

PMA
Outreach



Volume 12 Issue 1

The Newsletter of Prison Mission Association

MARCH 2006

PRISON MISSION ASSOCIATION PROCLAIMING GOD'S GRACE FOR HALF A CENTURY

2005 marked the 50th anniversary of Prison Mission Association. During that time a history of the mission was compiled and a synopsis was prepared to give friends of the ministry a good summary of how PMA came to be and the people and events that have shaped its purpose and objectives for half a century. As a final tribute to our sesquicentennial celebration we decided to share this brief overview of Prison Mission Association with the readers of PMA Outreach.

*The following italicized paragraphs are excerpts from the book **Adventures in a Prison Ministry** by Joe Mason.*

It was summer of 1933 and the railroad yards were loaded with transients seeking a free ride to somewhere. They were going to different destinations, but few could tell you where or why. The thought seemed to be simply that "somewhere" would be a better place for living than the "here and now."

As I traveled those many miles by rail, I began a careful review of my life. At age 23 I knew myself to be a failure in both college and university. A drinking habit grew slowly and a drift away from the home church as well.

Years later I see that this taste of affliction worked for my ultimate good. I was brought face to face with the reality of life. Arriving in California I was to hear a simple and basic message of the good news of Christ.

It was in Weatherford, Texas that Prison Mission Association was formed. Here it was that I sensed the need to visit some of the many jails in the area. I had a tape that Henry Gonzales had provided for me when I asked for his testimony and it was natural to introduce his testimony as we began a teaching message.

Soon after the mission was formed we realized that we needed some form of follow up. I learned that other missions in foreign lands would advertise and offer free Bible courses. It was this idea that led me to discover a study of only four lessons. As the mission grew it was natural to add other courses., and so there is today a number of studies that are sent free to all. Not only are the courses for prisoners but they are sent to non-prisoners as well. Today there is an outreach around the world

I was about to experience an adventure in my spiritual growth. We drove some 30 miles to Mineral Wells (Texas), and arrived just in time to hear the main service. Pastor R.B. Shiflet spoke on, "Why the signs of Mark 16 are not for us today." His reference to scripture was sound, I had never heard these things before and I had been a believer for some 20 years. I decided not to challenge him for his errors till I heard more of his message. I was soon to recognize that he was able to answer some problems I had in God's Word. One of our students was seeking to assure me that the signs of Mark 16:17-18 were for us today. I knew that the signs were not for us today yet the student had scripture. I was to learn from Brother Shiflet we need to rightly divide scripture as we see in 2 Timothy 2:15.

Prison Mission Association was founded in Weatherford Texas in 1955. After several years of working in Texas the ministry relocated to Albuquerque, New Mexico, then Phoenix, Arizona and finally in the late 1960's to Riverside, California where PMA was based for more than twenty five years.

It was during the years in Riverside that PMA expanded its outreach to become a truly worldwide ministry. In the early 1970's Pastor Ken Parker joined the organization for a period of time and traveled to Cameroon, West Africa to establish contacts with Dr. Lawrence Asong. As a result of that trip a Bible Correspondence Fellowship ministry was established that reached

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A Note from the Director

Even though PMA's 50th anniversary year is over we wanted to give our readers one more opportunity to celebrate God's faithfulness to the ministry by publishing a synopsis of our history, from 1955 to the present and beyond.

This issue of *PMA Outreach* also has an exciting interview with Pastor Mick Robinson of Canal Fulton, Ohio in which he describes how he is using our lessons to ground members of his congregation in the Word of God. There is also an extended Spanish Side section which gives attention to the work of Arnie and Sally Selfors with Hispanics in Florida where they have a vibrant cross-cultural ministry both in and out of prisons. I hope you will be as inspired and

enthused as I am about how God is working in this tremendously diverse part of our country.

In this issue's God's Perspective you can also read about how the Apostle Peter became emboldened after the descent of the Holy Spirit so that he was willing to go to prison for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ on multiple occasions.



