

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST
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Report by ARTHUR JAMES BOLKAS
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**To Study The Rehabilitative Effectiveness Of Christian-Run
Prison Pre-Release And Aftercare Programs**

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INTRODUCTION

The rehabilitation of prisoners is, and has always been, a vital aspect of the modern prison system. Indeed, in their study of prison-religion in the USA, Professor Todd Clear and his associates stated that “Even today, religious programming is easily the most common and pervasive form of correctional rehabilitation available to prisoners” (1992). Following his masters thesis on *The Significance of Christianity in Reforming Prisoners*, the present writer - a former prison (Christian) convert himself - visited several overseas Christian-run prison pre-release and aftercare programs to determine both their effectiveness in helping to reform offenders and possible replication in (Victoria) Australia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arthur James Bolkas MA Criminology
58 Swan St Footscray Victoria 3011 Tel: (03) 96879850 Em: arthurjbolkas@hotmail.com

According to the prison-religion literature, lasting rehabilitation is contingent on *holistic* inmate care - tending a person's mental/emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. APAC (a pre- *and* post-release Biblically-based correctional program within a pervasively Christian environment) is such a model. Producing significantly lower than average recidivism rates among program participants in Brazil's original Humaita prison, APAC has been replicated in Ecuador, the USA, and England, with further global expansion likely. The present project, then, sought to examine such models with a view to possible local implementation.

Notable Prison Fellowship pre- and post-release initiatives were Detroit TOP (Transition of Prisoners) and NFL (Network For Life). Central to these ministries is a *network of support*: achieved by matching a Christian mentor/friend with an offender prior to release - the mentor's church in turn providing support/resources. Volunteers and staff (many ex-prisoners, like the TOP/NFL Managing Director) help inmates with essential needs like finding accommodation/ work, budgeting, and family reconciliation, as well as accessing local service agencies and community resources - such as drug treatment or vocational training. Interested persons are also linked into a good church family. Another very impressive program was the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) in Texas - the first 24-hour-a-day Christian pre-release program in the U.S. For their last 18 months prisoners are immersed in a highly structured program aimed at promoting personal transformation. Devotions, school, work, daily living skills classes, and leadership training are complimented with volunteer-run evening classes dealing, inter alia, with victim awareness, community bible study, marriage/family enrichment, substance abuse, and preparation for re-entry. In contrast to the lethargy and negativity of prisoners generally, IFI program participants showed remarkable confidence, initiative, and hope. Even cynics who entered the program or those looking for an 'easy option' attested to the life-changing nature of the environment. Again, aftercare was an integral component. The Kainos Community Project, HMP The Verne in Portland, England, was a similar model that is (like IFI) being replicated nationally. Significant also was *Circles of Support*, an initiative of the Mennonite Central Committee in Toronto, Canada, providing invaluable aftercare to high-risk sex offenders.

The prison-religion literature suggests that prison ministry plays (and will foreseeably continue to play) an important part in the prison system and in the lives of many prisoners, and may represent a potentially inexpensive and readily available rehabilitative force for some offenders. The present project confirms this proposition. It appears that there are prisoners worldwide who genuinely seek a lifestyle change and for whom such change may be facilitated through holistic Christian prison ministry. In relation to Victoria, however, this writer's postgraduate research revealed that whereas Christianity has a salutary effect on Christian prisoners generally, lack of adequate support/follow-up had the potential to thwart its rehabilitative potential, and therefore needed to be significantly improved/expanded. In response to this challenge Prison Fellowship Victoria proposes to pilot *Lives In Transition* (LIT), an APAC-style mentoring program providing pre- and post-release support to prisoners. Information/resources obtained by this writer will assist the proposed implementation of LIT, its policy/program development, and fundraising/awareness via correctional services/community/media promotional opportunities.

PROGRAMME

Los Angeles - California

Unfortunately scheduled meeting with Prison Fellowship Southern California Director did not eventuate as he was on annual leave.

Detroit TOP (Transition Of Prisoners) - Michigan

Prison Fellowship initiative offering community aftercare to predominantly African-American prisoners.

Contact: Mr Henry McClendon Jr, Director

Network For Life (NFL) - National Office Detroit Michigan

Prison Fellowship initiative similar to TOP but largely volunteer driven.

Contact: Mr Joe Williams, Managing Director NFL and TOP.

NFL Conference - Chicago, Illinois

Invited as Joe Williams' guest. NFL ministries across mid-west of America represented, as well as other Christian ministries and Corrections officials.

