



# INSIDE Journal®

PRISON FELLOWSHIP'S NEWSPAPER FOR AMERICA'S PRISONS

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## From Near Death to Living Hope

by W.M. Thompson

**H**ector Fernandez was 14 years old when he ran away from his home in Michoacan, Mexico, to live in the United States.

But before he had the chance to cross the border, he received a phone call that stopped him in his tracks. He learned that his father had killed himself.

"It was the worst day of my life," Hector recalls. He immediately returned home for the funeral.

### 'I wanted to defend myself'

For decades Michoacan has been a hub for drug trafficking, so Hector grew up around the drug culture. "Drug traffickers looked powerful, and I wanted to defend myself," he says.

Other kids frequently bullied Hector because he was small for his age. His home offered little refuge; his parents fought constantly and disciplined Hector harshly.

The day his father died pushed Hector over the edge.

Fueled by rage and grief, Hector began living a lifestyle that would lead him to the brink of following in his father's footsteps. Relatives arranged for Hector to live in California, hoping a change of scenery would help.

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before Hector was back in with the wrong crowd. His uncle taught him how to sell drugs. Hector joined the South Side Gang and quickly earned veteran status. However, his success came with a price.

"Many people were murdered, including my best friends," Hector recalls.

At age 17, he feared that he was next. He decided to start fresh by getting married and leaving the state. "I thought having a family would fix everything," he says.

And it did—for a few years. Hector stopped selling drugs and worked at a factory in Minnesota. His wife gave birth to her second child.

"It was my dream come true; I had the perfect American life," Hector says.

