



Freedom Focus

A Newsletter with information for your partnering with us in

“Proclaiming Freedom for Prisoners”

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What will Prison Ministry look like Post COVID?

By Del Burkholder

As COVID-19 begins to subside, I felt it was important to address the question: What will prison ministry look like post COVID? I asked a couple leaders of well-run Biblical prison ministries from around the country to give their thoughts on what it may look like. We start off with Chaplain Phil Maust, the longest tenured FCPD (Head Chaplain), in the PA Department of Corrections (DOC) and considered one of the most knowledgeable voices in chaplaincy matters.

Phil Maust: FCPD Somerset State Correctional

The past two years have been challenging for those committed to prison ministry. COVID-19 has prompted prisons and jails to be locked down and/or closed to volunteers, and in many cases, contracted chaplains, for periods of time. Even for staff chaplains, ministry has become one-on-one, sometimes through a closed door. Group Bible studies and chapel services are increasingly rare due to limits on gatherings and other strategies enacted to protect the inmate population.

The PA DOC has been continually reviewing and adjusting its mitigation efforts for COVID-19 based on current conditions, including the rise and fall of COVID cases in the prison and the community. As we move forward, I anticipate more changes as the situation develops. I believe that even as things loosen up for more services and even volunteer services, it will take a long time to get back to the way things were, if they ever do. Prison ministry will become more focused on smaller groups of inmates. Literature will be an important part of ministry, now more than ever. I can see the possibility of less opportunities for evangelism and more emphasis on maturing the prison church and preparing it to effectively live out their testimony within the prison confines. We will need to strive for efficiency of time and effort, but God is faithful and will use our efforts and open the right doors at the right time.

Dave Miller: Executive Director, Gospel Express Ministries

As all of us are aware, prison ministry has certainly been affected by the pandemic the last two years. How will prison ministry look in the years ahead? A difficult question to answer. However, we have seen doors open that would likely not have opened, had it not been for the pandemic. Upon Chaplains requests for digital resources, the Lord made it possible to record some videos. In our case both the, “From Bondage to Freedom” and “Conflict Resolution” Seminars are now on DVD as well as a family service which includes singing and preaching. The demand for the Bible Study’s has increased tremendously. This is largely due to sending out packets every two weeks to prisons that don’t have the materials. All of these resources are leaving an impact and doesn’t require any in-person meeting. Even as some states are easing restrictions for in-person, these digital resources can continue to go to prisons where people can’t get to. How will in-person prison ministry look?

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LOOK WHAT IS INSIDE

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Board Member Focus

For the past 16 years, Board member Dennis Sensenig with his wife Sharon have been fixtures at SFPM food events. You will see both of them working and directing the operations and usually also their children are helping in any way they can. Dennis has been a board member since 2006 and has been on the SFPM Food Committee from the very beginning of his board time.

Dennis and Sharon live in Newmanstown and have been married for 21 years. They have 4 children ranging in age from 11 to 20 and are excited to be gaining a daughter in law this spring. They attend Heritage Mennonite Church. Dennis works for Martin's Appliance in the service department.



As a family, they enjoy camping and the males in the family enjoy NASCAR racing. Camping at a racetrack is enjoyed by all! In his free time, Dennis built a smokehouse and enjoys making ham and bacon! He also enjoys collecting old coins.

Dennis has participated in several prison crusades in South Carolina with Gospel Express Ministries. When asked what it has been like serving on the SFPM board, Dennis says the following: "It has been a great blessing for my wife and I working with SFPM over the past 16 years. We really enjoy preparing and serving food, which has been our primary responsibility at our annual auction, and now we enjoy helping Darrel and Jen Seibert and work with them to make the annual chicken BBQ happen."

A favorite passage for Dennis is Matthew 25:35-36, "*For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick, and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*"

Dennis has been a vital part of the success of the food sales that have produced thousands of dollars over the years, which SFPM has used to help promote prison ministry work in many different ways.

Thank you, Dennis, for your continued service!



Youth Intervention Center Chaplain, Jason McKinney and his wife, Nicole welcomed Javian Ransom-Nicholas McKinney to their family on January 27, 2022.

Mom and baby are doing great and their daughter is thrilled to be a big sister!!

Welcome to the world, Javian!



What will Prison Ministry look like Post COVID? (continued from page 1)

We have found it really varies from state to state. In December 2021 we were able to do a full “like normal” crusade in one state. This included dorm visitation and Chapel services with no restriction on attendance, Thursday thru Sunday! Several of the other states where we normally hold crusades are not yet open for such an event. As we look to the future, it seems like anything we can do to provide digital resources is becoming important, but we also anticipate in-person meetings again.

