



# Newsletter

## Chaplain Ed Welsh

Isaiah 61:1

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*I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me;*

*I was in prison and you came to Me.*

*Matthew 25:36*

### Regaining a Sense of Reality

As I sit down to write this I just got back from being at the women's prison, CIW. I needed to go there tonight for a couple reasons. One of them being we are starting to set up our third concert.

It is going to be different this time in that it looks like we are going to be able to have it outside instead of in their auditorium. I sure hope it works out that way because it will give us the chance to reach a potentially much larger audience with the Gospel message. It is still in its early stages and we probably won't be in there until some time in October. But please keep this upcoming outreach in your prayers.

We are going to be having a new group of women going in by then. It really blessed me when we had sign ups; there were seventeen women who signed up to go in. So the upcoming outreach and the new group going in will all happen at just about the same time.

The other reason I wanted to go into CIW tonight was to try to regain a sense of reality. All though what I experienced the other day was all too real to me, I had to put an image back into my mind of what I perceive it should be like instead of what I had just seen.

What I am talking about is that I had the opportunity last week to go into a Mexican prison and spend the day. I had been asked to go down there a number of times and finally was able to.

I just wasn't prepared for what I was going to see! I had heard the stories about the place but actually being there and seeing it for myself is something else. It definitely was one of those "Toto we aren't in Kansas anymore" kind of things!

I hadn't been to Tijuana in somewhere around thirty years. I was amazed how much it had changed and grown. It wasn't at all like the notorious boarder town I remembered it to be.

Sure there were areas that were just like I remembered but really for the most part it looked like any modern city anywhere.

La Mesa is a prison in the Tijuana area of Mexico. I understand it used to be much worse before President Fox started to recently clean it up. But what I saw was still very bad.

There used to be whole families in the prison. When the men would go to prison the families had nowhere to go so they would go in there too. Over the years it somehow became a city within prison walls with its own kind of social structure. At least by our standards the whole thing was like some surrealistic "Mad Max" world.

Up until some months ago there were children in there also. But thankfully one of the reforms was to take them out. I was told stories of how little kids would get into fights and the children spectators would be yelling for the kids fighting to stab each other; acting out what they saw the adults doing around them.

Can you just imagine what those kids would grow up to be? Thank God they have gotten them out. I am sure it would have disturbed me a lot more had I seen kids in there too. What I saw was disturbing enough.

I understand sickness and malnutrition was just a way of life for the children in there. Fortunately now its only the adults in there who have to worry about that.

The older part of La Mesa is what you see first as you go inside. There is something that looks like an alley where cellblocks are on each side. Ropes are stretched across the alley with wet blankets and clothing hanging there dripping murky gray water. You don't want to walk under these rows of clothing or at least I didn't. I sure didn't want that dripping on me. But if you wanted to travel deeper into the prison that is just what you had to do.

The cement you walked over was broken and very uneven. As if these walkways had seen many earthquakes and much upheaval. If you didn't watch where you were going it would be very easy to trip and fall.

When I did look down there were metal grates that revealed the underground pools of stagnant greasy, gray water. It made you want to hurry all the faster to get out from under the dripping clothing hanging from above.

The next thing you can't help but notice is the smell. All prisons have

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## Regaining a Sense of Reality (continued)

a smell to them but I had never smelled anything like this before. The closest thing I could come to in description is that of a garbage dump. It did smell bad. I can't imagine ever getting used to that smell.

When we got to the other end of that alley it opened up to a wider area but not like you could notice it much. There were so many people it was hard to move around. The prison is supposed to hold 1,500 people and there are nearly 7,000! Some "cell" areas were just a fenced off area where people laid on the ground outside. It's kind of ironic, up here in the states some of the homeless go to jail to get a place to stay and in La Mesa you can be homeless in prison if you have no resources.

What it takes to make it in there is resources and or initiative. Before the reforms where they tore down the inner city, the drug lords and others with money lived fairly well. They paid up to \$8,000 a month for their living area and just what we would consider a normal cell in a prison state side would run you \$1,500.

As part of the reform they built a new prison in Tecate that houses 1,500 people and some time ago they moved some of the worst out. They then went on to bulldoze the inner city down. And now you see the start of construction going on behind chain link fences where they are going to build conventional cell blocks. What they are attempting to do is turn this into a prison more like we would recognize

I know reform never comes easy and after working within custody I have come to appreciate the other side of the equation better. It certainly is no easy job trying to run a prison anywhere. Then to have the economy they have; It's commendable what they are trying to do.

Having said that there was one thing

I saw that I just do not understand. It's not culture, it is not money. It just doesn't make any sense to me. You see the population there consists of about 6,000 men and 700 women. They are all in the same facility! Not in different sections like we have up here in some jails and prisons. They were all mingled together. I can't even imagine what it must be like for those women in there. The things they must have to do to even survive in an environment like that!

