

INSIDE Journal

PRISON FELLOWSHIP'S NEWSPAPER FOR AMERICA'S PRISONS

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A New Life for Jorge

by Kate Campbell

Jorge Garcia was just 13 years old his first time in a juvenile detention facility. For him, it was a badge of honor.

"It made me think I was cool," says Jorge. "But I was only a kid. I didn't know where all this was going to take me."

Jorge was born in Mexico but immigrated to San Diego with his family when he was 11. "I found out that it was a different language, a different culture," he remembers.

A Life of Crime Begins

In middle school, Jorge began stealing candy, bicycles, and clothing with his "kids' gang," and sniffing gasoline, paint, and glue. By 13, he was smoking marijuana. In high school, he began selling marijuana and pills, which made him very popular.

"I grew up with seven kids, so it was hard for me to get atten-

tion," he says. "I looked for that attention outside of my family."

Jorge's uncle opened the door to a life of crime when he convinced Jorge to become a drug trafficker. At 16, Jorge often made \$7,000 a day "working" for his uncle.

When he was 19, Jorge married his first wife, who didn't know about his criminal lifestyle.

"I knew I had to hide myself," he says. They had four kids and remained married for 18 years. Jorge spent much of that time in and out of prison, and he got tired of his life of crime.

"Deeply, I was not happy," he says.

Becoming a Child of God

In 1978, Jorge was invited to go to church.

"Before I went in [to church], I put my gun ... and my bag of cocaine under the dashboard," he says. The church was different than what Jorge had experienced before.

"People at this church were singing and clapping," he re-



Photo provided by Jorge Garcia

After a life of crime, Jorge Garcia still spends a lot of his time behind bars—but not as a prisoner.

members. "The church where I used to go, everybody was quiet."

During a worship song, Jorge began to cry, and, for a brief moment, a hardened criminal was

transformed into an innocent child again.

"It made an impact," he recalls. "I never cried like that day ... [but] I went back into my car and put my gun under my belt."

Jorge continued his criminal lifestyle, spending more than two decades in and out of prisons in Mexico and America. In 1990, everything fell apart when

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The Art of Looking Back

by Jim Liske

Jim Liske is the president and CEO of Prison Fellowship Ministries.

When Chuck Colson, a native of Boston and a former captain in the U.S. Marines, was invited to be special counsel to President Richard Nixon, he moved his things into an office looking over the White House lawn. Chuck, known for doing whatever it took to win, was at the high point of his success. *I wonder what Grandpa would think of me now, he thought proudly.*

Just a few years later, facing charges related to the Watergate scandal, Chuck packed up his office in disgrace. Looking over the White House lawn again, he thought grimly, *What would Grandpa think if he could see me now?*



Sometimes to move forward, you first have to look at the past.

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Repeating the Past

We've all been in situations like Chuck's. Our mistakes catch up with us, and our apparent success goes up in smoke. When this happens, we have two choices: 1) We can ignore the past and try to start over, or 2) We can look carefully at the past and learn from it before moving ahead.

Often we choose Option 1. We make plans for becoming different, better versions of ourselves, without examining why we do the things we do.

We say things like, "Man, I shouldn't have had that last drink. I'm going to be late for work again. I hope I don't get fired. That's it. I'm going to be different. No more drinking for me—starting tomorrow."

Or, "I know my wife doesn't like my 'side business.' She's afraid I'll go back to prison. But we really need to move into a bigger place. Just one more big deal, and then I can leave it all

behind for good."

Speeches like the ones above are "famous last words." Sadly, just having good intentions rarely leads to a changed life. Why?

Look in the Rearview Mirror

Maybe you've heard the old saying, "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." That's true in our personal lives. If we try to fix our bad choices, without ever looking at why we made bad choices in the first place, we're not going to be successful.

If we're serious about changing our direction in life, it's not enough to be sorry. We need to take a good, long look in the rearview mirror.

- **Examine the past.** Are things from your past driving your present actions? Have you used alcohol, drugs, or toxic relationships to numb the pain of something bad that happened? Being reminded of a painful

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Letters to the Editor

'Roy's Long Road'

I was laying on my bunk and this old man came up to my cell door and asked me if I wanted something to read. I got up and started talking to him, and my heart went out to this man in his 80s named Dave. He slid the Inside Journal Prison Fellowship's newspaper for America's prisons, Volume 23. No. 2, Spring 2014 under my cell door and told me, "You read that and you will find some answers." I read that newspaper three times and was touched emotionally by all of the articles. 'Roy's Long Road to Paradise' is a little like my story.

