



Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

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Berean Banquet
August 27, 2016

THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT

When called to serve, these Berean Prison Ministries volunteers answered with 'Here, Lord.'

So often we find ourselves at a loss on how we could be furthering the Lord's ministry. From my own experience, giving money or material things - while necessary and very helpful - can be quickly accomplished and still leave me wondering what I can do next and how I can go about getting involved.

In the rush of today's technological world, I find myself looking for fast solutions, and I sometimes need to be reminded that not everything should be done in an instant. Sometimes the most important thing I can give to someone else is my time.

In his book *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?*, Rick Warren has some thoughts on the gift of giving your time to another person:

"Time is your most precious gift because you only have a set amount of it. You can make more money, but you can't make more time. When you give someone your time, you are giving them a portion of your life that you'll never get back. Your time is

your life. That is why the greatest gift you can give someone is your time.


"It is not enough to just say relationships are important; we must prove it by investing time in them. Words alone are worthless...the best way to spell love is 'T-I-M-E.'"

It is with those words in mind that I submit that the most important way Berean Prison Ministries ministers to inmates is through the time of the volunteers! The time given by the men and women volunteering through Berean Prison Ministries is being used by God to change the lives of inmates and their families around the world. In this volume we highlight some of the Berean volunteers, to show the variety of ways time can be donated to the Berean Prison Ministries.

Marvin and Gail Hodel have both been involved with Berean Prison Ministries for over twenty years. Du-



»Marvin & Gail Hodel



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-MARVIN HODEL

ring that time, the capacities in which they have served the Lord through Berean have shifted and morphed as the needs of the ministry have changed throughout the years.

Marvin was first called to participate in Berean Prison Ministries twenty plus years ago. He began helping with Saturday night Bible study sessions at the Peoria County Jail that included both male and female inmates. Though they have separated into male only and female only groups since, these sessions were the precursor to the individual counseling sessions and the Sunday morning services.

Though Gail had been asked by Paul Meister to help counsel female inmates at the Peoria County Jail in the late 1990s, it wasn't until 2002 that she could fully commit to the ministry. She began first helping in the office at the jail, with the computer and administration while train-

ing to meet inmates.

Marvin and Gail have attended training sessions on how to counsel inmates and, more specifically, counseling for substance abuse. Gail currently runs an eight week course that covers the Biblical approach to substance abuse on Tuesdays, while still helping in the office occasionally and mailing out Bibles to inmates. Many, if not most, inmates have some sort of addiction, often the very cause of their incarceration.

Within the ministry, Marvin's position eventually shifted into that of Chaplain, where he is currently meeting one-on-one with prisoners for counseling sessions. Every Friday morning he meets with inmates that have requested individual counseling and on Sunday mornings he goes into the pods to give Sunday School lessons to the inmates that aren't allowed to attend the full service. Gail mans the literature table on Sundays, fills in as a piano player, and counsels if asked by an inmate.

Both of them work very closely with inmates, getting to know them pretty closely after a while. "My personal conviction is: all the Gospel runs on personal relationships. It's built that way. And so God uses us to reach others and it's got to be a personal relationship to do that," Marvin said in the interview.

This idea of building personal relationships has carried over into Gail's volunteer work as well. After getting to know the women she counsels and teaches, finding a way to keep in touch and continue encouraging them in their new faith after they had left the class, been transferred, or released really began to weigh on her heart. She was lead to begin sending out monthly newsletters touching on what the Bible says about a certain topic, with interesting stories or encouraging snippets she has seen or read. It is an idea

PRAYER REQUESTS

The power of prayer is a remarkable thing and we see that power in work every day in the lives of those we minister to in prison and out. Here are some of our current prayer requests. Please join us in praying for the following:

- Pray for the Banquet to be held on August 27 and for the speaker Manny Mill. Pray for an inmate willing to testify on the work of God in his/her life.
- Additional volunteers to help in Peoria, IL with processing the thousands of requests for Bibles and Bible Studies each month.

- Fedi Davidovics, Sparky Meister, and Ken Helmuth just returned from Romania to meet with Berean's volunteers, visit the two gypsy churches Berean helped to start, meet with the wardens at two prisons that have newly started services, and meet with the General Director and his staff. Pray that God's kingdom will continue to be expanded in Romania through the prison ministry.

- Pray for the men and women in the jails/prisons served by Berean who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. Pray that they will continue in their growth to become great men and women of faith.

that Marvin has embraced as well.

The inmates on the mailing list greatly look forward to the newsletters, though they are required to write once a year to stay on the list. For some, the newsletters are the only bit of positive mail they will receive, certainly the only mail encouraging them in their new-found faith.