But the responsibilities of

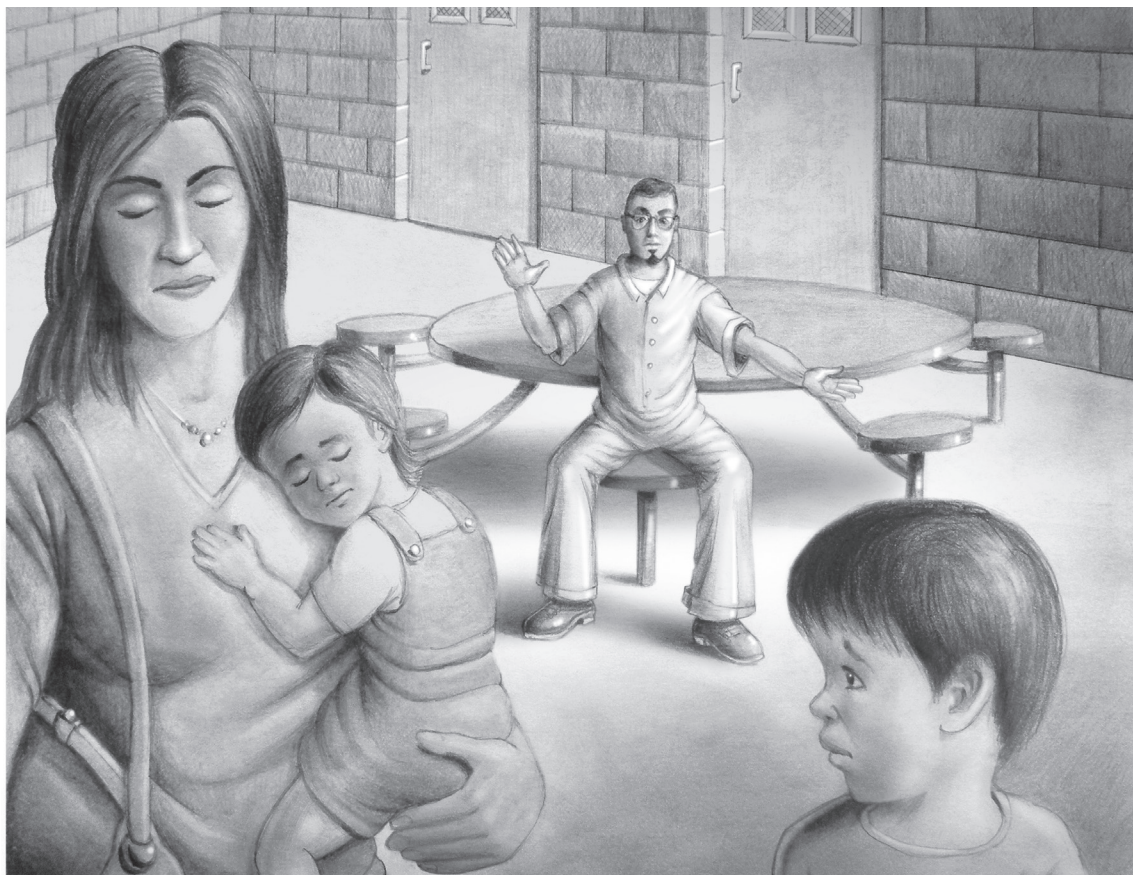


Illustration by John B. Shaffer

**Hector was lured back into drug dealing by the promise of "easy money," but his decision cost him priceless relationships.**

married life started sinking in, causing Hector to second-guess his decisions.

### Party's Over

The lure of easy money enticed Hector back into drug trafficking. In Minnesota he

could sell an ounce of cocaine for \$1,200—double what it sold for back in California.

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## Making Music Behind the Walls

### A Review of the Great Prison Recordings

by Steve Rempe

**I**n 1970, blues legend B. B. King performed a show at the Cook County Jail in Chicago, Illinois. Featuring many of his signature songs, including "Every Day I Have the Blues," "How Blue Can You Get?," and "The Thrill Is Gone," the performance is widely considered one of King's best. A recording of that concert, *B. B. King Live in Cook County Jail*, was recently rated as one of the 500 greatest albums of all time by *Rolling Stone* magazine.

But *Live in Cook County Jail* is just one of many important recordings to take place inside prison walls. The sparse, stripped-down sound of the



**Johnny Cash's performance at Folsom Prison is perhaps the best-known in-prison recording.**

bands, combined with the less-than-perfect acoustics of a prison yard filled with an en-

gaged audience, is tailor-made for the blues. The connection between musicians and prison-

ers is almost strong enough to touch, and makes for some of the most emotional shows ever recorded.

With King's recent passing, there is an opportunity to look at some of these recordings, and to appreciate the performances.

### 'At Folsom Prison' and 'At San Quentin' by Johnny Cash

Any list of prison recordings should begin with Johnny Cash. More than perhaps any other musician, Cash connected with the trials and suffering of prisoners, and the love of the audiences in these two prisons for Cash is readily apparent. In both recordings, the prisoners are as much a part of the performance as the musicians. Cash weaves themes of crime, punishment, and incarceration into his lyrics—much to the delight of his audience—but also strikes notes of redemption ("He Turned Water

into Wine," "The Old Account Was Settled Long Ago"), offering a message of forgiveness and transformation.

### 'Live at Soledad Prison' by John Lee Hooker

In 1972, Chicago bluesman John Lee Hooker performed for prisoners at the Correctional Training Facility in Soledad, California. While finding recordings of this performance has become a bit of a task, the search is worth the effort. Hooker's raspy howl effectively reflects his surroundings, and the audience of roughly 500 prisoners responds wholeheartedly. John Lee Hooker Jr., who performs on the recording with his father, would later serve time in Soledad, as well as a number of other prisons across the United States and Canada for drug offenses. He is now an ordained minister and serves as an evangelist to prisoners.

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# A Light in the Dark

When I was a child my family sometimes celebrated Independence Day by watching the fireworks that were set off at Disneyland in Anaheim, California. We didn't actually pay to go into the park, but if we sat on the hood of my parents' car in a neighborhood a few miles away, we could still get a pretty good view.

We would stay up long past our normal bedtime to see the bright, loud spectacle begin. We had to; summer days are long, and the fireworks needed a black backdrop to be seen in all their glory.

Sometimes human events are like fireworks. Acts of goodness, compassion, and courage stand out with extraordinary clarity when times are at their worst. That was certainly the case in June of this year in Charleston, South Carolina. On a Wednesday night, a young man walked into a historic AME church. After he was welcomed into a Bible study, he pulled out a gun and opened fire. Nine people died, including a state senator and an 87-year-old woman.