Toronto - Canada

Meetings with: Mr Brian Inkster, PF Canada Director; 'Circles of Support' (COS) staff (Mennonite Central Committee initiative offering assistance to sex offenders released from prison); and Mr Hugh Kierkegaard, COS founding member and Chaplain General to Canada.

InnerChange Freedom Initiative - Carol Vance Unit, Houston, Texas

A Prison Fellowship sponsored Christian prison unit based on the Brazilian APAC (Association for the Protection and Advancement of the Condemned) model. This is the first replication of such a model in the USA. Contact: Mr Tommie Dorsett, Director.

Quito Prison - Ecuador

1984 replication of the original 1974 Brazilian APAC model. Largely under the auspices of Prison Fellowship International.

Contact: Mr Santiago Crespo

HMP The Verne - Portland, England

Kainos Community Project - an interdenominational prison pre- and post-release prison ministry. Contact: John Hill

MAIN BODY

Notwithstanding one's credentials as a Churchill Fellow, by their very nature prisons/prison programs are generally difficult, if not impossible to access, particularly overseas. In light of this, and because most sites which I had proposed to visit were Prison Fellowship based, a letter of introduction to the various PF national/state ministries was obtained from PF International President/CEO Mr Ron Nikkel which facilitated relatively smooth access.

Detroit TOP

Not so smooth, however, was the flight to Detroit, Michigan (via Los Angeles) for my wife Andrea and I given our restless two-year-old (Demitri) aboard crowded planes. But it was certainly worth it given the extraordinary time I had at Detroit TOP (Transition Of Prisoners) in Detroit, Michigan, a ministry of Prison Fellowship. Aably led by Henry McClendon, Jr (Director), as its name implies this ministry assists prisoners in the difficult transition-reintegration process from prison back to the community. Based in a 'black' city, most of Detroit TOP's clients (and all of its staff) are African-Americans - predominantly in prison for drug (crack-cocaine) related crime. Several staff, including their dynamic Case Manager, Bob Vann, were former drug addicts/dealers and prisoners themselves, so had particular empathy with their clients.

To see the environment where TOP operates, and to which most of its clients released from prison return, is to appreciate the daunting task of trying to keep people from being reimprisoned. What hope is there, after all, for an unskilled, unemployed, poorly educated drug addict in a run-down, inner urban, drug-infested black ghetto? And yet, through its program of education/training and church-based community support, TOP is making a real difference in the lives of many ex-prisoners and their families. Indeed numerous clients that I spoke to attested to the profound impact that TOP had had on their lives, many stating that they could not have survived without this help. A distinguishing feature of TOP was the absence of professional 'distance' between staff-clients through the establishment of genuine friendships. Mr McClendon also arranged for me to visit the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility which, like its adult counterparts, almost exclusively housed African-Americans.

Network For Life (NFL) - Chicago

Joe Williams (NFL/TOP Managing Director) invited us to attend the NFL conference which covered ministries across the mid-west of America. The conference provided invaluable networking opportunities, information exchange, and resource gathering - much of which is being used to establish PF Victoria's proposed Lives In Transition program. A conference highlight was the large number of former prisoners who had themselves been assisted through NFL, and in turn now volunteered to help others going through the

difficult reintegration process. NFL underscores the importance of providing effective aftercare ministry to ex-prisoners and their families by mobilising the church/wider community. Its steady growth throughout the US is indicative of the worthwhile nature of this program.

Circles of Support (COS) - Toronto

I was especially pleased to spend time with the COS staff given my concern for the welfare of sex offenders released from prison. Under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee, COS provides an intensive aftercare service to sex offenders who genuinely do not want to re-offend. A group of between 4-6 Christian volunteers/staff commit to regular meetings with the ex-prisoner to help provide support/counselling/accountability in that persons life. Other professionals are strategically introduced to this process, as are various community-support groups/agencies. The idea is to provide an ever-widening circle of community support for these high-risk offenders which will help minimize their chances of re-offending.

Brian Inkster (Executive Director, Prison Fellowship Canada) convened a meeting between us and Hugh Kierkegaard (founding member of COS and Chaplain General of the Canadian prison service). According to Hugh, COS has achieved widespread recognition in Canada and is being replicated in various parts of the country. An evaluation of this program is forthcoming. COS provided me with extensive material about its program (currently with Prison Fellowship-Victoria, and likely to be disseminated further within corrections circles), whilst Hugh Kierkegaard has offered any possible assistance in the implementation of such a program in Victoria.