Ryan Newswanger: CEO, Jubilee Ministries

At Jubilee, we have 10 chaplains in 5 county jails and 3 state prisons. The only consistency we have seen over the last two years of COVID is change and adjustments. Looking ahead, I see more of the same. Each jail and prison is making policy according to what is happening with their own population. We have made several adjustments ourselves:

- We utilized different areas within the facility when we could not use the chapel.
- We preached to a camera so that the recorded sermon could be streamed to inmates.
- We utilized correspondence courses, Christian literature and wrote letters through the mail.
- We utilized a closed visitation area to counsel through the glass.
- When not allowed inside, we received permission to stand at the fence to bring a message to the blocks being released to yard time.

As one of our chaplains has said, “Nearly everything we did before has been shut down or changed, but the Gospel will not be stopped! No matter the future, we will do everything we can to bring the Gospel of hope and salvation to those we are called to serve!”

Don Metzler: Executive Director, We Care Program

For We Care Program, post-COVID prison ministry is the tale of three states. Since most of our chaplains serve in Alabama, that is where we have the most experience. Things are starting to open up, but we are not back to a pre-COVID status by any means. At this point it is still uncertain whether we will ever return there, particularly in regards to large groups entering the prisons. Our chaplains in Ohio are both back in prison and working as much as they desire. They were out longer than the Alabama chaplains, but now that they are back in, things seem to be very open for them. Florida is the third state where we have chaplains, and things are back to pre-COVID normal. Obviously, state leadership matters when you are working in state facilities. The biggest take-away for We Care from this pandemic experience is the reminder that ministering in prisons is a privilege, not a right. Because this privilege can be lost at any time for many different reasons, our challenge is to make the most of the opportunities we do have.

In summary I give affirmation to the ministry leader’s comments as they all did a great job and overall there is not much to add. Two areas in my conversations with chaplains around the country that may need empathized are most states will have smaller church services likely in the future, and also the trend to electronics such as Zoom or electronics tablets, as printed materials may be reduced by prison officials. That has its benefits and concerns at the same time. No matter what happens we know the Word of God will continue to go forth in His way.

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11

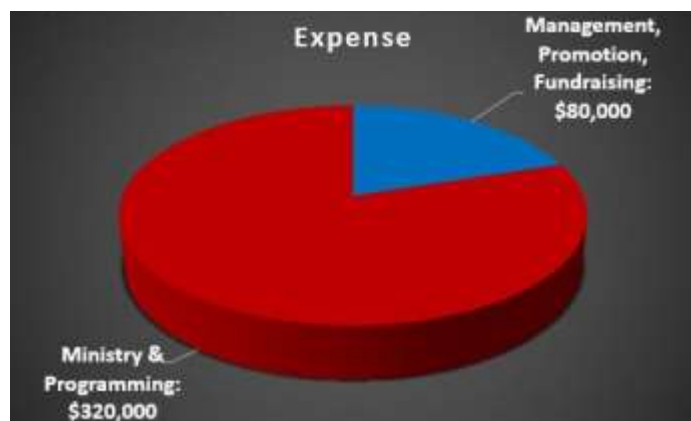
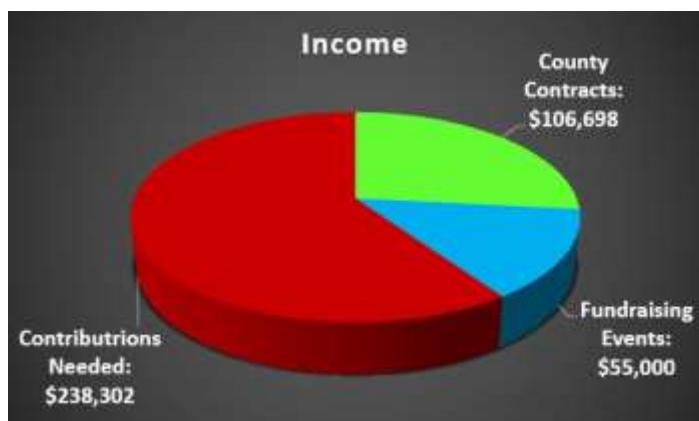
**MARK YOUR
CALENDAR!**

**Annual Chicken Dinner
October 28, 2022
More details to follow!**



Focus On Finances

2022 Budget: \$400,000



**You can also make a donation on line through our website.
A self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your gift to partner with SFPM. THANK YOU !!**

Check out our website for updated photos and information: www.supportforprisonministries.com

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Support for Prison Ministries

True Repentance

By Del Burkholder, Director

One time, when I was in a local business, the owner discovered I was involved in prison ministries. He asked me to step outside with him. He told me that he did not want his employees to know that he was an ex-inmate at Lancaster County prison and also one of the state prison facilities, which I ministered in quite a bit. He could not express his thanks enough for the work the chaplains have done in helping mold him as a Christian.

Recently, I read 2 Corinthians 7:9 where Paul says, *“I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance.”* A good chaplain knows that the key for an inmate turning his life around is not only to be sorry for what he has done, but truly repent and change his life direction.

This local business man that I talked to had dealt with his sin and was not only sorry for what he had done but also repented and began a walk with the Lord. As I left the store I rejoiced at how Jesus Christ had set yet another prisoner free!