The young man was full of hatred, and he will face the justice due for his crime. But at his arraignment hearing, his victims' families did not respond with



SondraP/iStock

hatred of their own. Though deep in grief, they offered him forgiveness. They urged him to turn to God. "We are the family that love built," said Bethane Middleton-Brown, whose 49-year-old sister was killed. "We have no room for hate, so we have to forgive," she said.

"I just want everyone to know I forgive you," added Nadine Collier, the daughter of 70-year-old victim Ethel Lance. "You hurt me, you hurt a lot of people, but I forgive you."

In an era of division and strife, this kind of forgiveness isn't just unusual—it's almost superhuman. It takes incredible courage. And because it sprang up against a backdrop of such darkness, it's even rarer and more beautiful—like fireworks.

We don't have to tell you that prison life often has its share of darkness, too. So when goodness shows up, it's pretty conspicuous. Have you seen encouraging examples of forgiveness, kindness, or compassion? Let us know by writing to Editorial Staff, *Inside Journal*, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146.

We look forward to reading your stories.

A.R. Quinn  
Editor

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## Making Music

*Continued from p.1*

**'It's About Time' by Marshall Chapman** South Carolina-raised singer-songwriter Marshall Chapman has had songs recorded by everyone from Jimmy Buffett to Joe Cocker, but it's doubtful that any of those recordings were performed with more emotion and conviction than when she performed several of her compositions at the Tennessee State Prison for Women in 1993. The set moves from rowdy rock-and-roll numbers like "Betty's Being Bad" to more introspective songs like "Happy Childhood," which reminds the audience that "It's never too late to have a happy childhood."

**'Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> at the Cook County Jail' by Jimmy McGriff, Lucky Thompson, George Freeman, and O'Donel Levy** In 1972, four accomplished session musicians gathered to perform at the same jail B. B. King had visited two years earlier. While the venue was the same, the style was notably different. Instead of the rootsy blues sound of King, the quartet offered the prisoners a playlist of instrumental jazz and soul, featuring McG-

riff's trademark Hammond B-3 organ and the intricate guitar work of George Freeman. Lucky Thompson's soprano saxophone features prominently on the songs "Green Dolphin Street" and "Cherokee."

**'Jail' by Big Mama Thornton** Legendary rhythm and blues singer Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton was known for her big, deep voice, and her even bigger personality. *Jail* was a collection of performances at two prisons in the northwest United States. The recording features two songs originally recorded by Thornton that went on to greater recognition by other artists—"Hound Dog" (later recorded by Elvis Presley) and "Ball 'n' Chain" (more famously



Ace Records (UK)

recorded by Janis Joplin). The album concludes with the Gospel standard "O Happy Day" ("Oh, happy day / When Jesus washed / My sins away"). ■

## Near Death to Hope

*Continued from p.1*

Although Hector never used drugs himself, he began abusing alcohol.

On the night of Sept. 6, 2000, Hector celebrated his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday by partying with his friends. He drunkenly made a deal to sell a kilo of cocaine to a man in the next town over. While driving there, Hector noticed several state patrol cars trailing his car. He started to speed, attempting to flee arrest, but it didn't work.

Hector spent a year in Douglas County Jail in Minnesota, facing a conviction of up to 40 years in prison.

Hector's wife visited with their children and said that she was leaving him. It was the last time that he would ever see them.

In four months behind bars, Hector lost everything.

## Divine Intervention

One day Hector grew so depressed behind bars that he attempted to end his own life by hanging himself. But before he could complete the deed in his cell, he changed his mind.

"I was afraid that I would get into more trouble if somebody found me alive, so I got down," Hector recalls.

The next day, Dave Schonberg, a pastor in Douglas County, happened to visit Hector. Grabbing a book, Dave held Hector's hand and said in Spanish, "Hector, I am here to tell you that Jesus loves you."