When asked how God's hand has been at work in the ministry, the unanimous response is that he is at work in every single aspect. "It is very much a God thing," Gail said, referring to an example of how He brought in new counselors for female inmates when they were sorely needed. Two sisters in Christ had both come to Gail separately, feeling that God had put it on their hearts to counsel at the jail.

One of those sisters was Myrna Hoerr, who is also a certified counselor at Esther House. A year and a half ago she was led to start counseling female inmates at the Peoria County Jail. She now counsels on Thursdays and has seen many wondrous changes in the inmates she encounters and counsels.

In her volunteering experience, Myrna has seen that while most people go into volunteering thinking they are going to be helping, teaching, and inspiring others, the volunteers are equally impacted by those they are helping.

It is a theme shared by the ladies in charge of organizing and mailing out the Bible studies and Bibles to inmates. Judy Sceggel started working for Berean Prison Ministries twenty-three years ago. When she started it was a small operation, but it has since grown exponentially, such that today over 2,500 Bibles are given out each month and more than 60,000 inmates are or have participated in the Bible study courses. Three years ago, Diane Honnegger began providing much needed clerical and organizational skills to the program. Both Dian and Judy spend countless hours ensuring that inmates can participate in studying God's Word.

The jobs available to volunteers through Berean Prison Ministries come in a wide variety from folding and preparing the Bible studies for mailing, to stuffing the envelopes and addressing, to preparing Bibles for the prisoners, to grading the finished Bible Studies, to reading the letters sent in by the inmates - there's something for everyone.

"We can always use more volunteers," Judy said toward the end of the interview. With an operation that continues to grow, the volunteer opportunities will also continue to grow.

If you are interested in volunteering through Berean Prison Ministries, remember, your time - in any form - is the most precious gift you can give to these inmates.

**"BUT LOVE YOUR
ENEMIES, AND DO
GOOD, AND LEND,
EXPECTING
NOTHING IN RETURN
AND YOUR REWARD
WILL BE GREAT, AND
YOU WILL BE SONS
OF THE MOST HIGH,
FOR HE IS KIND TO
THE UNGRATEFUL
AND THE EVIL."**

LUKE 6:35



» Judy Sceggel



» Diane Honnegger



» Myrna Hoerr

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I have recently been thinking about serving the body of Christ and how we, as followers of Christ are called to serve. The standard was set by Jesus when He said: "For the Son of man came not to be ministered (served) unto, but to minister (serve) and to give his life a ransom for many," Mark 10:45. From the passage we learn two things - the ability to serve and give were twin qualities that Christ had. Qualities that often run counter to human nature. It is far easier to take than to give.

That being said, we are all capable of being servants - not because we are brilliant or gifted, but because we are *willing*. Berean Prison Ministries is blessed to have over 350 volunteers who willingly give their time and resources as servants to the imprisoned in Russia, Romania, and the United States.

Like Christ, a servant is meant to be selfless. The servant is preoccupied with the needs and welfare of others, which results in happiness and fulfillment. Colonel James B. Irwin went to the moon and walked on its surface. Amazed at the wonders of space he shared these thoughts on the trip back to earth.

"As I was returning to earth, I realized that I was a servant - not a celebrity. So I am here as God's servant on Planet Earth to share what I have experienced that others might know the glory of God."

I believe nurturing a serving spirit begins with little things, thoughtful things such as embracing one who is hurting, a note or visit to one who is lonely and feels unappreciated. A cup of cool water for one whose lips are parched from the hot blast of a fiery desert when all seems futile and worthless.

Christ taught that we are to be the salt of the Earth and the light of the world. As Berean's servants go into the prisons and jails, they bring a purifying salt to preserve perishing souls. The light that reflects a believer's life opens up the darkness of the perishing soul.

A final thought to the servant or volunteers: "The heart of the volunteer is not measured in size, but by the depth of the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others. Amen."

Blessings,
Ken Hoerr

“REMEMBER THIS:
WHOEVER SOWS SPARING-
LY, AND WHOEVER SOWS
GENEROUSLY. EACH OF
YOU SHOULD GIVE WHAT
YOU HAVE DECIDED IN
YOUR HEART TO GIVE,
NOT RELUCTANTLY OR
UNDER COMPULSION, FOR
GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL
GIVER.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7

FINANCIAL NEEDS

Berean continues to need your regular financial support. In Romania, the approximately 50 volunteers have significant needs and often depend on Berean to help with bus fare and gas money to travel to the prisons where they hold services.

Berean's postage costs and the cost of purchasing Bibles continues to climb rapidly. The costs for postage alone is 2.5 times what the postage cost was last year and continues to increase as more and more inmates participate in the Bible study program.