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What's Happening at HeartBound Lately?

**Minds and Hearts Changed** through Angola Prison Trip,  
**Prison Chaplains Honored** at 4th Annual Appreciation Luncheon,  
**Light Triumphs over Darkness** through The Integrity Project,  
**Correctional Officers Applauded** by the Georgia Legislature...

In Other Words, God Is at Work!!!

**Heart-Changing Trip To Angola Featured on NPR!**

For the third straight time, HeartBound sponsored a bus trip to visit Angola Prison in Louisiana. We packed a fifty-five passenger bus with Georgia wardens, chaplains, prison staff and HeartBound folks for three days in April to this most unlikely and special place. It's a place that used to be the bloodiest prison in America, but now it overflows with born-again men, virtually all lifers, who have restored dignity and hope through Jesus Christ. This was supposed to be our last trip, but it is just too in-demand to stop! HeartBound will sponsor another trip there in October because visiting Angola is changing the way Georgia prisons operate. Here's a case in point. One Georgia chaplain writes, *"After returning from Angola, the Warden insisted upon buying a lighted cross to go above the door leading into the chapel. It is going to be 2' tall, and the cross members will be 11" wide. It will light up a Thomas Kincade picture of a chapel and a very serene village. It will say in beautiful letters, "All things are possible with God." The Warden said in this morning's staff meeting that he got the idea from the dedication service at Angola. He went on to say that he wanted the inmates to be able to lay in their bunks and see the lighted cross above the door of the chapel. Isn't that the neatest thing you ever heard?"*

This trip we were joined by Larry Schall, President of Oglethorpe University, who wrote an essay on his experience which has been recorded for National Public Radio. Attached is Larry's powerful expression of the impact of Angola. Also enclosed is a photo of our group with Franklin Graham at the dedication of the Graham Chapel at Angola, built in honor of Franklin's parents, Billy and Ruth Graham. It was the thrill of a lifetime to meet Franklin Graham and hear him preach in a prison! If a picture says a thousand words, the smiles of our folks say it all!

**Chaplains Appreciation Luncheon Encourages Chaplains...and HeartBound**

On Tuesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>, we held our fourth annual luncheon to honor and encourage Georgia prisons chaplains, wardens, and Department of Correction personnel – about 175 people in all. At the luncheon, Mark Earley shared his journey from being Virginia's Attorney General ("the Top Cop") to becoming President of Prison Fellowship, and former Atlanta Falcons star Wallace Francis (now the National Director of Ambassadors for Christ International) provided a powerful message for all -- "God uses strategic people in strategic places for a strategic message." As part of the luncheon, we honored Charlene McElheney as "Prison Chaplain of the Year." It's easy to see why. The following are some of the messages the inmates wrote to thank Chaplain McElheney on her day:

*"I'm the one who needed someone to talk to. It was the first time I'd been locked up and I couldn't stand being away from my wife and kids. You listened to me. You showed me scriptures to read and you prayed with me."*

*"I'm the guy the officers brought to you in handcuffs. I was really messed up, but you talked with me. You told me about Jesus and I asked Him into my heart. You gave me a pocket Bible and wrote my names and the date inside of it. That was a major turning point in my life and I'll never be the same. I think about you every time I see your handwriting in the front of that little Bible."*

*“I’m the one whose mother died around Christmas and I really didn’t think I could hold it together. You gave me a book called “Sorrow Not” and prayed with me. You even called me to your office several times after that, just to make sure I was doing okay.”*

*“I’m the inmate who was sitting in your service in M building when you told us we couldn’t go back to doing the same thing we’ve been doing or else we would keep getting the same results. You said that’s what people would call insanity. You told us about God and how He sent His son to die for us. My heart broke as I thought about the things I had done and the family I have left on the outside. I asked God to forgive me that night and accepted Christ as my Savior.”*

*“I’m the one you helped find a place in a Christian halfway house when my family turned their backs on me. I’ve been a Christian for a long time but never lived like one until I got here and started reading the Bible you gave me.”*

*“I’m the guy who couldn’t keep my cool when things got crazy in my dorm. You have so many good books that I buried myself in them and it helped me do my time easier. I don’t know where you get all those books but God really uses you to help us.”*

*“I’m the one who wanted to learn more about the Bible and God. You got me a Bible study that made me dig deep in my Bible and even mailed it for me when I was done. I can’t wait to do a new book every month.”*

*“I’m the one who bugged you all the time, just wanting to talk. I’ll never forget what you told me when I was getting ready to parole out. You treated me like I was somebody special or like I was one of your kids. You’re the best, Chap.”*

We were thrilled to honor our chaplains who are on the front lines and making a difference.