- C.C., Tennessee

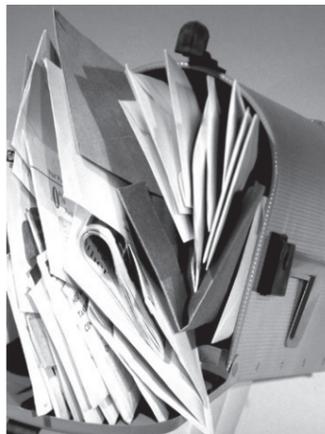
Prisoner Wages

During my times inside I have noticed the cost of items increase multiple times while inmate worker wages have stayed the same. Both state and federal minimum wages have risen multiple times as well. But who cares about the hard-working inmate population? [...] It is way past time for a change. It is way past time for a raise. It is way past time for respect.

- M.P., Connecticut

Getting in the Christmas Spirit

Dear Angel Tree, I want to thank you for giving my children ... gifts on my behalf. My daughter wrote me and told me that you have



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been doing this for years. [...] I wanted to thank you for your love and concern for my two children. [...] I will be eligible for early release next April 2015 and I will be moving to a [transitional living facility]. When I get established, I want to help in your program to give to all who are incarcerated with children. Have a memorable Christmas just like mine. Thank you for your prayers and love!

- R.S., Ohio

Vegan Food

I am a vegan. It is not healthy or logical in the year 2014 to eat products from animal-based foods. [...] The problem is that the DOC does not offer any meals that are strictly plant-based. The DOC does not even offer a vegetarian diet. On average, the DOC serves four ounces of ½ cup of vegetables about four days out of seven. [...] The DOC commissary is an option, however, the only plant-based products that the DOC sells are peanuts, black beans, pickles, trail mix, and popcorn. One cannot create a normal plant-based diet on what the DOC provides. [...] If a person wants to be a Muslim, the DOC provides a non-meat-based diet. It is sad that the DOC will not honor my spiritual decision of wanting only a plant-based diet.

- K.M., Connecticut

Subscription Info

At Inside Journal® (IJ), we receive many letters each week from prisoners asking for subscriptions to our newspaper. We are grateful for the interest and support of our readers - however, because of limitations on our staff and budget, IJ is *only* available in bulk shipments to your chaplain, programming coordinator, or a volunteer who visits your facility. Chaplains, to set up these shipments for free, please contact our editorial staff at P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790 or insidejournal@pfm.org.

Art of Looking Back

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event can trigger an explosion of bad choices, like stepping on a land mine. It will be hard to stop engaging in addictive behaviors until you deal with the pain head-on. That might mean journaling about your experiences or joining an addiction support group. You can't change the past, but you can choose what you do about it now.

• Examine your worldview.

We all have a worldview, or way of thinking, that drives how we act. If you think money is the most important thing in life, you will worry about having enough, and you might break the rules to get more. If status is the most important thing to you, you will do whatever it takes to be on top. Ask yourself what thoughts might have led up to decisions that you now regret, and what thoughts you want to embrace instead. If you're a Christian, search the Bible (Proverbs and the New Testament are great places to start) for principles worth building your new worldview on.

• Examine your relationships.

We don't make decisions in a vacuum. Sometimes the people around us encourage us to make bad decisions, and sometimes our bad decisions hurt others. Before we can be ready to move forward, we might need to choose to surround ourselves with more positive influences. We might also need to apologize to others for

the pain we have caused, and do whatever is in our power to make up for our past actions.

Repentance is a lot more

You can't change the past, but you can choose what you do about it now.

than feeling sorry for something we've done wrong and promising to do better. It's an "about-face," a total change of direction in the way we think and act. It's a revolution of the heart.

As he took a hard look back at his own life, Chuck Colson realized that his worldview was built on the wrong priorities. He valued power and winning instead of humility and serving others. When he had a personal encounter with God, the whole direction of his life changed. He pledged guilty to charges that he knew were true and agreed to serve time in a federal prison camp. When he came out, he dedicated the rest of his life to serving prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families, and helping others develop a healthy worldview.