Dm

Reaching Out by Reaching In

Pastor Mick Robinson is the pastor of Grace Bible Church in Canal Fulton, Ohio. Several people in his church have been using the Bible Correspondence Fellowship lessons to help them develop a stronger foundation in their understanding of the Word of God. I recently spoke with Pastor Mick and had him explain how the lessons are being used and the impact they are having in his congregation. —Editor



PMA-Outreach: Can you describe how you are using the BCF lessons now?

Mick: Right now we're calling it the evening school of the Bible but we are using it both as a study with a group of people that gather together and do the lessons as a group and allowing people from the church to do the lessons on their own time and at their own pace and we correct those lessons as well.

PMA-O: How many people do you have involved right now?

Mick: There are between 20 and 25 total that are involved and between seven and eight in the group that goes through the lessons together.

PMA-O: How long have you been doing the program?

Mick: We started in the middle of September 2005.

PMA-O : What is the response that you've seen from the people that are involved in the program.

Mick: Excellent. They can all tell that it is a programmed study where they're getting a foundation and building upon it and it's kind of fun to see the excitement in the eyes of some of them that are going through this material for the first time.

PMA-O: What has been some of the response specifically from some of the younger believers or those that are less well grounded in their knowledge of the Word of God.

Mick: They're loving it. There are a couple of gals that are not taking it with the group but are going at their own pace. Both of them have said that they have never been able to understand the Bible before and now it's making sense to them and they can understand it.

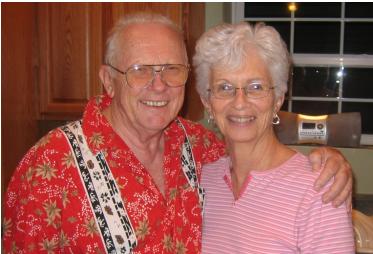
PMA-O: Is there anything else you can say about the lessons you have been using?

Mick: Our goal for the group that is going through the group together is to complete all eight of the Understanding the Bible lessons by Spring. I feel that everybody that has gone through those courses is much better trained and equipped to teach the Word, whether it be Sunday School or children's church or youth club, whatever.

PMA-O: Would you recommend these lessons to other churches that are looking for ways to build a better foundation of knowledge of the Word of God for their membership?

Mick: Absolutely! I've had a problem for all my ministry life of trying to make everything myself and it's kind of stupid to try to reinvent the wheel. This material is put together so well that it is kind of foolish to try to do something that has already been done.

THE SPANISH SIDE



One of the first ways Prison Mission Association began to branch out in its early years was to institute a Spanish ministry. Because of PMA's origins in the Southwest, the need to reach out to the Hispanic population has been very evident. Lessons were written in Spanish very early on and for most of the ministry's history there have been one or more people responsible for the Hispanic outreach. Now that PMA's presence extends to every state in the U.S. the need for a strong outreach to the Spanish speaking population is greater than ever. To help fill the need in this area PMA has recruited Arnie and Sally Selfors. The Selfor's are retired missionaries living in Largo, Florida in the Tampa Bay area. They have had extensive experience throughout Latin America, having ministered in Bolivia for many years as well as Uruguay and Puerto Rico. When Arnie and Sally returned to the U.S. they could leave behind their love for the Spanish-speaking people or their burden for ministry. Because of the large number of Hispanics in the Tampa area the Selfors very soon were able to establish an outreach among them. At the same time they were willing to be a part of PMA's outreach and work with Spanish speaking inmates. Originally, they were only advising the woman that was helping to correct Spanish lessons, Ida Vazquez, but gradually their role increased and they began to take over more and more responsibilities. In 2002 Arnie became the Field Representative for Hispanic Ministries.

Their responsibilities with PMA include helping with the developing of the Spanish speaking lessons, correcting lessons that arrive from all Hispanic inmates, corresponding with inmates and doing in-jail visitation and Bible studies. They play a vital role as link between our home office that sends out the lessons and the inmates that learn and grow spiritually through their study.

