

- Fact: Georgia ranks 5th in the nation in incarceration.
- Fact: 1 out of every 15 Georgians is under some sort of supervision of Corrections, Parole, or Probation departments.
- Fact: 350 inmates are released back into our Georgia communities EACH WEEK with only \$25 dollars in their pocket. The majority have no money or financial support, no food or clothing, no family or friends, and no work skills or hope for the future.
- Fact: 3 out of 4 inmates have substance abuse problems, but only about 10% receive any formal treatment while they are incarcerated.

These statistics are bleak, but Jesus didn't say that life would be easy...it surely wasn't for Him. And, neither is life hopeless...

John 21: 15-17: "When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He then said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." (Jesus) said to him, "Feed my sheep."

While Jesus challenges us to "Love me" and "Feed my sheep", He also promised "I will be with you always." We know that in all situations we can chose to ignore the needs of others around us, or, we can chose to respond with God's love. It could be as simple as a smile, a thank you or a word of encouragement. Or, it could be more profound as stepping out of our comfort zone and being involved in Prison Ministry.

St. Brendan's Prison Ministry started innocently enough not quite 3 years ago when my Pastor asked me to take Communion to a person at the local county jail. Today we have a ministry funded with a donation from a prisoner, active with men and women working with the Kairos Prison Ministry at 3 state prisons, and plans to support inmates transitioning into society. When I visit a jail or prison I wear my clerics and I have learned what a powerful symbol the collar is to the people I meet, both Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

We may never know what impact God's love has when we serve others. However, I was blessed to get an insight when I received a letter from an inmate at the jail where I bring Communion and the scripture readings of the day. He said that for nearly 18 months he had been watching my visits to other inmates and started to feel the need for God in his life. Then his wife suddenly died...he was given no other information other than she was dead...he felt confused and angry that God let his innocent wife die. I met with him to listen and to share my faith only 3 or 4 times before he was transferred. And, I did get the KofC to buy him a Bible and a book on the Catholic perspective of the World religions. I saw him open up to Jesus and it was obvious he received a blessing of peace. In our last

meeting he said he recognized that God works in wondrous ways. You see, 5 months before he had been sentenced, but was just sitting in the county jail with nothing happening. Now he realized if he had been moved immediately that we would never have met, and that he probably would be wandering without Jesus in his life.

Our vision at St. Brendan's is to impact North Georgia communities and specifically South Forsyth County by providing spiritual support to inmates (and sometimes their families) and by helping transitioning inmates to become crime-free productive citizens again. We are active in the Kairos Prison Ministry and are working to incorporate the Archdiocese of Atlanta's "Thresholds" six-step program into our prison ministry.

I encourage my brother Deacons to be involved in Prison Ministry. You will add a spiritual dimension to the lives of the inmates you visit, and your own, that will be measured one person at a time. Though we may never know what impact God's love has when we serve others in Prison Ministry, over time I am confident that our communities and the People of God will be better for it in immeasurable ways.

About Kairos Prison Ministry International, Inc. from www.kairosprisonministry.org:

"[Kairos] is the parent organization of a body of ministries addressing the spiritual needs of incarcerated men, women and children, to their families and to those who work in the prison environment...Kairos is a ministry of the church ... a ministry of the apostles whom Jesus, the Christ, has called into community and sent forth into the environment of the correctional institution."

About Thresholds: From www.thresholdsdelco.org/about.htm "...Thresholds is an in-prison course on decision-making. Through the use of a Guide, trained volunteers from the community teach inmates, or "clients", how to define situations, set goals, develop possibilities for reaching their goals, evaluate these, decide on a course of action, and to stay focused until their goals are achieved."

Thresholds volunteers usually meet once a week with a client as mentors for 7-10 weeks. Each meeting lasts for a period of one to two hours. During this time the mentor and client cover the six steps outlined in the Thresholds Guide (workbook). Further reinforcement of the material is provided during group sessions, which are also held once a week. The group sessions include discussion, videos and role playing.