The InnerChange Freedom Initiative - Houston Texas

This was undoubtedly the highlight of my trip. Over seven days I was a participant observer in this most unique of prisons - casually mixing with inmates, attending programs, sharing their meals. An ex-prisoner myself, and involved in prison reform for the past seventeen years, I was very impressed with the comprehensive nature of this holistic pre- and post-release prison program. Addressing every aspect of a person's life, InnerChange offered offenders a real opportunity to turn their lives around. Particularly impressive was the extent of community involvement in the program. Volunteers (many of them professionals) frequently shared their time/expertise with program participants which served to 'normalise' prison life through strengthening ties with the outside world. The weekly victims support group was a poignant reminder that victim-offender reconciliation is possible and highly desirable, as unresolved guilt can be a huge obstacle to an offender's progress.

Complimenting the in-prison program, a professionally run aftercare component ensured that accountability, training, and counselling continued after a person's release from prison. On my final day at the prison I addressed the men, congratulating them on their achievements but warning about the

dangers inherent upon release and the importance of aftercare. After all, however successful the program's prison phase, it was based in an 'unreal' institutional environment. Visiting InnerChange has challenged my entrenched belief in the inability of prison to serve a redemptive purpose in offenders' lives. Unlike traditional prisons, I am convinced that a program like this at least provides life giving opportunities for change.

An interesting footnote to this account is that Mr Jack Cowley (InnerChange Director of Operations, USA) asked me to send him my CV if I was ever interested in a job with his organization. Should something like InnerChange ever be contemplated for Victoria, the opportunity to work in America would certainly be invaluable.

Quito prison - Ecuador

The Confraternidad Carcelaria del Ecuador (CCE) operates the APAC method in one section of the Quito prison. The prison is very old and overcrowded, and there has been hostility/obstruction by prison guards towards the work of CCE. Dr Santiago Crespo took time out from his busy schedule to brief me about their ministry, pointing out that in a poor country like Ecuador financing CCE was a serious problem. We visited Quito prison on the same day that PFI international president Michael Timmis from the USA was there to attend an official function. Dr Jorge Crespo (CCE Director), internos (Spanish - used rather than 'prisoners' or 'inmates' to describe persons involved with CCE in prison), and volunteer workers all expressed their gratitude to PFI for funding the CCE program. I was particularly impressed by the number of former internos who had returned to the prison as CCE volunteers. A group of us later accompanied Mr Timmis to inspect a disused, run-down navy barracks which CCE hoped to purchase and, with Government permission, convert into an exclusively Christian-run prison which would eliminate many of their current problems. However the outcome of this proposal is clearly dependent upon the support of Mr Timmis/PFI. Unfortunately language and prison regulations limited me to only a cursory examination of the CCE program. Nevertheless it was rewarding to visit one of the earliest APAC model prisons in the world, upon which western models have been established.

The Kainos Community Project - HMP The Verne (England)

The Kainos Project in 'D' Wing at HMP The Verne is a therapeutic community run by the Kainos Community Trust within the Prison Service where inmates (of any religion or who acknowledge a 'higher power' in their lives) can stay for a minimum of 18 weeks and for a normal maximum of a year. The therapeutic approach blends aspects of group and individual sociotherapy into a daily living programme. The basic ethos of Kainos Community is that 'residents' have to survive and grow through a 24-hour living and learning experience where all daily interactions both inside the community and in the prison at large are examined, and maladaptive patterns of behaviour challenged. As far as possible within a disciplined prison environment,

residents take responsibility for their own actions or inaction and have the opportunity to witness (re faith) and experience their effect upon other people. Residents play a major role in organising and carrying out tasks related to daily community living including: organising meetings, cleaning and maintenance of the unit, arranging hospitality for volunteers, setting and ordering house rules and recruiting new applicants. There is an intensive programme of work within the unit from Monday to Friday, in addition to one-on-one listening, guidance and other similar sessions.

The Kainos Community Project is unique in that it is the first time that the therapeutic community regime of the Brazilian APAC has been combined with the non-denominational Kairos weekend found in the United States.¹ Following the weekend the 18 week Journey Programme commences - one day a week in the evening. It is a presentation of Christian teaching and principles that challenges the participants to develop further the initial experience that they went through over the weekend. After their release participants have the option of being followed-up by various community based support groups, including Kairos volunteers. Since the Kainos Community was first established at The Verne prison (Portland, Dorset) in 1997 three additional communities have been created in England, with the possibility of further expansion within England and Wales and the Scottish Prison system.