It's not always easy or flattering, but finding a new life starts with looking hard at your old one. Once you have looked back, you will be better prepared to leave the past behind for good. ■

A New Life for Jorge

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his wife asked for a divorce. He tried to repair the damage, even seeking help from a woman who practiced witchcraft. While his family crumbled, the rest of his life began to crumble, too.

"I started losing everything one by one," says Jorge. With no house and no car, Jorge lived in his brother's garage and rode the public bus.

"I didn't even have \$5 to buy a hamburger," he says.

Jorge soon decided his life wasn't worth living. While lying on the couch he used for a bed, he attempted to kill himself by overdosing on drugs, but his friends found him and brought him back to life. All he said to

"Before I went in [to church], I put my gun ... and my bag of cocaine under the dashboard."



Photo provided by Jorge Garcia

A church service first broke down Jorge's defenses, and it's where he eventually turned his back on a life of crime.

them was, "Why did you bring me back? I wanted to die."

His second attempt to overdose was also unsuccessful; a police officer found him in a park and took him to the hospital. Feeling like a failure, Jorge thought, *I'm not even good enough to kill myself.*

That's when he prayed: "O.K., God, I want to go Your way."

Jorge remembered the church from 12 years earlier and decided to go back again.

"That church had something special that I never felt before," he says.

When he returned, he found lasting peace for the first time since he started using and selling drugs as a kid.

"I was tired, and that's what made a criminal become a child of God." That day, Jorge gave his life to Christ.

A Life Redeemed

After he became a Christian, Jorge left California and spent five years on a farm in Mexico. "It was like therapy. God changed me little by little," he says. "He had a mission for me." When Jorge returned in 1996, he began working in Los Angeles and volunteering with Prison Fellowship. In 2003 he became Prison Fellowship's Hispanic ministry coordinator.

Through his new position and faith in Jesus Christ, Jorge discovered his God-given gifts and talents.

"I thought that [selling drugs] was the only thing I knew how to do," he says. "But I discovered I know how to love my people behind bars ... I discovered that I have a lot of talents that I never knew I had."

Jorge remarried and now has another child and a grandchild. He directs Prison Fellowship's work in Latin America and Mexico, and also produces "Libres en Cristo," a Spanish-language radio program that airs regularly on Radio Nueva Vida.

His life story is a message of God's transformative power. "If I had known what I know now when I was a kid, I would have chosen God when I was a kid," he says. "But God gave me the opportunity ... to show what God has done in me." ■

PRAYER WARRIORS CORNER

This fall, please pray for the following concerns:

- Pray for all those who are behind bars in this country and around the world, whether they are being imprisoned justly or unjustly.

"Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

- Hebrews 13:3

- Pray for Christians, as well as other religious minorities in the Middle East, who are being forced to flee their homes as they are persecuted for their beliefs in the Middle East. Tens of thousands of Christians around the world are committed to praying for this special concern every Monday.

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people."

- Ephesians 6:18

- Pray that the Lord would continue to reveal Himself to those who don't know Him and comfort the families whose loved ones are incarcerated.

"Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you."

- 2 Thessalonians 3:1

Good Behavior Counts, Right?

by Johnathan Kana

I stared excitedly at the folded slip of paper the officer had just handed me. At that moment, it was the single most important thing in the world to me.

It was my first parole decision. I felt good about the release plan I'd filed with the board. I had a safe place to live, excellent job leads, and a strong support network. Over a dozen upstanding members of my home community had written letters on my behalf, and I'd voluntarily completed several self-improvement courses behind bars. What more could they possibly want?

"Get this guy out of here," I

imagined them saying. "Let's make room for someone who really needs to be here." Already dreaming of what I'd do the first day I was out, I eagerly unfolded the notice.

Moments later, I wished I hadn't.

"The parole panel assigned to review your case has determined that, in light of the nature and circumstances of your offense ..." I didn't need to read any further to know I wasn't going home. I'd never felt so heartbroken in my whole life.

Worse Than a Set-Off

It was my first parole set-off, but it wouldn't be my last. In the months that followed, I slavishly followed all the warden's rules,

trying to keep a clean disciplinary record. They say good behavior counts, after all. But as I watched others receive similar set-offs time and time again, I began to lose hope. It became clear that my crime would always be the first and most important thing the parole board considered, and nothing I said or did behind bars would ever change "the nature and circumstances of my offense."

