

Christian Prison Ministry

Overview: Groups of Christian volunteers spend two 4-day weekends per year and 10 Saturdays in state prisons providing the love of Jesus Christ to inmates, who have selected themselves as needful of relationship with God and of forgiveness among one another.

Kairos Prison Ministry International is a lay-led, Christ-centered ministry that seeks to bring the love of Jesus to those who are affected by incarceration. Volunteers are recruited from numerous churches of all denominations, and groups of volunteers are dedicated to visit particular prisons on a long-term basis. We volunteers are trained to "listen, listen, love, love."

Kairos' model differs from that of other successful prison ministries in that we come back regularly to provide support to those inmates who have participated in a long weekend "walk."

My group of volunteers serves a medium-security men's prison in SW Virginia called Pocahontas. Over the course of bi-annual "walks" and of monthly Saturday reunions we have gained fellowship and even friendship with numerous men behind bars and have shared with them our own awareness of salvation in the face of our figurative as well as of their literal bars.

Our purpose is to allow them to experience the love of Jesus, without pressure on them to make any specific change in their lives. During a typical walk, about 25-30 of us spend a Thursday, Friday, Saturday and most of a Sunday with (usually) 42 self-selected men who have waited on a list of potential attendees, sometimes for several years, in order to have the chance to be with Kairos.

We bring motivational and informative talks, prayers, music, and an opportunity to discuss with us a rising sense of faith and of spiritual freedom—if they can find it. The rising sense is intense, built on four daily "encounters"—with Kairos, with self, with Christ, and with others. Another thing we bring them—and this is our brand—is **home baked cookies**. We need about 1500 dozen cookies for a walk. So we enlist friends and church members to bake, bake, bake...for men who otherwise have no choice about what they eat.

The Forgiveness Ceremony on Saturday evening is one climax of a walk. I have seen angry men hardened by prison muscle, gang tension, covered with tattoos, who have refused even to contemplate their responsibility for crime, break down and weep.

In Matthew 25: 36 & 40, Jesus says, "I was in prison and you came to me.... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." We of Kairos spend time with men whom many in society consider "the least of these," and we find that they are very much like ourselves, sinners in search of forgiveness and redemption.

Inmates who attend a Kairos walk may be wiccans or devil-worshippers or Muslims or atheists or those who were raised in Christian homes but have become witheringly angry at God and vow never to have anything more to do with Him, but—here's the value for society of what Kairos can do. Those inmates who attend a Kairos walk and then maintain a presence in later prayer and fellowship services organized by the prison's church, when released, have dramatically lower recidivism rates than those who do not. Normally as high as 50%, Kairos attendees' recidivism rates average about 10%.

Kairos has three ministries, Kairos Inside (ours), Kairos Torch, directed to youth up to age 25, and Kairos Outside, directed toward the families outside who "serve time," too.

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Kairos is volunteer-heavy: in the USA, approximately 30,000 volunteers donate 3 million volunteer hours per year equivalent to an estimated donation of \$36,000,000 of donated time. In 2018, there were more than 444 Kairos walks in prisons across the country. We are a non-profit funded by donations, and (hint hint) we are a 501 (c) 3 organization – therefore tax deductible.

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