Immediately Hector began to weep. "I didn't even know what was happening," Hector says. "All I know is I felt a release

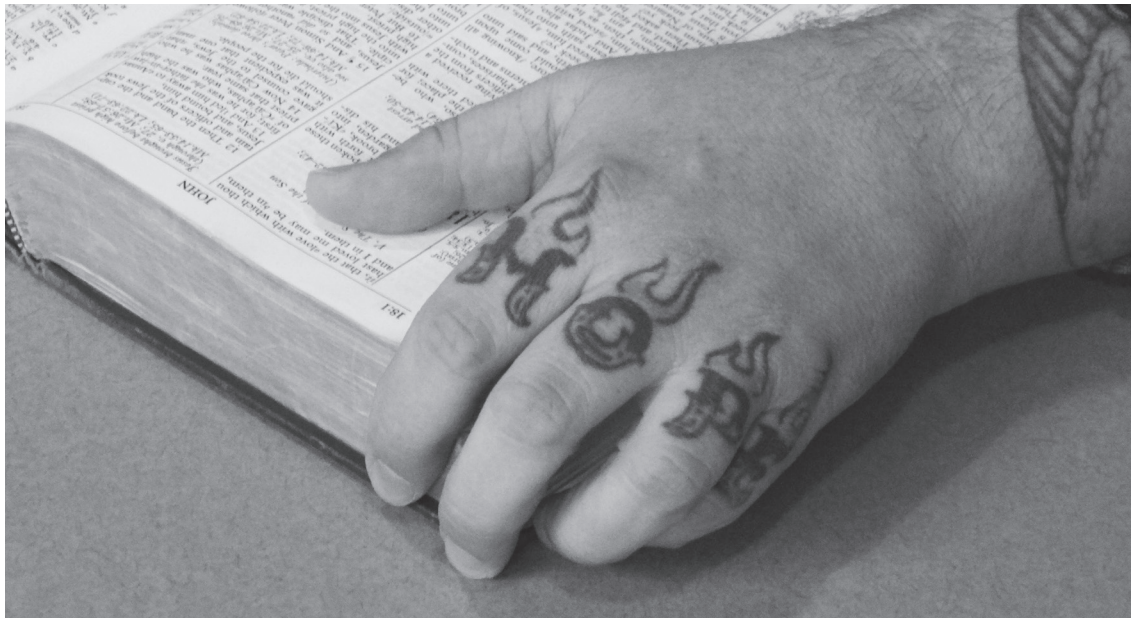


Photo by A.R. Quinn

**After almost committing suicide, Hector started to find hope when a visitor gave him a Bible.**

of something."

Hector read the book—a Bible—as soon as he got back into his cell. He loved reading God's Word, but nightmares of

his violent past still disrupted his sleep. The frightening images drove Hector to kneel by his bed and pray.

"I made a deal with God. If he made me a new man, then I would serve him for the rest of my life," Hector recalls.

## A New Man

Hector was sentenced to 96 months in Minnesota's St. Cloud Correctional Facility. There he learned about a Prison Fellowship faith-based reentry program. Hector thought it was a way to prepare to do the right thing outside of prison. He applied and was accepted into the program at Lino Lakes Correctional Facility.

"It was hard being the only Hispanic and I struggled with my English. But the love of Jesus came upon all of us and changed us," Hector says.

Hector's fellow prisoner Ryan

**"I was afraid  
that I would  
get into more  
trouble if  
somebody  
found me  
alive, so I  
got down."**

## PRAYER WARRIORS CORNER



- Pray for the administrative staff of your jail or prison to have wisdom, compassion, and effectiveness in their duties.

*"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity." – 1 Timothy 2:1-2*

- Pray for healing for those within your jail or prison who may be struggling with serious health problems.

*"LORD, help!" they cried in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them, snatching them from the door of death." – Psalm 107:19-20*

- Pray for men and women behind bars who are preparing to go home, that they will find safe housing, caring community, and lawful employment.

*"So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free ..." – Galatians 5:1*



# A Secret No One Knows

by J.L. Rogers

When I was a little boy, I used to tell kids “I have a secret no one else knows.” Naturally, kids asked what the secret was. But every time, I smirked and said, “I can’t tell you, or it won’t be a secret anymore.” It was the closest I came to admitting I had been sexually abused. Nobody told me to keep quiet; nobody threatened me. I just knew it was something I had to keep inside. But the problem with keeping something like that inside is it becomes part of your identity.