After my second set-off, cold reality set in: I would never deserve to be set free until I had fully served my time, all the way down to the last day.

The same is true for all of us when it comes to our standing before God. The Bible says, "When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned" (Romans 5:12 NLT). A lot of us think we can be saved from our sins by going to church and doing our best to follow God's rules. We think that our good deeds will somehow cancel out past mistakes, and so we do our best to simply be "good people."

But that's not how God judges. The Bible says, "The person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws" (James 2:10 NLT). That means anything we think, say or do that falls short of God's perfect standard makes us eternally guilty before Him—and nothing we say or do afterward can erase that guilt. When our cases come up for review, those past misdeeds will still be on our records, and we'll still have to answer for them.

Better Than Parole

Because He created us and loves us, God has provided a way to wipe those blots away, but it

No Revocation Hearings

Parole comes with conditions, and it can be taken away for misbehavior. God's mercy isn't like that. His grace has no strings attached, and He'll never summon you to a revocation hearing.

You can't earn that kind of love, but if you're willing to confess your sins and invite Jesus into your life, you can receive it right now as His free gift. You can start with a simple prayer like this one:

God, I've tried so hard to run away from my sin, but I can't. I don't deserve Your love, and yet I know You still do love me. I believe You sent Your Son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins, and today I ask You to come into my life and set me free for His sake. Help me live in a way that honors Your love.

If you just prayed those words from a sincere heart, then you're on the road to a new life, and Inside Journal wants to help. You can enroll in a free correspondence Bible study—and get a Bible, if you don't have access to one through your facility—by writing to "No Revocation," c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA, 20146-1790. We will connect you with a partnering organization that provides these materials.

has nothing to do with our merits. "He saved us," the Bible says, "not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5).

God knew that once His perfect justice was served, we would all perish. That's why He allowed His own Son to become one of us. Jesus Christ, being God in human flesh, lived the perfect life none of us ever could; yet He was also destined to die at the hands of the very people He came to save. Nailed to a Roman cross like a common criminal, He submitted to a punishment He didn't deserve so that God could extend us the mercy we don't deserve. At the cross, God exhausted His wrath against our sin, and then He raised Jesus from the dead three days later to demonstrate that death no longer has any claim on us.

Whenever I think about that,

I'm reminded of how I felt the day I passed through those prison gates, having served less than half my sentence before making parole, despite the set-offs. With only an empty street to keep me from being reunited with my family, I felt nothing but profound gratitude for the unmerited favor I had received from the parole board that day. I may have been a good candidate for early release, but I still didn't deserve the privilege. I also knew there would be strict rules to follow on parole, but I was so thankful that it didn't matter.

That's how I still feel as I strive each day to live in a way that honors the God who went to such extraordinary measures to save me from my sins. It's a privilege to serve Jesus, because in Him I have something far better than parole. My case has been wholly expunged. ■



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Nothing Johnathan did seemed to make his parole date arrive any faster. He realized there was nothing he could do to earn his freedom—or his salvation. But there was still hope.