All day long I watched the women walking around, some pregnant, most with an empty look of hopelessness on their faces. It really did break my heart. I just couldn't understand why they would be subjected to that kind of degradation. I have seen a lot of man's inhumanity over the years; I was a part of it in my past. Most I can understand, even possibly justify in my mind, but this was something that went far beyond anything I can understand.

Yet, so much of what I experienced there was a blessing. Starting with Alma who is the woman who brought us in. She goes into the two prisons and brings close to 200 volunteers in to do the Lord's work. She has no past that would bring her to be in prison ministry. She never went to jail herself, nor has any of her grown children. But now she has many "children" as she puts it; all the people she ministers to within the prisons. It really is amazing; she'll even bring them to her home after they get out and help them get a start. I really enjoyed meeting her.

Another blessing that day was meeting one inmate in particular. His name is Mario and I spent a good part of my time talking to him. Partly because he could speak at least broken English. Actually we were able to communicate pretty well.

His was a very interesting story. He has been there about five years and

has somewhere around two more to go. When he came it was for drug trafficking and was one of those who was able to afford to have an \$8,000 cell. I assume he lived pretty good in there during that time. Well that all changed for him a few years ago. His people on the outside stopped taking care of him and at least some of those people were family. I am not clear if it was before or after they stopped but about the same time he became a Christian.

He was explaining to me how he really didn't care that they no longer took care of him. He says he is not even mad at them. He claims that when he gets out all he wants to do is to tell them about Jesus. When he talked about not having what he once did in there when he had money, he said "what do I need? I have all I need, I have Jesus." It blew me away to hear this man talk with such peace and conviction. As he made these statements so simply in his broken English I was reminded of what Paul said:

***Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Phil 4:11-13***

Mario was very helpful in explaining to me the history and politics of living in La Mesa. I really appreciated the

chance to get to know him but what had the most impact on me was the peace he seemed to have. It truly was a peace beyond understanding. In stark contrast to the rest of the prison their chapel was a big surprise to me. We walked in during the service already in progress in fact it was very near over. Yet they still ushered us to the front row and all around us

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## Regaining a Sense of Reality (continued)

greeted us warmly.

I was more than a little surprised that they even had a Chapel especially as expensive as real estate is in there. Their Chapel seated about 200 people and it was completely full. I didn't understand a word of what was being said but I do know they were really into it. The Pastor who is an inmate himself was preaching with passion. So much so that there wasn't enough room up front when he called them forward for the altar call at the end of service.

One thing there is a big shortage of Bibles but then this is true in every place I have gone on either side of the boarder. Unfortunately, a very large ministry promised them 5,000 Bibles many months ago and they

have never come. So with the help of friends we are going to send whatever we can down there to try to help fill the gap.

The trip down there was an eye opener for me and it touched my heart more than I realized at the time. I haven't stopped talking about it since I have been back. Its one reason this became a larger article than I usually do in these newsletters. Talking about it has already brought some unexpected fruit.

After coming back home, I told a Calvary pastor about La Mesa and his immediate reaction was "when can we go down there?" So at the end of July I'll be going back down there with two Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors. One of the pastors is from

the San Diego area where they can start going down there on a regular basis. Also there is a Missionary from the La Posada mission in Rosarita who hosts Calvarys from all over that come down. This missionary is going to be brought into all this too. Who knows what the Lord will do! It just takes a willing heart and God takes care of the rest.

Please keep all this in your prayers and there will be praise reports coming in the future.

## San Diego Crusade and Ministry Fair

What had first opened the door for me to go to La Mesa was meeting people involved with the Billy Graham crusade. Working on that project has already opened a few doors and I'm sure more to come.

I didn't get to go to one of the actual crusades and I would have really liked to have been able to do so but I have more than enough to do at the Men's Central Jail not to mention all the other things we are trying to do with Jesus is the Key. I did get to go down for one of the prison outreaches into Donovan state prison and that was enough for me.

Donovan has a reception center with about 500 inmates and a level one area with another 200 that are the workers for the institution. For those who don't remember, a level one is minimum custody and level four is the highest custody. The majority of people, about 1,500 are level three; they are classified as high-medium custody. I am not sure how many yards there are there but

I believe it is much like the prison we go to out at Blythe Ironwood state prison where they have five yards.

The day of the outreach the weather was very overcast and looked like rain. We were praying that it wouldn't and as we stood out front waiting to be checked in we joked about how we should have brought our umbrellas. We had no idea how true that would be.

I am not sure how many churches were represented in the volunteers that participated but I heard it was nearly two hundred. In talking to some of the people going into the prison most had never done anything like that before. It was really nice having all these people wanting to get involved.