So I became a young man and walked around in an adult body. But there was still a boy inside who remained trapped in an abusive experience with a neighborhood adolescent. I didn’t have the courage to let myself talk about what happened and heal. As a result, a part of me remained immature and trapped in a psychological prison where I stayed a victim. God had better plans for me though; He was going to release me from my cell.

### Into the Prison Cell

When I turned 18, I became friends with a guy named Shon who had lived a rough life before he became a Christian. One thing I admired about Shon was his lack of shame. Even though he had an ugly past, he wasn’t obsessed with it. It wasn’t the source of his identity. Another thing I liked about Shon was that even when I shared things that caused me shame, he didn’t panic. He just listened. So one night when I was 23, I



greg801/iStock

Author J.L. Rogers kept a history of abuse a shameful secret for years. Inspired by an ex-prisoner, he finally decided to speak up and find freedom.

decided to tell him my secret. The problem was, I couldn’t get the words out. For 30 minutes, I stuttered and fumbled over my words, only getting out syllables as Shon waited quietly. Finally, that little boy inside found his voice, told the awful story, and started weeping as Shon said, over and over again, “You’re going to be OK.” It was good to venture out of my cell of shame, but I felt afraid. Shon was gracious, but what would happen if I told other people? I already knew what would happen though; I had seen my friend Steve tell a similar story to a room full of college students.

**Learning from an Ex-Prisoner**

Steve is a pastor of mine who has always been cool without trying. He’s funny, smart, athletic, and has a lovely wife and children. He’s also an ex-prisoner,

and he’s willing to tell the truth about himself. One night at our church’s college meeting, Steve was talking about shame, and he shared a verse from Hebrews 12:2. It says, “Because of the joy awaiting him, [Jesus] endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.” Steve said, “Jesus came to take your shame, and you don’t have to carry that around with you anymore. He already handled that. Listen folks: A man molested me when I was 13 years old. I don’t have to carry that shame anymore. Jesus took that shame, and He can take yours, too.” Steve looked so confident, so convinced when he said that, and I never forgot it. In fact, I’m sure that sermon is part of the reason I eventually had the courage to tell Shon, other friends, and my wife. None of those folks

made me feel dirty or damaged or disgusted with myself. They loved me and reminded me of the truth of Scripture, which set me free. And now I can tell large audiences without shame.

**Breaking Free**

When I read Scripture, I try to picture it in my mind. And there’s one particular image that sticks with me whenever I feel tempted to see myself as a victim again. Galatians 2:20 says, “My old self has been crucified with Christ.”—or in other words, executed. Sometimes I picture that sexually abused boy on the cross

beside Jesus. Jesus and the little boy are dead, and that’s heart-breaking until I remember that unless I allow my old self to “die,” I can’t become the new self Jesus offers to make me. Then I recall the rest of the verse: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Yes, I was damaged as a child, and maybe you were too, but that child is no more. When we bring the pain and shame of the past to Jesus, He can lay them to rest for us and give us a new identity. ■

## Moving Forward

Healing from the pain of sexual abuse takes time, and it isn’t something you should try to do alone. Reach out to a trusted friend, chaplain, or counselor and talk about what happened to you. But understand that one conversation about what happened probably won’t be enough. You need to talk to someone who will give you the space, over time, to share as much as you’re comfortable saying.

You also need to be honest with God about your feelings of anger or hurt inside. He already knows about those feelings anyway, but He wants you to trust Him with them. He can also give you a fresh start as you trust in Him. If, as I did with Shon, you struggle to find the words to talk about your brokenness with God, you might want to start with this sample prayer.

*God, I’ve been broken, but I don’t want to be defined by the past. As I give my shame to You, please make me a new creation through Jesus and His gift of new life. Thank You that Your grace and power are enough for me.*

If you’d like to learn more about what it means to be a “new creation” in Jesus, *Inside Journal* wants to help. Write to “**Moving Forward**,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. We’ll connect you with a trusted partner organization that offers free correspondence Bible studies and NIV Bibles to those who enroll in their program.

## Connect with Your Child This Christmas!

### What Is Angel Tree?

Maybe you’ve heard of Prison Fellowship’s Angel Tree program, but you’re not sure how it works. Angel Tree is a simple way to let your children know that you are thinking about them at Christmas.

