Fierro

Team Operations Assistant



My name is Yasmeen Fierros. I came to Easton Bible Church in 2015, where God allowed me to become a new creation in Christ! He put amazing people in my life as a new believer, including Tom and Faith Hogan who became my mentors. Being introduced to SPM through them, as a volunteer in 2017, I was drawn to the purpose and vision that the ministry brings to the inmates. So, when I heard they needed more

hands, I was not hesitant; I was ready to be onboard! I am very excited to be on the Saints' staff as the Team Operations Assistant and can't wait to see what God has in store for me.

I presently live in Lakewood, NJ along with my husband Jesus and my beautiful little girl Laila. I believe in helping others on their journey with Christ, which is why Hebrews 13:3 makes my service with SPM so special: "*Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.*"

Inside the Mind of Gibby

Dear Gibby

By Tom Gibson, IL Saints Softball Coach

After doing this semi-humorous column for the past four years, I have collected a fair amount of fan mail. I sorted through the bag and, while there was a copious amount of complaint mail, there were some good questions for an average run-of-the-mill missionary athlete like myself.

Dear Gibby, What is your favorite prison memory?- INQUISITIVE IN IRVINE

Dear Inquisitive, It would be impossible to choose just one. I have special memories of playing softball and sharing the Gospel in places like FCI Greenville, Danville CC, Toledo CI, and Louisiana State Prison. But my most favorite recent prison memory is doing an open field tackle to tag out a runner at Avon Park CI in Florida...it was the 3rd down stop that we desperately needed!

Dear Gibby, What exactly are your plans for the extra COVID weight?- NOSEY IN NETTLETON

Dear Nosey, Putting a spin on a quote from former Philadelphia Phillies' great, John Kruk, "Lady, I'm not an athlete, I'm a softball player!"

Dear Gibby, I'm writing in regard to your bus warranty. The warranty is up for renewal but only if you act now. Please call us at 555-3226 and please have your credit card number, social security number, mother's maiden name, name of the street you grew up on, your MySpace.com password, and first-born child ready to renew your warranty. - LEGIT IN LEWISTOWN

Dear Legit, You sound like a great guy who likes to help people and I'm sure your credentials are impeccable, so I'd like to make you an offer! If you will please call me back with your mailing address, I will send you all the information you requested - and the title to the bus!

Dear Gibby, Who is your favorite baseball announcer? - WONDERING IN WITCHITA

Dear Witchita, Living in the Midwest, we have been blessed to hear such great voices such as Pat Hughes, Bob Uecker, Steve Stone, Jack Buck, and Ken Harrelson, but the soundtrack to my childhood is Cubs baseball with the broadcasting of Harry Caray. While he never helped me pronounce Mark Grudzielanek correctly, he helped me to have an appreciation for the fun parts of the game when you are getting beat 12-0. But to accurately answer your question, anybody but Joe Buck...

Dear Gibby, As part of a non-denominational parachurch ministry, how do people from different backgrounds get along? - FUNDAMENTAL IN FULLERTON

Dear Fundamental, this has never been an issue during my tenure with the ministry...as long as you don't bring up music styles, Bible colleges, Bible translations, online church, smoke machines, multi-site services, pastors who wear ties, pastors who don't wear ties, anyone who has a radio ministry, or John Piper's Twitter account.

Thank you to everyone who has been writing in! As we return to the field this summer, I will be looking forward to more inspiring questions amidst all of the complaint mail!



FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Correspondence from behind the walls

Let me start off by saying I hope my letter finds you all blest by the best and doing well. Sorry that it took me so long for me to write you back but I've been having some feelings cause my family have turned their backs on me and I was just down and out and I really want to thank you very much for the birthday card. Because I was really feeling down and thinking that no one cares about me. Thanks again for the card and picking me up and making my day. Still trying to stay strong in the Lord. Can you please keep praying for me cause it gets hard, someone you love don't care for you anymore. I don't have much more to say but again I want to thank you very much for the birthday card and thinking of me. May God bless and keep you all well.

- Clarence C., Eastern CI, MD

I just wanted to say thanks for all the years you all have remembered my birthday and for bringing me joy when I felt none. As you know, I have been here inside of this prison for 18 years and many things have changed in my life, but I can count on hearing from you all each year. I will always try to spread the love of the Father with all of my fellow man and also I will be getting out of here in two more years and if I can, I will give back some of my time to Saints Prison Ministry if you would let me cause the joy you have given to me, I would like to give to the next person. Also know that there is so much power in a few kind words, and if at all possible, please keep it up. Well, as I said I only had a few words, but hopefully you now know how I feel about you all out there. So again thank you and God bless you all.

- Riccotize D., Grafton CI, OH

I just wanted to thank you for the birthday card. It's been a long time since you've been here. Things are pretty messed up right now. But with the Lord, things should get back to normal. Maybe one day I'll be able to play softball with ya.