I was looking forward to seeing how a big organization does an outreach. And I found out right away, no different than what we had already been doing. They were doing more in sheer

numbers with all the facilities but the format was just like what we had. That was reassuring to have that kind of confirmation.

As we got into the yard and started the program it didn't take long to see the weather was not going to cooperate. We barely got going and it started to sprinkle and it didn't take long before it was pouring.

It was decided that the main speaker would come up early and give the main message. The speaker was Miles McPherson, a dynamic speaker, pastor, and former defensive back for the San Diego Chargers. He is the founder of Miles Ahead Ministries, which sponsors evangelistic crusades. Miles is also the senior pastor of The ROCK, a church in San Diego, CA.

In the pouring rain he gave an awesome message and when it came time to ask the men to raise their hands if they wanted to accept Christ into their

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lives, you literally could not see many

## San Diego Crusade and Ministry Fair (continued)

of them in the down pour.

I wondered later how all the electrical equipment fared in all that rain. But it really was all worth it. A couple different inmates later mentioned how it really ministered to them that we were willing to stand out there in that rain for them. They knew we could have gotten in out of the rain if we had wanted to. They couldn't get out of the rain until they had the next yard recall where they could go back inside. I know that all of us out there didn't even think of leaving. I would be willing to get wet for something like that anytime.

Overall the crusades into the prisons were very fruitful. I understand there were many commitments and rededications to Christ over the week of prison crusades. And as important as all those decisions are there is something else just as important. And that is the faithfulness of the volunteers.

Hopefully many of these churches that were a part of this outreach will

continue to go into these different facilities. That is the whole idea to get these local churches plugged in to long term ministry with in these jails and prisons.

Another way we tried to get the churches plugged in was with a follow up prison ministry fair. A number of weeks after the outreach we had the fair in the parking lot of a San Diego area church. Fortunately the weather was much nicer that day.

There were somewhere between 15 to 20 different ministries represented there that day. From prison ministry to aftercare. From groups who do pen pal correspondence to Bible study correspondence programs. Everyone had their booths and tables set up with just about every aspect of prison ministry you could think of.

It was really nice to see all the different groups coming together for a common goal; truly different parts of the body. Regrettably too many ministries want to compete rather than cooperate.

From what I understand nearly 700 churches were invited. I'm sure not nearly that many came out but it was a very good turn out. The fair lasted for four hours and there was a constant flow of people the whole time.

I know I passed out somewhere around 100 brochures on Jesus is the Key and there was some churches that have said they would like for us to help them start a prison ministry of there own. I spoke with one black Baptist minister at some length about what he would like to do with his church.

I had no idea how many Calvary Chapels there were in the general San Diego area; 24 of them. I got to speak to a number of people who go to many of them.

I am very encouraged to see how much interest there is in prison ministry. And I am really looking forward to seeing what God is going to do.



The people from the local churches checking out the different Ministry displays.



Chaplain Richey  
Calipatria State Prison

Chaplain Brown  
R.J. Donovan State Prison

Henry Amaya  
Calvary Chapel Montebello  
Prison Ministry Overseer

Dave Hunt in full time Ministry as A  
Yard Pastor in Donovan State Prison  
Horizon Christian Fellowship

Jorge Garcia  
Oversees Spanish Ministry  
Prison Fellowship

## He is so Good

In one of my recent newsletters I wrote about a new Orthodox Jewish Chaplain that has come to do ministry at the jail. He really has become a blessing to me and I have really enjoyed getting to know him.

Just a few weeks ago he honored me by sending me an invitation to the wedding of his daughter. I would have really enjoyed going to the wedding but it turned out to be on the same day as when I went down to the prison in Mexico.

Last month the front office at the jail told me to keep the 22nd open. When I asked for what, they only said

something concerning the Orthodox Jewish Chaplaincy had something going on.

What was planned turned out to be a very nice surprise. And what made it even nicer for me was that I was able to have my wife there with me to share in the experience.

What happened was that a number of us Chaplains were honored by receiving proclamations from the L.A. Board of Supervisors, the Mayor of Los Angeles and from Sheriff Lee Baca.

The Orthodox Rabbis were recognized for their work in establishing their Chaplaincy Board. Then the staff of the Office of Religious and Volunteer Services were recognized for the assistance given by them. After that they gave a Chaplain from the Wayside Honor Ranch facility and myself proclamations for our help in the program at the facility level.

These past nearly three years have brought many changes and blessings. I am continually in awe of the favor God has shown me. He is so good.



## The One Who Gives Us All Hope

Some have asked what is happening with Hannibal and Monster. In that question being asked it made me realize I needed to get back saying more about what is happening at the jail. I promise to do more of that in upcoming newsletters.