Angel Tree works like this: Applications are shipped to the chaplains of participating prisons in early June. You fill out an application asking Angel Tree to give your child a gift from you at Christmas (you can suggest what kind of gift you think your child would like). Your chaplain collects all the applications and sends them to Angel Tree by the deadline. In the fall, Angel Tree volunteers call the person who takes care of your child to verify what gift your child would like to receive. Before Christmas, Angel Tree volunteers will buy and wrap the gift. The gift will be delivered to your child’s home or given to your child at an Angel Tree Christmas party along with a presentation of the Gospel. Your child will be told that the gift is from you—their mom or dad who loves them! Plus, your brief, personal message to your child will be written on the gift tag.

### A Gift from Your Heart to Theirs ...

This summer is the time to sign your children up to receive a Christmas present from you through Angel Tree. **Applications for Christmas 2015 must be postmarked by September 1, 2015.** Ask your chaplain or program coordinator for an application, and either the chaplain or program coordinator must submit it for you when you are done.

There are some important restrictions to the Angel Tree program, so please read carefully before filling out an application:

- 1) You **must** be the child(ren)’s father, mother, stepfather, or stepmother.
- 2) There **must not be a court order** restricting your contact with the child(ren) or their caregiver(s).
- 3) Your child(ren) must **live in the United States**.
- 4) Your child(ren) must be **18 years old or younger**.
- 5) The form must be filled out **completely and legibly**.
- 6) The form must be **signed**.
- 7) The form must be **postmarked by September 1, 2015**.

Start preparing now to sign up your children by contacting their caregiver to gather the most current information for your application.

Get an application and sign your kids up today! A special gift from you at Christmas will help them know that you love them, and it will connect them with a church that can come alongside your family in your absence. Best of all, it will give them an opportunity to experience the transforming love of Jesus Christ.

Angel Tree makes great efforts to serve every eligible child. Sometimes, however, if we are unable to locate your children’s caregiver, if the caregiver refuses to participate, or if there are not enough Angel Tree volunteers in a local area, we may not be able to deliver gifts to your children.

If your facility is not signed up and has not received applications, your chaplain may contact **1-800-55-ANGEL** for more information on how to participate.





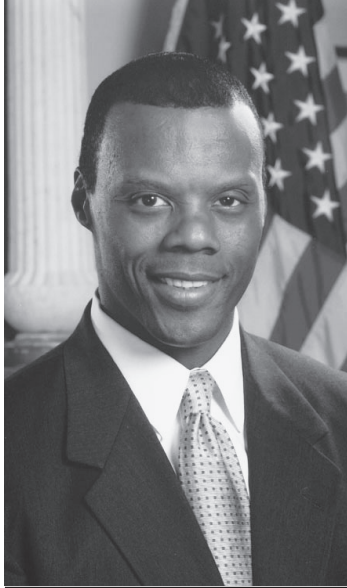
# Colson Task Force Seeks Reform

**W**ASHINGTON, D.C. – Prison overcrowding and other problems are nothing new. But there's a new group seeking solutions to these problems within the federal system: the Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections.

The Task Force is a nine-person, bipartisan, blue-ribbon group created by Congress. It has been charged with looking into challenges within the federal corrections system and developing new, smarter, practical policies to deal with them. After it holds four meetings in Washington, D.C., the Task Force will present its findings and recommendations to the Department of Justice, Congress, and the President.

The Task Force, established in 2014, has already met three times. Its first meeting, on January 27, 2015, was held at the Urban Institute, a social and economic policy organization. At the January meeting, the group heard testimony from four federal officials with extensive knowledge of the system. All the presenters—including a U.S.

district attorney, the director of the Bureau of Prisons, a representative of the U.S. Sentencing Commission, and a district court judge—pointed out that overcrowded, understaffed federal prisons are more dangerous and less rehabilitative. Though the population of the federal system has leveled off and even dropped in recent years, overcrowding remains a problem, especially in higher-security facilities. To address these problems, they said, the Task Force will



Former Congressman J.C. Watts Jr., a Republican from Oklahoma, chairs the Charles Colson Task Force.

