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## Articles

### Sheep and Goats

#### *Places of Worship Reviewed*

By Drew E. Goodmanson  
Published March 10, 2005

[[Sheep and Goats](#) from [previous weeks](#)]

#### **R.J. Donovan Correctional Facility (Kairos Prison Ministry)**

**Denomination:** nondenominational

**Address:** 480 Alta Road, San Diego, 619-661-6500

**Senior pastor:** Bill Brown

**Congregation size:** 200

**Dress:** blue jumpsuits

**Diversity:** diverse

**Website:** [www.kairosprisonministry.org](http://www.kairosprisonministry.org)

Tall, barbed-wire fences surround R.J. Donovan Correctional Facility near the San Diego-Mexico border. Approximately 5500 inmates call the blue-and-white cement buildings home. Twice a year Kairos Prison Ministry runs a three-day weekend program for the inmates. All visitors sign in and acknowledge that in the event they are taken hostage, the authorities will not barter for their lives.

Kairos volunteers arrive at 6 a.m. and stay until 8 p.m. The volunteers talk to the inmates about God, love, and forgiveness. On the last day, over 100 visitors attend a celebration ceremony to show support for these inmates.

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Donovan is separated into three yards, based on the crime and danger the prisoners represent. In the maximum-security yard, 60 men participated in the program. These inmates came by invitation of other Christian prisoners. The celebration was held in the yard chapel. The chapel walls were decorated with 60 hand-drawn posters from churches and local schools. One poster from Valley Christian School read, "Jesus loves you" and "We are praying for you," surrounded by students' signatures. Streamers decorated the ceilings, and a table was set with homemade cookies.

In the chapel, guests sat on one side of the room and prisoners and volunteers sat on the other. The prisoners wore dark-blue jumpsuits with "Prisoner" written in yellow on their pant legs. The ceremony began with a band of guests and inmates singing songs such as "Do Lord, Be My Body" and "I Saw the Light." After the songs, a dozen prisoners came forward to give testimonies.

"This has been a new experience for me. I always refer to myself as a convict, even when I'm out on the street. I have had a life of gang involvement and drug addiction. This weekend I have seen that I am a human. Some of us have never seen this type of love in our lives," said Don.

"I gave myself to the Lord two days ago. This is amazing. I was in tears," said Donnell. "I've been in prison 13 and a half years. I am scheduled to be out in four months. I'm scared; I don't know what's out there for me, but as long as I keep walking with God, I'll be all right."

Other inmates spoke about the hope they have now, the love they felt. After the testimonies, Jack, the yard pastor, walked to the front. Jack said 360 people volunteered to help the Donovan ministry. "Five-thousand-dozen cookies were made for the prisoners to eat and hand out to other inmates," said Jack. "[The Kairos program] transcends denominational differences -- Pentecostals, Baptists, Episcopalians, Catholics, and Methodists. The Christian community is bigger than denominations." Pastor Jack then spoke about the hope the program offered. "We have guys who never have the possibility of going back on the street, but they have hope."

At the end of the meeting, an inmate named Dexter walked up to the yard pastor and said he wanted to accept the Lord as his savior. Three men laid their hands on him and led him in a prayer to confess his sins, ask for forgiveness, and accept Jesus Christ as the King of his life. At the end of the prayer, the people in the room stood up and cheered. Dexter wiped away tears from his eyes.

Chaplain Bill Brown walked forward to close the ceremony. "I am tickled to be here and see what God is doing. If you are feeling something, it is the living God and His Spirit because he's trying to give you a message of hope, peace, and joy," said Brown. He looked at the

inmates and continued, "You don't need to wait until you get out of prison to experience these things. You all are invited to be a part of the body of Christ."

After the ceremony, the prisoners and visitors mingled around homemade cookies and punch. "For many, the ceremony was a miracle. The third yard has been on lockdown since last September," said Charlie Woerner, a Kairos volunteer. (Lockdown means the prisoners are not allowed outside of their cells.) The warden signed off just days before the Kairos Ministry weekend, allowing it to happen. Woerner attributed this to God answering prayers.

Walter, a 19-year-old, said he accepted Jesus six months ago at the last Kairos weekend. Since then, he has gone back to college to study psychology. He is scheduled for release this November. "I lost contact with my family outside of here. I've been doing my time alone; now I have a community," said Walter. He remarked that this weekend surpassed his expectations. "There were a lot of rough guys in this group. A lot of these guys were involved in gang violence."

Chuck has been involved in Kairos for three and a half years. Chuck told me he was still in prison because of the three-strikes law. I asked him his experience with the prisoners who became Christians during the weekend. "Half of the people walk the walk," said Chuck. "The other half fall back into their old life because of the peer pressure."

Chaplain Brown told me the impact of Kairos is significant in prisons. "The prison is divided by language, race, and by gangs. The blacks are separated into the Bloods and Crips, and the whites by Aryan Brotherhood and biker gangs. When a man comes to Christ we are all to love one another. I've seen white men with a giant swastika tattoo holding hands and praying with a black man," said Brown. "Sometimes the shot-callers take offense and tell these guys not to affiliate with other races. We've had [Christian] brothers beat up for walking their Christian faith."

Brown showed me a study by the Florida Department of Corrections. Of the 33 inmates released who serve in the Kairos program, the recidivism rate, or how often an inmate is convicted after release, is 9 percent. In comparison, the statewide rate is approximately 28 percent. "We are seeing guys come to the Lord and get out on parole and stay out. Now they want to come back into prison as a volunteer," said Brown.

-- *Drew E. Goodmanson*

**Sheep and Goats** from [previous weeks](#)

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