

Ministry helps prisoners find meaning through faith

A group of St. Aloysius parishioners participated in a Kairos Closing Celebration Nov. 5-8 at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola to experience the Church as it was in the Book of ACTS.

Attending a Kairos Closing Ceremony is an opportunity to get a better understanding of what goes on at a Kairos retreat inside Angola. It offers a time to reflect on the impact the Holy Spirit can make if you were to use your God-given talents for this prison ministry. Inmates living inside Louisiana State Penitentiary, some of them residents for the rest of their lives, guide you on a spiritual tour from where they were prior to the retreat to where they will be going. Most importantly, they share who they will be following along their redirected path and how they've come to that decision.

Somehow, in just three days, for 59 retreats in a row, prisoners come to realize that even their lives can have meaning if they live for our Lord. They realize that even they can be forgiven and that our Heavenly Father has the authority and desire to do so.

In the midst of prayer, songs, cookies, kindness and tears, some find the courage to forgive their enemies or those that were supposed to care for them but never did. Some figure out a way to forgive themselves. Some learn God's will for all his children is good regardless of our surroundings, status or past... that we all have a Savior in Jesus who thirsts for us to call on Him.

Matt Zylicz shares his personal testimony:

Q. Where did your journey of faith through answering God's call in Prison ministry begin?

A. It began in my heart with a desire to visit a prison and pro-

gressed through a 2009 Aloysius Alive and prayer. Two years later I was directed by a friend to speak to Rick Blackstone about prison ministry and a week later during a Manresa retreat a man I had just met asked me if I have heard of Kairos Prison Ministry. When one of my players (Matt coaches basketball for St. Aloysius) asked his mom about visiting a prison on his own, it was enough confirmation of its importance and the time to act.

Q. How is your participation in Kairos Prison ministry a celebration of your faith?

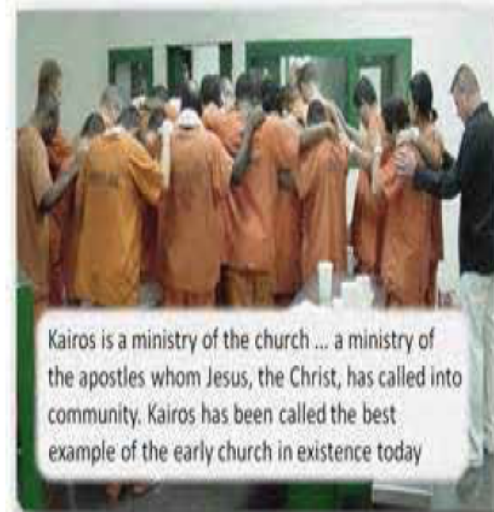
A. Jesus tells us that He is in prison. When we visit others in prison, we're visiting Him. The volunteers that make up a Kairos team are made up of Catholics and members of protestant religions alike. Each is inside Angola to represent God's unconditional love. We do this because of our common faith in Jesus Christ. We imitate Jesus simply through the Kairos model of Listen Listen, Love Love.

Q. How does your faith inspire your work in ministry?

A. During the Kairos retreat I witnessed so many men become closer to God and to knowing who He is and their place with Him. My faith inspires me to act. The work, however, is done by the Holy Spirit. The Kairos motto of Listen Listen, Love Love helps in humbling each volunteer to a place where they can see this clearly.

Wanda Townsend shares her personal testimony:

In all honesty, I have to admit I was pretty apprehensive about going into Angola, even if it was to attend a Kairos closing ceremony. As I walked into the room where the inmates and Kairos team had gathered, my mindset



God's Special Time

you cannot explain when you witness a man who has murdered another human being not only seek redemption but give testimony to it. That is the gift that taking that ride to Angola gave me. It does something for your own soul to know that our God is present to everyone, no matter what the atrocity.

Let me end by saying if I were a man I would be making the Kairos retreat as a team member and that way I would be there through the entire spiritual experience that this ministry brings to people who by the grace of God still have hope for a life of grace.

Here are some answers to the most frequently asked questions regarding the closing ceremony:

If you would like to attend a closing ceremony or you would like to invite someone to a ceremony, the attending person must submit their information to the prison and the Department of Corrections.

This is accomplished by filling out Kairos Closing Application Form and submitting it to the retreat leader for the particular retreat you will be attending. There are typically at least two Kairos retreats per year held in Angola -- one in the early Spring and one in the Fall of the year.

Future retreat dates may be determined by contacting Rick Blackstone at 225-205-9376 (email: rwblack1@cox.net) or Matt Zylicz at 504-905-6288 (email: matt.zylicz@gmail.com). They can also be contacted through the St. Aloysius Parish office.

totally changed -- I observed a room filled with music and singing and a feeling of celebration.

The men who had participated in the weekend were amazing to watch -- brothers in Christ, supporting and embracing each other, sharing their stories, shedding their tears over the transformation in their lives that the Kairos experience had made. As intimidating as being confined in the walls of this maximum security prison was to me, I am forever grateful for having been given this opportunity.

Angela Falgoust shares her personal testimony:

Rick Blackstone had asked many times about my making a

Kairos Closing Ceremony and each time I said sure when I have time. Until the day I found myself saying yes, I really did not know why I needed to give up this "Sunday" time.

Of course there were obvious reasons to attend, in that I am the Social Responsibility Coordinator at St. Aloysius and that should have been reason enough. Not to say I needed a *partner in crime* to go to Angola, but *misery loves company* so I asked my good friend Wanda Townsend to come for the ride. It is a ritual of safeguards that predetermines your visit before and during the experience. I am here to say, it is all worth the trouble.

There is truly something that