INSIDE OUT: CHANGING HEARTS, TRANSFORMING LIVES, IMPACTING THE WORLD

There is only one correctional institution in the State of Connecticut exclusively for women. It is the York Correctional Institution in Niantic. This facility houses a maximum of 1,500 inmates. The average age of women there is 35.

I had the privilege of visiting last Saturday. I say privilege firstly, because not anyone can get into a correctional facility. Secondly, because what I experienced was extremely uplifting and life-changing, not only for the inmates, but also for the volunteers who worked with them for a week, as well as the guests who attended a closing ceremony for the Kairos Prison Ministry Program.

The United States leads the world in incarceration rates. We have 716 imprisoned per 100,000 people. Kairos is a ministry based on the words of Jesus, "I was in prison, and you came to visit me.” Kairos Prison Ministry reaches out to as many incarcerated as possible. Kairos volunteers strive to bring God’s light into the darkness of the prison through a three day program that aims at transforming the participants through God’s love, light and grace. Where Kairos has been offered, correctional institutes have experienced as low as 10% recidivism as compared to 23% of non-participants. Something is working.

Tears came to my eye as Jill gave her testimony of what Kairos has done for her life. “I am serving a 35 year sentence. When I was an adolescent, my life began spiraling out of control and I got deeper and deeper into bad things. I ended up making very bad decisions which eventually lead me to do something I had never even contemplated. I ended up here, down and out.”

Seventy five inmates tried to get accepted into the Kairos program last week but only some 40 were received. The rest remained with the earnest desire. Perhaps in the future. Jill went on to explain how Kairos had changed her life from the inside out: “This is my ninth time participating in the Kairos program. It has changed my life. It has given me a new purpose. I didn’t know God. I have come to know and love Him. I try to show His love to others.” She has become an “angel” for her sisters who are participating in the Kairos program for the first time.

Another prisoner, Ann, gave her testimony before she received her certificate of participation at the closing ceremony. “I know that next month when I walk out that front door, I will be a changed person. My mission will be to bring the love of God to everyone.” Families experience big changes in their members who have been released from prison. They begin to model their new lifestyle without crime with a new and positive behavior. Communities are made safer because former inmates make life-changing decisions from a foundation of ongoing “Prayer and Share” meetings.

Sandra expressed her experience with this simple phrase: "Everything minus God equals NOTHING. Nothing plus God equals EVERYTHING.” The inmates received their diploma, a certificate of completion, from the moderator of the three day session. As their names were called, they came forward with an enthusiastic round of applause by all present; participants, volunteers and guests.

The ladies did not want their three days to end. Many gladly expressed that they would like to return. They vowed to go back to the compound to help change other women’s lives for the better through there example. They left with a secret: they completed the "Kairos Experience" and now they were members of the “Kairos Family.” When they see each other around the compound, they recognize each other with a nod or some other sign of their new found friendship in God.

They were once broken. Now they were on their way to healing. They will one day be reunited with their outside family with more hope for the future. The mission statement of Kairos Ministries is: Changing Hearts, Transforming Lives, Impacting the World. I could clearly see that, during my short stay of a little more than one hour; this is possible from inside-out within the only all-female correctional institution in the State.