- Charles M., Lieber CI, SC

I've been wanting to write to you to you to thank you for a long time, but I never seem to have the extra envelopes to do so because of the fact that I'm broke. I'd like to thank you all for being the only ones in the world to remember my birthday on a yearly basis. You have no idea how much it means to me. I was at Trenton CI from January 2010-December 2014 and you still stayed in touch. Hopefully the softball guys go to MacDougall CI because that's where I should be going when they start shipping again. That's in Ridgeville, SC. I get out in 2025, I hope to see you all again soon. Thank you for staying in touch and not forgetting my birthday. It's good to know that someone out there loves me. I may not have money, but God has been providing me with the things I need in life.

- Mark K., Evans CI, SC

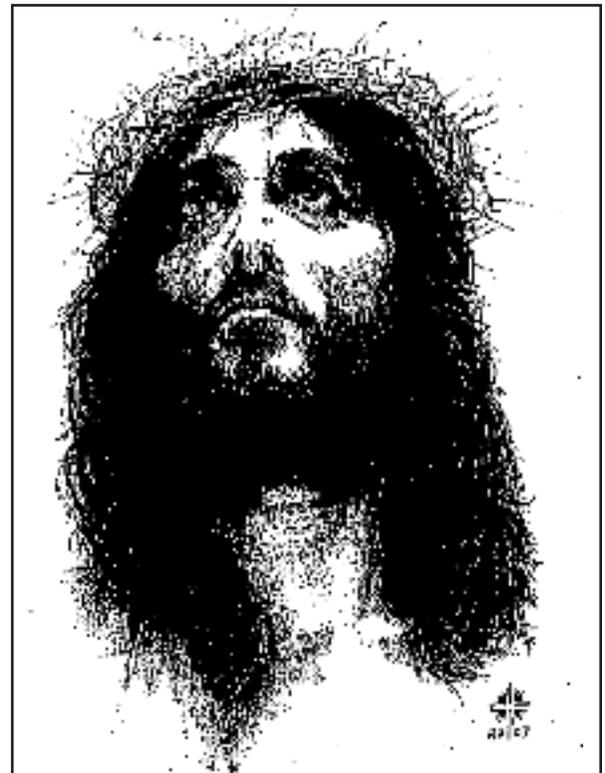
Praise the Lord! Jesus is Lord! Thank you for remembering me for my birthday and for the newsletter... especially for your concern through prayers offered up in my behalf. Know also of my concern for all of you there in the Saints Prison Ministry. Surely you glorify the Father and His Son, by the power in your works by the Holy Spirit... please continue. I Corinthians 15:58. Endure 'til the Return,

- LaVonn P., SCI Albion, PA



Left: Johnson A.,
SCI Laurel
Highlands,
PA

Right: Grover S.,
SCI Laurel
Highlands,
PA





Short-Term Missions Opportunities

We are all familiar with the term, and many of our churches are currently active in missions around the world. The Saints Prison Ministry has embraced the concept of these short-term trips for long-term impact and is actively seeking churches to partner with in this area.

Perhaps your church is planning to resume mission trips when access becomes available. But even then, there are likely men in the church that simply are not interested in teaching VBS or painting a church on the mission field. They want to serve, but the opportunities just don't match their skills and gifting. What if that same opportunity included playing sports instead?

For the last few years, SPM has partnered with three different churches to reach inmates with the Gospel in areas that our

current schedule cannot accommodate. These churches have collectively reached thousands with the Gospel, seen hundreds come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and found fulfillment in serving the Lord with the talents He gave them!

Right now, the state of Florida is wide open to our ministry, and others will soon follow, so there is a great opportunity for your church softball or basketball team to come under the Saints umbrella and make an impact for the Kingdom. Doing something they already do for "fun," the church can join with the Saints Prison Ministry and send a team to one of four regions of Florida, to minister to inmates who are simply waiting for someone to remember they are still there!

If your church would like to join us in 2021 - using athletics to reach this unreached people group - contact Frank Zeidler, Executive Director, at fzeidler@saintsprisonministry.org to get the ball rolling!



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Moorestown, NJ 08057

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Pen Pals Needed

You can fill a volunteer need right from the comfort of your home! Are you capable of letting Jesus' light shine through you to a man or woman in the darkest place on earth?

One letter a month, even if it is a single paragraph each time, will cause a man or woman in prison to leap out of their cell when they hear their name at mail call.

Right now we have more than 100 men and women on our waiting list - many of whom write to us just to remind us to keep them on the list! Please do not make them wait any longer!

For more information, including the Pen Pal guidelines and expectations, please contact the Saints office at 609-845-3197 or office@saintsprisonministry.org

THE SAINTS PRISON MINISTRY STAFF

DIRECTORS

FRANK ZEIDLER, JR.
Executive Director

JIMMY COCHRAN
Director of Team Operations

PROFESSIONAL STAFF

KAREN BROWN
Office Manager

REBEKAH BAILEY
Communications Manager

SANDRA SKURLA
Office Assistant

Yasmeen Fierro
Team Operations Assistant

COORDINATORS

TOM GIBSON
Illinois Coordinator