Arnie started doing in-jail outreach by going into the Pinellas County jail and offering English lessons for the Hispanic inmates. Eventually they asked him to include Bible study and now he has dropped the English lessons and only has a Bible study with the men. I recently had an opportunity to accompany Arnie for one of his Bible studies. This happened to be a group of English speaking inmates that had requested Arnie to come and teach Bible studies for them as well. It was an exhilarating time as about 10 inmates met together with sincerity and enthusiasm as Arnie and I discussed God's Word with them.

Another very exciting work that Arnie and Sally are doing, though not directly associated with PMA, is a weekly Hispanic Bible study. They have a group that can range from 10-15 and sometimes more that come together each week for a time of fellowship around the Word of God and with one another. Some of the members of the group are people that Arnie and Sally knew while ministering in Latin America, the majority, however, are people that heard about the gathering through word of mouth. A number of people have accepted Christ through these Bible studies and some have even returned to their homeland in order to share the gospel with their families, friends and countrymen.

In addition to the Tuesday evening Bible class, many from that group attend Grace Bible Fellowship in Pinellas Park. They join in with the full congregation during the songs, prayer and preliminary parts of the worship service and then when the sermon starts they go to a separate room in which Sally translates the preaching for them into Spanish.

As well as the ministry that they do, Arnie and Sally still both hold part time jobs, play tennis every week and stay very busy in the activities of their church. All in all they are a very active couple and a tremendous asset to the ministry of Prison Mission Association.

PMA accepts contributions for the Selfors ministry and they are assisted financially by a small stipend that is sent to them. If you would like to be a part of the Selfors ministry you can send gifts to the Port Orchard office of PMA with a designation for the Selfors' ministry.

Meet the Board of Prison Mission Association

Todd Nelson—Secretary



Todd Nelson has been a board member of Prison Mission Association since 1991 and has served as board secretary since 1993.

Todd and his wife, Tina, are from Enumclaw, Washington. He is the board president of the Northwest Bible Church and has been belonged to the church since it was founded in 1986. Todd came to know the Lord at a young age, though he cannot pinpoint an exact date. However, after spending time in the service he became a more dedicated believer and started attending church more regularly and becoming more involved in ministry. As their commitment grew the Nelsons eventually took on more and more ministry responsibilities.

Todd worked for 22 years as an excavation contractor and currently he maintains the water system for the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation outside of Enumclaw. Todd and Tina have two grown children and three grandchildren.

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 several West African nations. It was also during that time that the BCF ministry made valuable contacts in Kenya, South Africa, Australia, India and several other countries. Many of those contacts developed into long term ministries, some having been followed up by foreign mission agencies and continue today.

After founding Prison Mission Association in 1955 and leading its ministry for 36 years Joe Mason retired as director in 1991. At that time Vernon Bigelow, a former missionary to the Philippines, took over the directorship.

This was the same time that PMA relocated its offices from California to Port Orchard, Washington. This relocation served as an important milestone in the ministry's history as it opened up opportunities for outreach in a completely new part of the United States. The early years in Port Orchard were also a time of restructuring of the organization as new by-laws were drawn up and board members from the Pacific Northwest were recruited to help guide and direct PMA toward the future.

There was concern about the future of PMA after Joe Mason retired. He had founded it and been its driving force for all of its history to that point. The Bigelows were used by God to keep the ministry vital and moving ahead even after Joe stepped down.

In 1997 Vernon Bigelow passed away and Nathan Whitham became the director of Prison Mission Association. Under Nathan's leadership the lessons were reformatted, improving their appearance and making them easier for the inmates to fill out. By making use of modern technology it became possible for the operation of the ministry to become more efficient.

One of the most significant additions to the PMA ministry during those years was our sponsorship of the annual revival at the Washington Corrections Center in Shelton. This annual event gives PMA the opportunity to present the gospel to up to

2000 inmates during a single weekend. We continue to organize the Shelton Revival.

In 1991, soon after PMA moved to Port Orchard, Washington and Vern Bigelow took over as the director of the ministry Karen Bodeutsch was hired as a receptionist and lesson coordinator. Karen has been with PMA ever since and today she is the office manager and is in charge of all the operations of PMA that take place in the Port Orchard office.

