

# Showing God's Love to Prisoners

*By Bev Wilson & Betty Baker*

*"I was in prison and you visited me..." Jesus*

"Carl\* wants to talk to you" the guard said to Trietscher Sonny Gann.

Sonny was in the gymnasium of Coffield Prison as part of the "inside team" on a recent Kairos weekend. Kairos is a program that ministers to incarcerated individuals, their families, and those who work with them. Kairos volunteers bring Emmaus-style retreats to prisons across the country. These three-day weekends have been described as a short course in Christianity. Over the years, Trietsch members have taken an active role in the Texas Kairos movement.

"Carl was one tough looking dude," says Sonny. "He was part of our 'family' for the weekend, but he hadn't had a lot to say. I was pretty nervous about talking with him one-on-one, but I sensed God was speaking with him. So I said okay."

"He started by saying he had done some terrible things," continued Sonny "and then proceeded to tell me about them. My stomach literally churned as he told me the details. I tried to assure him that he didn't need to tell me these things, but he insisted he needed to say them out loud — needed to hear himself speak about what he had done."

When he finished recounting his deeds, Carl looked at Sonny skeptically and said, "Now, tell me you can forgive me." "I'll be honest with you," replied Sonny. "I can't do that. I'm only human. But I'm here to introduce you to the one who can. His name is Jesus."

Tears of relief streamed down Carl's face.

Along with Sonny Gann, the team that weekend included Trietsch members Andy Kidd, Dick Williams, Steve and Margaret Griffin, Ted Hyde, Rob and Holly Wright, and Betty Baker.

Coffield is a maximum security facility and is one of many Texas prisons that host Kairos retreats each year. Located in Anderson County, Coffield houses over 4,000 male inmates.

Volunteers undergo training before they are permitted to pass through three security checkpoints leading to the gym where most of the activities take place.

The Kairos weekend agenda includes inspirational talks and reflective exercises that prove to be powerful for many of the participants.

The goal of each Kairos volunteer is not to convert the prisoners but rather to demonstrate God's love.

Says Steve Griffin, a veteran of many retreats, "We don't bring Jesus into the prison — he is here all the time."

And it's not only the prisoners who feel the effects of the weekend. Guards are present for the weekend as well, and witness first hand the powerful and moving impact.

While the members of the "inside teams" match the gender of the weekend's participants, outside teams are on site providing support and prayer. Each weekend requires hours of preparation and there are lots of ways to be involved. Betty Baker had served on "inside" teams in women's prisons but now focuses on supporting the men's program. She coordinates preparing materials and food and is there to help take care of those who are spending their days ministering to the inmates.

There is also an affiliated program, called Kairos Outside that ministers to women with incarcerated friends or relatives. The spouse, parents and other relatives often "do time" right along with their loved ones. The program lets them know there is a Christian community who cares.

The mission of Kairos is to bring Christ's love and forgiveness to all incarcerated individuals, their families, and those who work with them and to assist in the transition of becoming a productive citizen. Those who feel called to participate in this important and meaningful work can do so in a number of ways including financially — the cost of each weekend is approximately \$17,000.

To learn more about Kairos or how you can be involved in a future weekend retreat, contact Betty Baker at 469-293-7778 or Steve Griffin at 972-317-8787

*\*Not his real name*