Doing HIS Time: Meditations and Prayers for Men and Women in Prison

By James C. Vogelzang with Lynn Vanderzalm
Revised Edition with Study Guides

Foreword by Charles Colson

Doing HIS Time

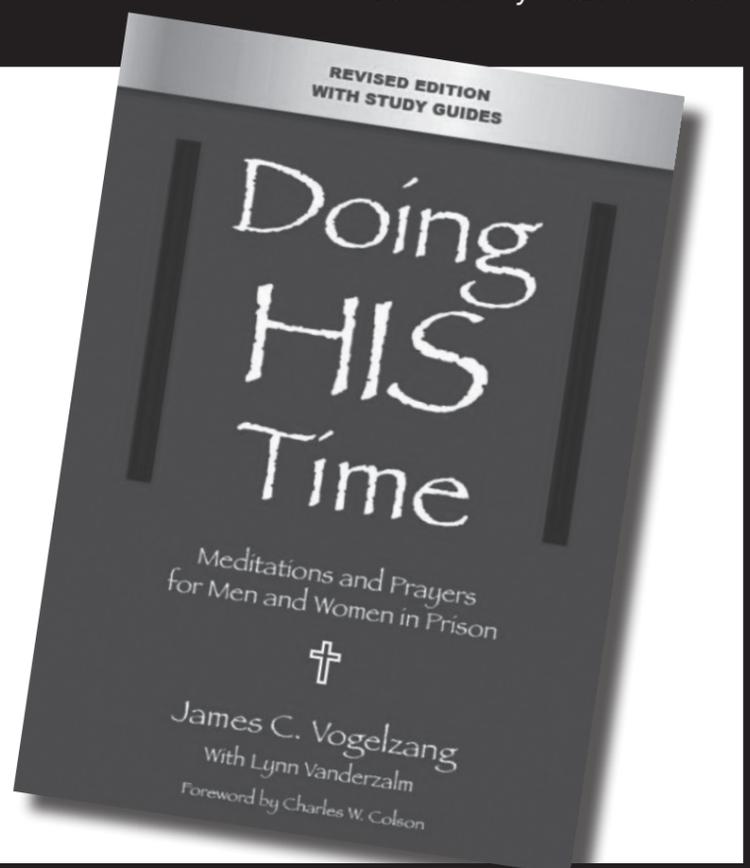
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Great Prisoners of the Bible

In honor of Inside Journal's 25th anniversary, we'll re-run some classic content from the last quarter century in each of the next four editions. We hope you enjoy!

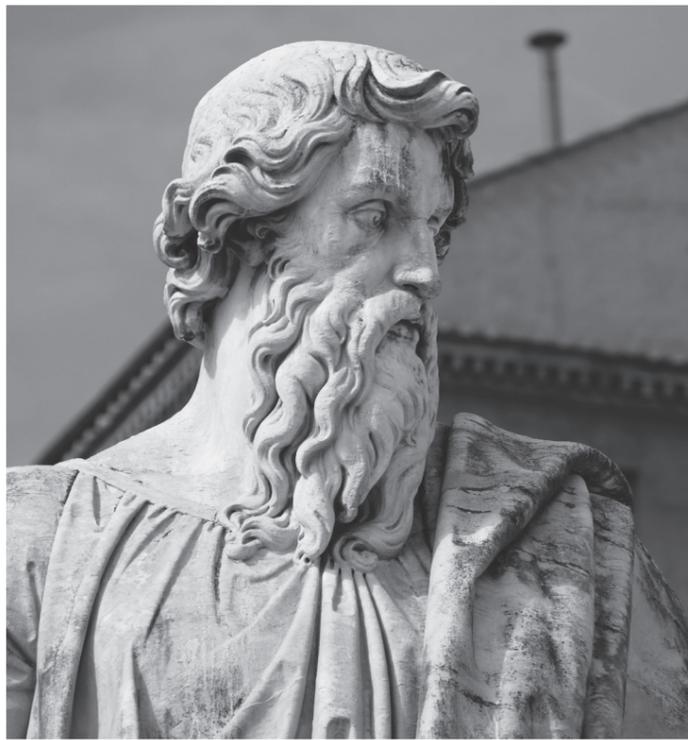
Apostle Paul: From Jailer to Jailbird

Throughout history, many people have found themselves on the inside looking out. Paul, one of the dominant personalities of the New Testament, was one. We read Paul's story in Acts 7:58-28:31 and throughout the many New Testament books he wrote. Most of those books were letters he wrote to young churches. They contain excellent teaching on how to grow as a Christian. Of the 27 documents that make up the New Testament, Paul wrote 13 of them. Luke and Acts were written by a doctor who was Paul's friend.

Paul the Enforcer

When we first meet Paul in Acts 7:58, he is vigorously persecuting Christians. Questions for personal or group study:

- What was his attitude toward the stoning of Stephen?
- What else was he doing to make life rough for Christians?
- Why do you think he hated them so much?
- Have you ever hated someone that intensely?



Paul was one of the greatest enemies—and later one of the greatest champions—of the early Christian movement.

A Dramatic Turnaround

Something incredibly dramatic happened to Paul (who was previously called Saul) one day. Luke gives the historical account of it in Acts 9. Paul talks about it in Acts 22 and Acts 26. Questions for personal or group study:

- Describe, in your own words, what happened to Paul that day.
- Was he any different after that? In what way?
- How did he view God's working in his life? (Galatians 1:15-17)
- What has been the most

dramatic turning point in your life so far?