Karen's association with the ministry is actually longer than any other person besides Joe Mason himself. She has a passion and commitment for the ministry that has helped to encourage volunteers to become involved in the ministry as lesson correctors, and helpers with the many tasks involved with sending lessons, Bibles and literature to inmates throughout the U.S. and around the world.

PMA owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Karen for her dedicated and faithful service for more than a decade. Her role in the ministry has been an important part of its fifty year history.

Our history of PMA thus far has taken us from its humble beginnings in Weatherford, Texas with Joe Mason up to the move in 1991 to Port Orchard, Washington and the directorship of Nathan Whitham.

Nathan left PMA in around the year 2000 and for over a year the ministry was lead by Bob Bobo who served as an interim director. Bob was instrumental in keeping the ministry alive during those years. Had he not been available to serve during that time it is uncertain if PMA would have been able to continue.

It was also during this time that a number of volunteers stepped up to make it possible for the ministry to function in the absence of a fulltime director. One of those was Faith Demarais who is an accountant. She put in a tremendous amount of work to make sure that all the financial records conformed with accounting standards.

These individuals are evi-

dence of God's continued care for the ministry of Prison Mission Association.

In 2001 Don Sommer took over the directorship of PMA. He shares the vision of Joe Mason and all previous directors, seeking to make it possible to get the Good News of Christ out to people all throughout the world through correspondence courses and other media as well. Since 2001 PMA has seen a standardization of the format of all the lessons, so that every PMA lesson has a similar look and style. All the text has been put into a digital format and made available on CD ROM and on the PMA website so that more people can use the lessons for teaching and personal growth. All this has been for the purpose of making this wonderful truth of God's Grace more accessible to everyone and anyone.

Along with developing lessons, PMA has recently been encouraging more and more local churches to take on Prison ministry and to be involved in reaching the incarcerated.

Prison Mission Association is one of the oldest continuously operating prison ministries in the United States, and the future for the outreach is bright.

By God's grace, Prison Mission Association will continue to minister to inmates throughout the United States and around the world by providing correspondence Bible studies, literature, Bibles and letters of instruction and encouragement. We hope to add new lessons every year so that eventually we will have a one for every book of the New Testament. We believe that lives are changed as they encounter the Word of God presented in an understandable and dispensationally accurate way.

Besides our literature and correspondence ministry, we will fulfill our mission to "Reach Prisoners for Christ" through our annual Shelton Revival, personal visits to inmates, through the Internet and by encouraging churches and individuals to become actively involved locally by reaching out to prisons and jails in their area.



GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

This is the tenth in a series that examines references to prisoners and prisoners in the Bible. In this article we look at Peter, the most prominent apostle during the time of the Lord's earthly ministry and afterwards, during the period in which God was offering the Kingdom of Heaven to Israel after the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. We can read of Peter's experiences in and out of prison in Acts 2-12.

Much has been said about Peter and his impulsive personality. Before the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2 we see Peter as a person that could one minute declare that he was willing to follow the Lord Jesus Christ to his death and the next deny he ever knew him. After the arrival and subsequent baptism with the Holy Spirit we see Peter endowed with a new boldness that enabled him to fearlessly preach to the Jews that had congregated in Jerusalem about their Messiah, whom they had rejected and had crucified. Because of his and John's courageous preaching they enraged the leaders of Israel and they had them arrested. Because they had healed a lame man in front a crowd of people the Jewish leaders could not keep the two Apostle's locked up for long. When the Sadducees questioned them and found out that they had committed no crime they had to be released, yet the Jewish leadership tried to keep Peter and John quiet and forbade them from preaching about Jesus. However, Peter and John responded that they could not be silent and they had to testify of the things they had seen and heard. As the Apostles continued to perform signs and wonders and their notoriety grew