### **Darkness or Light? One Integrity Project Teen Makes the Choice of a Lifetime...**

For a number of months, HeartBound has sponsored The Integrity Project at Bill Ireland Youth Development Center in Milledgeville (a youth prison). While the Project has had its struggles (the spiritual warfare has been intense), there have been success stories. One such story occurred recently when Terry Cliett, the leader of The Integrity Project, encountered a boy who professed to be a Wiccan practitioner. After participating in The Integrity Project for a number of weeks, the boy came to Terry and told him that he had asked Jesus to come into his heart and change him, and had been baptized. As Terry put it, “This boy put the religions he was looking at to the test of integrity, and Christianity won out. He recognized Christ as the Integrity decision.” Truly, “the truth and the light” triumphs over darkness! **Please pray for Terry, the boys and for future funding for The Integrity Project!**

### **Correctional Officers Have Their Day!**

For the first time ever, HeartBound sponsored an appreciation day for Georgia’s correctional officers. House Resolution 1214 honored their efforts on behalf of Georgia’s prisons, putting icing on the cake! Wardens and chaplains across the state honored their correctional officers on Thursday, May 1, in a variety of ways – goodie bags, cookouts, ice cream socials and more. As one officer put it, “*This is a big day for us and we have waited on this for such a long time.*” These men and women are unsung heroes, and they need to be told how valued and appreciated they are. We did!!

### **Some Final Thoughts...**

One warden recently wrote, “No one individual or any Association has ever been so attuned to the needs of inmates or staff. Thank goodness for HeartBound!” In closing, we want to say thank goodness for **YOU!** Please know that HeartBound is able to do what it does because of **YOU** and God’s amazing and unending grace. Thank you again.

**Serving the fenced-in flock, Andrea Shelton, Jan Spencer, Darcy Harper, Woodrow Hudson, Richard Maner, Galen Oelkers, Vennie Owen, Martha Ray, Lisa Timmons and Norah White**

**NPR segment by President Larry Schall, Oglethorpe University, Atlanta.**

Hope or despair. Redemption or retribution. Dignity or degradation. As I enter my fourth year as president of Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, these words may seem odd to be at the forefront of my thinking. While life as a college president is not easy, despair, retribution and degradation thankfully don't describe too many moments in my life. Then again, it's been only three years. No, these words are fixed in my mind not because of my day-to-day work, but rather because of a break from that work. Two Oglethorpe alumni who have become dear friends invited my wife, my daughter and me to join them last weekend in prison: Angola Prison, part of the Louisiana State Penitentiary System. We were the outsiders on the trip, the other 40 travelers work in the Georgia State Prison System as wardens, chaplains or nurses and were visiting to learn how their own prison communities might become reflective of the ideals of hope, redemption and dignity.

Angola is infamous, both for what it was and what it has become. It's the place of *Dead Man Walking* and *Monster's Ball*. For decades, Angola was America's bloodiest prison and it remains the largest maximum-security prison in the country with 18,000 acres and over 5,200 inmates. Today, with sentencing laws among the harshest in America, the average sentence at Angola is 88 years. Of the 5,200 inmates, 3,600 are in for life with no parole. Ninety percent of those who pass through the gates of Angola will die there. If these numbers don't represent despair, retribution and degradation, I don't know what does.

Here we were, husband, wife and 16-year-old daughter, dropped among 5,200 inmates, mostly lifers, all of whom have committed very serious offenses – murder, armed robbery, aggravated sex crimes. Unless you've been to Angola you might chalk the rest of this story up to the tale of a do-gooder with his head in the sand, but it's the truth so help me God. Our first night at Angola we wandered into a church at about 9:00 p.m., one of five churches now at Angola. The bell on this church is nearly 100 years old. The inmates love the bell and tell its story something like this: after it was created and before it had the chance to ring anywhere, it fell and killed a church member. The first time that bell ever rang was at Angola – the bell was a killer and now it's been redeemed, and they call it a born-again bell. As we entered the church, we passed one guard quietly sitting. There were maybe 100 or so felons scattered in the church pews with an inmate preacher up front. He stopped for a moment, welcoming us to their house, to God's house, and urged us to sit among them in prayer. So we all sat shoulder-to-shoulder among the men. The next day, we joined inmates for a meal, again sitting side by side.

Picture this: my daughter, talking to a 40-year-old man who has spent half his life in Angola for murder, not scared, not even nervous. "It's odd," she said later, "It was just like talking to anyone else." For three days, I never heard one curse word, and I can't remember when that has ever happened. In fact I don't recall being among so many dignified men in my entire life, how can that be? How can men who have committed such serious crimes, locked away for life, maintain any shred of dignity?

That brings me to Warden Burl Cain. His job, as he sees it, is not to punish the men under his care. After three years, virtually no inmate receives a single visit in a year. His men are in jail for life. They have been punished. Society has locked them up. His job is to give them an opportunity to give back. You have to do what you can where you are says the warden. In a Christian world, there is always a chance for redemption -- hope and dignity.

Hope at Angola is everywhere, and it's not the hope of one day being released, since that almost never happens. Instead I believe it's the hope that comes with regaining one's dignity, through taking responsibility for one's acts, finding ways to take care of others, through God and through work. Everyone has a job at Angola. The newest inmate makes two cents an hour working the fields. A 15-minute call to his loved one costs \$6. That's 300 hours of work, or about eight weeks, for that phone call.

The violence at Angola is almost gone. Warden Cain says it's this simple: the thousands of men of God in his prison won't tolerate violence.

Hope and despair. Redemption and retribution. Dignity and degradation. All exist within the walls of Angola. And I am left in awe to have discovered that within such a place of despair lies so much dignity.