Public domain

need to investigate alternatives to incarceration, policy reforms, and reentry support.

The second and third meetings, held in March and May 2015, addressed similar issues, including sentencing reform, changes to prosecutorial practices, and the expansion of diversion courts and innovative alternatives to incarceration. By studying legal reforms, policy changes, and other new approaches, including some promising ones already at work in the federal system, the Task Force hopes to curb corrections spending and make more money available for adequate space, staffing, and educational programming. The Task Force will meet for the final time in September 2015.

The Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections is named for Prison Fellowship's founder, an aide to President Richard Nixon who spent time at a federal prison camp in Alabama on charges related to the Watergate scandal. Jim Liske, the current president and CEO of the ministry, serves on the Task Force to represent the perspective of men and women behind bars, the formerly incarcerated, and their families. ■

- ### Members of the Task Force
- Former Congressman J.C. Watts Jr. (Chair)
  - Former Congressman Alan B. Mollohan (Vice Chair)
  - David C. Iglesias, Director of the Wheaton College Center for Economics, Government, and Public Policy
  - Jim Liske, President and CEO of Prison Fellowship
  - Jay Neal, Executive Director of the Georgia Office of Transition, Support, and Reentry
  - Laurie O. Robinson, Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs
  - Cynthia Roseberry, Project Manager for the Clemency Project of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
  - Hon. Ricardo M. Urbina, Retired Federal Judge, United States District Court for the District of Columbia
  - John E. Wetzel, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections



Photo by Sara Marlin

# New All-Faiths Chapel Dedicated

**M**USKEGON, MI – People of all religions—whether Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh, or any other faith—have a new place to worship at Earnest C. Brooks Correctional Facility, a state prison in Michigan.

The Holy Grounds All-Faiths Chapel, built through private donations, was dedicated on May 17, 2015. It will serve residents of the facility who, up to now, have relied on the prison gymnasium and classrooms for all religious activities.

The chapel has been a long-standing vision of Warden Mary Berghuis, who saw the

importance of the chapel at West Shoreline Correctional Facility, the other prison she has run in Michigan. She believes that having a place dedicated to spiritual programming helps prisoners prepare to rejoin the community.

“Oh, it makes a real difference,” the warden told a writer for the *Muskegon Chronicle*. “I see the difference in the men. When they come out, their identity is affected.”

“A lot of prisoners, once the drugs and alcohol come out of their systems they’re remorseful,” Berghuis continued. “And the chapel helps them deal with that.”

The chapel has been a long time coming. The vision was



Before a chapel existed, Prison Fellowship founder Chuck Colson spoke to men at E.C. Brooks’ gymnasium in 2010.

Photo by Darren Breen

born more than a decade ago, but the recent economic recession slowed the pace of donations, and in 2008, the builder

who planned to lead the project died suddenly.

When the chapel was finally dedicated, Berghuis attended the Sunday afternoon ceremony, along with Michigan Department of Corrections Director Dan Heyns and Prison Fellowship President and CEO Jim Liske. Prisoners and ex-prisoners were also present to mark the event.

“I would consider this not so much a chapel for the inmates at E.C. Brooks as a chapel for all the citizens,” Liske, a former West-Michigan pastor, told the *Muskegon Chronicle*. “Because if these inmates don’t commit another crime, they all benefit.”

“Men behind bars have such potential to be transformed, and to make their facilities safer,

more rehabilitative environments,” he added, stressing the importance of how prisoners spend their time behind bars, as well.

In addition to worship services, the new chapel building will also house E.C. Brooks’ religious library and classes for The Urban Ministry Institute, a high-level theological program offered at the prison to qualified applicants. The program, administered by Prison Fellowship volunteers in partnership with urban missions organization World Impact, has been in operation at E.C. Brooks for several years. Many of its graduates serve as lay pastors within the prison.

Thanks to the new chapel, they’ll have a new space to practice the faith they are studying. ■



An external view of E.C. Brooks, where a new worship space has been years in the making.

Photo by Darren Breen

**“It gives them a separate space that’s away from the day-to-day harshness of the prison. A place to escape and practice their faith.” – Warden Berghuis**

**PRISON FELLOWSHIP**

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