John Hill (Kainos Community staff member) facilitated my visit to The Verne and gave me a guided tour of 'D' Wing. I stopped in several 8-man dorms and spoke at length to the residents who affirmed the program for the positive changes it had wrought in their lives. Whilst some prisoners (particularly ones who had served long sentences) found dormitory style accommodation difficult after being 'one-out,' given the overall benefits they considered this a small sacrifice. In the evening I was privileged to address residents and 'godparents' (volunteers who visited weekly) in the mess room, and enjoyed stimulating conversation with many of the men afterwards. As always, they were especially responsive to the fact that I had once been 'in their shoes' myself, and that in spite of facing difficulties after my release from prison I had managed to succeed in society.

¹ Conducted by an inter-denominational team of laity and clergy, The Kairos weekend is the catalyst for the change for participants and is the single most important element in the entire Project programme.

CONCLUSION

The Christian pre- and post-release prison programs that were examined as part of this Fellowship appeared to hold out the possibility of reformation for some offenders. Voluntary involvement in a bible based, Christian run program offered participants essential hope, meaning, and purpose in life, a positive outlook and productive use of time. It provided an entirely different way of life with new morals, values, and a renewed sense of self, which helped offenders to deal with guilt and generally enhanced relationships. Further, belonging to a religious group provided practical and moral/spiritual support which promoted prison adjustment and personal security. Lastly, participants appeared to have greater self-control than they would otherwise have had and more tolerance/respect for the authorities and others. Certainly for those who genuinely embraced these programs, what otherwise would probably have been a wholly negative prison experience was capable of being transformed into one potentially redemptive.

Adopting a 'holistic' model of inmate care, these programs offered participants all-important post-release community follow-up which, according to this writer's recent postgraduate research, has been a largely neglected feature of Christian prison ministry in Victoria. Indeed in-prison ministry was also found to be deficient: informants greatest unmet spiritual need being the inadequate quality and extent of religious servicing. Whilst all released prisoners are vulnerable because of these shortcomings, long-term offenders attempting to negotiate the difficult process from an institutionalised to an independent way of life (which is even more complicated when they attempt church assimilation) are even more at risk and therefore need greater assistance. For these reasons the establishment of a Christian pre- and post-release prison program in Victoria is a matter worthy of serious consideration.

The writer has disseminated this information to Mr Richard Whaley, Director Prison Fellowship-Victoria, and the PF-Victoria Council, and is presently volunteering to help launch PF's new pre/post-release 'Lives In Transition' program in May 2002 – the first of its kind in Victoria. Among other things, the writer will help to promote the program amongst Victorian church/para-church groups, in the media, and within the Department of Corrections, as well as prepare program material and be a guest presenter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this study trip (which reinforces the aforementioned prison-religion research), the following recommendations are made to Victorian government/corrections and church/welfare policy-makers and practitioners in the field, and other interested persons:

- A ‘holistic’ approach to inmate care should be trialed in Victoria whereby the total needs of offenders are met. To this end, interested health care providers, religious personnel, and inmates agree to work together in a spirit of mutual cooperation and trust, with a psycho-spiritual component included in sex-offender treatment programmes. This framework would best facilitate the ‘process of working through,’ essential for religious experience to be enduring.

However a holistic approach must also encompass the difficult transition/ reintegration process.² In this regard, Prison Fellowship-Victoria’s new ‘Lives in Transition’ (LIT) church-based mentoring programme will need unqualified support within the church/corrections.

- It appears that environment significantly affects the way prisoners approach their faith. An environment conducive to the enhancement of religious faith might comprise a Christian regime for like-minded prisoners and personnel; in effect, a Christian-run prison - arguably the ideal ‘holistic’ model. The replication of APAC-style prisons around the world is evidence of this. Moreover in an era of ever increasing fiscal constraint and government decentralisation, rising prison numbers and overheads have seen a major restructuring of our correctional system. Private prisons entering the marketplace have been at the forefront of change, bringing specialisation to new levels. In such a climate future consideration of a ‘Christian’ prison/unit in Victoria is not unreasonable, especially given the church’s longstanding prison ministry/welfare experience, potential resource/support base, prospective client pool, and successful practice abroad.

Certainly, a more thorough examination of the Kainos Communities in England should be undertaken with a view to possible future replication in Australia.

Such a study could possibly be performed by a future Churchill Fellow. Given

² Arguably the foremost transitional support model is Prison Fellowship’s Detroit TOP, which aims to re-establish prisoners in their own communities via extensive church/social supports and a programme of mentoring/accountability.(PF Texas)

English-Australian cultural similarities the Kainos Communities are likely to be most relevant in an Australian context, and have recently established a unique female community at Highpoint North which warrants investigation. The Kainos Community Projects still need to develop an effective aftercare component. Ideally, this should be modelled on the (PF Texas) InnerChange Freedom Initiative aftercare program, which provides a highly professional and structured support base.