Just briefly Monster is doing well. He is in the Word and every time I see him he has good Bible questions that assures me he is both in the word and seeking to learn more. I always get blessed when I get the time to stop by to see him.

As for Hannibal that is a different story altogether. In anything from my past experiences I have never come across anyone like him. It is beyond my ability to help reach him, only God could soften a heart like his.

They recently published a book about him and ironically my wife and I read it while we were traveling to northern California for a funeral. It turned out that the town we went to for the funeral was where one of the murders he had done happened. If I had known some of the things brought out in that book, I would have had better insight into how to handle him.

In the book they talk about another Chaplain who lost his job and nearly got in trouble with the courts too. So I know that the Lord had His covering on me to keep me from a similar fate. Long ago I said that maybe the Lord brought him into my life just for me to learn something? Because I certainly didn't do any good in getting through to him.

They dropped the charges on the case

he had here due to technicalities. I went by to see him before he left to go back to state prison. I wanted to say good bye. Also long ago I had made a commitment to him that I would be there for him when the time came for the AIDS to take its toll. Back then we believed he would die at the jail while he was fighting his case. His first case took seven years to be completed!

I told him when the time comes I would still stand behind my commitment, if he wanted I would go to the state to see him there. But that didn't even matter to him, he instead wanted to try to continue his endless manipulations and when I once again said no, I left him screaming and angrily pounding on the glass. I could still hear him while I was in the

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elevator three floors down from where he was.

When things like that happen you can become very discouraged. But whenever that happens it never fails, the Lord has something happen to let me know it is Him who is in control.

Just as soon as I came back to my office one of the new trustees came in to ask me a question. His name is Sam. Sam is Chinese and that is some what unusual because almost always the Asians are kept apart from the rest of the population. Not all Asians in there are in the gangs but the get lumped together anyway.

Sam is a really nice guy, polite, soft spoken and always respectful. The other inmates call him Jackie Chan not that he looks like the actor but he does have a similar personality. He is very muscular and just has a look about him where you wouldn't want to find out if he also knew marshal arts like the actor too.

Sam came to see if he could get some Bibles for the men that were up on the Asian modules who aren't able to get out themselves. I asked him if he was a Christian and he said no but he knew a little about it. He had been raised Buddhist and if he believed in anything it would be his past heritage.

I liked Sam right from our first meeting

and now just about every day he comes by to talk. He says he feels comfortable talking with me and we can talk about things he would never talk about with the other inmates.

God had brought Sam to me just at the right time. With me feeling very much the failure with Hannibal, I needed to see God's hand at work. And that is just what has happened. I gave Sam a Bible to read and I feel sure I am going to see the Lord do a work there over the coming months.

I think if I were to boil it down to just one thing I like doing more than the rest it is being able to spend time one on one with these guys. To make the connection and be able to see God at work. There is nothing else like it.

Sure it is all good. No matter if it is a one on one or doing a Bible study with 150 men at once, it all comes down to letting the Lord be in control. When I try to take control, I mess it up every time.

Judging by the results the best sermons happen when I am unexpectedly called to teach a Bible study at the last minute. Had one happen like that just this past week when one of the other Chaplains didn't show up and ten minutes before the study I had to come up with something. Then at the end a number of people raise their hands to ask Jesus into their lives! You just know its none of your doing and all you can say is thank you Lord.

When the inmates want to come see us for counseling, they fill out a slip and hopefully we are able to call them out within a reasonable amount of time. I have recently lost three of the Assistant Chaplains who worked with me and if I don't have their help it means I have to do it myself. I am getting behind on the slips and I won't be able to get more assistants for awhile. What is good that is going to come out of it is the county has agreed to let us bring in some Bible college students to do some of the work. We are setting up a class with the college so they will get intern credit.

Just yesterday I was reading some of the requests. One in particular touched me, he wrote, "I have no one so please call me out , I need to talk."

He sounded so desperate, so hopeless. But then that is really something that makes my job a little easier in trying to point them to the one who gives us all hope.

I had a guy tell me the other day about how the world all mocks them for trying to find God while they are in jail. You know the label, " Jailhouse Religion." I told him its true the world says that all the time but then I suggested to him the next time he hears something like that, listen to the one who is saying it. I'll bet you its someone who doesn't know God themselves. That is why they are mocking it, it doesn't matter where you find God, just that you find Him!

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: All Chaplains associated with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department jail system , work on a strictly volunteer basis. There is a :  
: complete adherence to the separation of Church and State . So as a form of disclaimer, I wish to clearly state this newsletter in no :  
: way represents the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. I work with the Sheriff's Department in the spirit of cooperation for the :  
: purpose of serving the men and women incarcerated in the Los Angeles County Jail system . The county in no way compensates us :  
: for what we do as Chaplains. My support comes solely from donations made to send me as a missionary to the incarcerated . :  
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