

A TRIP TO STATEVILL PRISON

Recently, Mark & his wife Jo accompanied Chaplain Tom into the NRC Unit at Stateville Prison. Afterwards, they wrote this:

Mark:

What did I expect? A bunch of angry, foul mouthed and bitter young men, confrontational, in a dark, damp, frightening, forbidding place.

What did I find? Grateful young men, receptive to prayer, devotionals and the Bible. The facility is very clean and well maintained. The staff is helpful and respectful. It is eye opening for the average person to find out what prison actually means.

Jo:

The Stateville Northern Reception and Classification (NRC) center in Joliet functions as the major male prisoner intake and processing unit for the entire state of Illinois. Every few weeks, 1,000's of prisoners go out, to their new permanent assignment in other prisons, and additional 1,000's enter in, waiting for processing. During their stay in the NRC, prisoners are on permanent lock down in closed cells. No TV, no letters, no cell phones, no newspapers, no Internet, no Ipods, no books, no magazines, no view, no sounds, no shopping, no snacks, no family, no friends.

Now imagine, one day, within the darkness and the interminable waiting, waiting, waiting...a friendly voice calls through the slot in the door, "Hi, my name is Tom. May I leave you some literature?" A Christian book or magazine is slid under the door, along with the *Our Daily Bread* devotional, perhaps even a Bible, and a pamphlet titled "Jesus Christ Changes People's Lives!" After receiving precious reading material, an invitation for prayer is offered, and prisoners are prayed for by name right on the spot.

This is one mission of New Life Corrections Ministry, a division of Wayside Cross Ministries of Aurora, Illinois. Once a month, Chaplain Tom Beatty and a handful of volunteers visit the NRC unit in Stateville Prison, Joliet, and bring human contact, diversion, conversation, prayer, and God's word to prisoners during a time of deep need. Do you think a young man may possibly read that Christian book? Might he read the devotional even more than once a day? Might he even ponder the meaning of the phrase, "Jesus Christ changes people's lives?" What a unique opportunity to bring the Word of God to fertile ground!

You have the opportunity to support this much needed ministry. Collect Christian books and magazines, devotionals, study guides whenever and wherever you can. Contact Chaplain Tom [tbeatty@waysidecross.org] and volunteer to go yourself. Does this idea cause fear? Be assured that there is no possibility of actual physical contact and those with whom you speak are very polite and appreciative of any books, conversation, and prayer that you can share. Would you dare to travel to Joliet to visit Jesus if he were in prison? Then will you firmly commit to one day this year to care for the least of your brothers, those in Stateville prison? And will you make your commitment today?

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" Matt 25:37-40