Paul the Repeat Offender

Now Paul, the persecutor of Christians, began to receive some of his own medicine. We learn in 2 Corinthians 6:4-5 and 11:23-28 that he was in prison many times. The book of Acts records at least three. Other early church documents record at least 7 times that he was in jail, in prison, or under house arrest. He once spent two years under a soldier's guard and bound with a light chain (Acts 28:16, 20). From the book of 2 Timothy

it appears that the last time he was imprisoned without hope of release. He was executed at Rome in A.D. 66 or early 67. Questions for personal or group study:

- For what kinds of offenses was Paul imprisoned? You'll find some of the account in Acts 16:23 and chapters 23 - 28.
- A particularly dramatic prison event is recorded in Acts 16:22-40. How were Paul and Silas (his ministry partner) spending their time in prison?
- Why was the jailer about to commit suicide?
- What happened to him instead?
- What impact might how you spend your prison time have on those around you?

Lessons From the Life of Paul

We know more about Paul than almost any other person

described in the New Testament. We can learn a lot from him about what it means to live a purposeful, meaningful life. Questions for personal or group study:

- Paul often referred to his Acts 9 experience as the start of his new life in Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1). At the center of his vision was Jesus Christ. New life begins with a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Have you met Him as Paul did?
- How did Paul use his various prison stints productively? What could you do to improve the productivity of your time behind bars?
- Paul was sometimes imprisoned unjustly. Often he had difficult conditions. But he tells us in Philippians 4:11-13 what his attitude was toward it all. This is a good model for all of us. What would it take to have that kind of attitude every day? ■



Paul oversaw the public execution of Stephen, an early follower of Jesus. Eventually Paul would be jailed and executed for his own faith.

Prison Food—From Field to Chow Hall

by Kate Campbell

The Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in San Diego recently launched its new Farm and Rehabilitation Meals (FARM) program, in which prisoners work as farmers and learn sustainable agriculture, according to The Huffington Post.

To accommodate 20 prisoner-farmers, Donovan Correctional Facility is building farming facilities, including three acres of farmland on prison grounds, a classroom, and several raised garden beds to serve prisoners in wheelchairs. Their produce will be served in prison cafeterias after undergoing an approval process by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

San Diego Roots Sustainable Food Program, a nonprofit organization that promotes gardening and farming education, is partnering with the health department at Donovan to coordinate this program. "It's kind of a grand experi-

ment for all of us. We've never done anything like this before," says Richard Winkler, who is on the board of directors for San Diego Roots and volunteers to help run FARM.

"For me, this is sort of a big opportunity to demonstrate what's possible," says Richard. "It seems to me that [farming] is a basic skill that I think everybody should know."

Getting Back to the Roots

In the first class, the prisoners will start by growing summer vegetables, including tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and squash.

"We teach them how to do everything from irrigation to growing healthy soil [to] what you need to know to grow food," says Richard. The program will also teach prisoners about good nutrition.

The program was created in response to a study conducted at facilities with similar programs, which demonstrated that prisoners involved with the farming program had a recidi-

vism rate of only 5 to 10 percent, compared with California's overall rate of 61 percent.

Potential for Growth

Wehtannah Tucker, health care administrator and FARM program coordinator, hopes that the program will be able to provide certification for participants, so prisoners can more easily find jobs in the sustainable agriculture industry, especially in San Diego,

where farming skills are in high demand. Wehtannah has been working alongside Elizabeth Gransee, information officer at California Correctional Health Care Services. They hope to one day expand FARM into a statewide initiative.

"My expectation is that this curriculum will be successful in teaching inmates ... not only at Donovan, but statewide," says Wehtannah. "When we start out projects that are innovative like

this one, we start on a small scale and we see where it takes us."

Richard hopes that the program expands beyond the half acre set aside for its launch. "There's a huge potential to grow food and have an outdoor recreational activity," says Richard.

As for prisoners entering the application process to be a part of this program, Wehtannah says, "We're looking for the inmate who wants this, who is motivated to learn and to take that knowledge and share it with others." ■



A new prison agriculture program in California may bring fresher, healthier food and marketable skills to prisoners.



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