throughout Jerusalem the leaders of Israel were again filled with jealousy and had Peter and John arrested. This time they were able to walk out of jail, not because they had been released by the guards but because an angel came along and lopened the door for them and led them to freedom, giving them instructions to preach in the temple court. When the leaders of the Sanhedrin realized that the two Apostles were gone they once again had them arrested. This time, they were wisely advised by Gamaliel, Saul of Tarsus' mentor, that if this movement were of God there was nothing that the Sanhedrin or anyone could do to stop it. After being beaten, the apostles returned to the streets where they continued to boldly preach about the risen Jesus and his power to save Israel from her sin. Peter and John rejoiced and praised God that they had been considered worthy to suffer on behalf of the gospel and for the cause of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Several years later Herod Agrippa started a persecution against the Christian believers in his realm which included Judea, and much of the rest of Palestine. When he saw how he had pleased the Jews by having James the Apostle, the brother of John, executed he proceeded to have Peter arrested with the likely intention of doing the same to him. However, while Peter was sleeping in the prison an angel appeared to him, woke him and led him out to the street. When Peter realized what was going on he knew that God had preserved his life in order that he could continue to do the His-work

Nearly 20 years later, when Peter wrote his first epistle he was able to speak from experience when he said, *"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."* (1 Peter 4:15-16) Peter willingly accepted persecution and suffering for the glory of God.

Peter's epistles, written primarily for Jewish believers (1 Peter 1:1), will have direct application during the tribulation that will follow the rapture of the Body of Christ and during a time in which many believers will be imprisoned for their faith and trust in Jesus as Messiah. Even today, while such persecution is not universal, there are thousands of believers that are in prison around the world because they have a bold and courageous testimony for the Lord. Peter provides us with an example of someone that with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit was able to be transformed from an impulsive and often insecure disciple to a fearless messenger of the hope and joy that comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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KAREN'S KORNER

The Discovery series has more than 140 booklets available on numerous topics. One of their courses features the Title *"The Mind of Christ – Experiencing the Joy of the Christlike Difference."* This title reminds me of a vital part of PMA to hundreds of inmates all over the United States. Our lessons deal with learning the mind of Christ and the joy that comes with Christ in our life.

Our Bible studies make inmates knowledgeable in the Scriptures so they can rightly divide and recognize false teaching along with the practical importance of Scripture. One inmate writes, "Thank you for the study on the book of Philemon. In this study I have seen the importance of relationships, that is forgiving one another and welcoming those who we have wronged or who have wronged us in the past, back as a brother or sister in Christ, restoring fellowship that was once lost." JB

Yet another inmate writes, "I do a lot of different Bible studies by mail but you have the only one that rightly divides God's Word." GB

TH wrote, "I truly enjoy taking these Bible courses. They help me focus on the Word of God. They also give me strength to endure my time here in prison. I look forward to sharing with others what I have learned from these lessons."

My prayer for this year is that we will be able to process over 4,000 lessons. This year we processed 3899 and that is up by 523 over last year. This year we processed 1310 new lessons and that is up by 310! We had 17 finish all of our lessons last year too. And we sent out 58 Bibles. I didn't think



about tracking the Spanish lessons until August. Since then we processed 156 Spanish lessons and 60 of them were new lessons. We gave out over 1,080 certificates for completed lesson.

Right now we have seven lesson correctors and we are adding one more soon. I'm also blessed with four faithful women who come and work one day a week. One of those comes in two days a week. That's a huge help to me as I'm kept extremely busy with all the other things I do here at PMA.

Here is a list of all my correctors and office helpers: Jack Nelson, Wanda Hightower, Lolamae Abbott, Helen Loverin, Louise Hunsaker, Kay Bodeutsch, Jamie Siroski, Karen Gillis, Celeste Wedding, Gladys Hansen, Linda Howell and Pastor Cal Bodeutsch. Thank you all so much! ♥

I also want to give a big thank you for some special ladies that pray regularly for the inmate's requests and also for all the new students—God bless! They are: Ruby Anderson, Cindy Huckabee, Elizabeth Williams, The Grace Girls, Joanne Pierce, Joanne Rhyne, Sue Sommer and Linda Warner. ♥

I am very excited for this, another new year. May God continue to bless all of you as you continue to pray and give to PMA in 2006.

"But by love serve one another" (Galatians 6:13b).

By God's grace,
Karen