



Osprey OBSERVER

Valrico



JUNE 2010 VOLUME 7, ISSUE 6

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www.ospreyobserver.com

YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY DIRECT-MAILED TO HOMES

PASSION FOR PRISON MINISTRY BURNS RUBBER BEHIND BARS

By Carisa Biesecker



"We never meant to start a ministry; it happened more like an unplanned pregnancy, and once the ministry was birthed, it just kept on growing," says Passion for Prison, Inc.'s founder Jessica.

While volunteering for a nationwide ministry, she was handed the key, literally, to continue a prison chapel whose chaplain had been deployed to Iraq. She says: "At the end of the eight weeks, I thought to

myself, 'Who is going to unlock this chapel when I am gone? Is it going to remain empty, dark and locked until the chaplain returns in a year? These inmates need the doors opened, the lights turned on and [to have] hope given to them now, not a year from now,'" which led to the beginning of Passion for Prison, Inc. in August of 2003.

From there, the Dover resident's ministry has ignited the hearts of some 50 residents. Some members take on the responsibilities of sending out birthday cards, thank you cards and cards of encouragement to inmates as well as prayers, while others walk or ride their motorcycles alongside Jessica and her husband Scott inside - yes, inside - prisons throughout Florida. Members' primary focus is on three prisons: Hernando Correctional since 2003; Hillsborough Correctional in Riverview since 2005; and Central Florida Reception Center East Unit since April 2010. Here, members

socialize with inmates and then get down to business, revealing the reason for their visit: a relationship with Christ - this starts with prayer, leading to a DVD selected to intertwine with the scripture chosen to bring the meeting to a close.

Always falling back to their roots, the group will team up with five fellow ministries on the weekends, traveling to prisons statewide to evangelize Christianity. Parking their bikes directly in the prison yard, Jessica estimates that some 80 percent of the prison population will come out to be a witness to what

the team has to say.

Having prison ministry experience that dates back to 2000, parting from the corporate world to follow God's prompting, Jessica leaves readers with this thought: "Florida only has 67 counties, and last year alone there were 37,018 inmates released by the



Florida Department of Corrections. Those 37,018 are going to live next to someone. Who do the local residents want living next to them and/or next to their loved ones...a released criminal or a released Christian? If they would rather live next to a released Christian, then who is going to share Jesus Christ with them before they are released? We already are; however, we need support to continue."

For those interested in becoming part of the group, which is made possible through donations, Jessica says that commitment is the only thing required "because inmates are people, not projects and, therefore, deserve a true commitment." Members meet at the Hillsborough Correctional, located at 11150 C.R. 672 in Riverview, on Sunday nights from 6-8 p.m. For more information, call 786-8303 or 495-3745, e-mail is jessica@passionforprison.com or visit www.passionforprison.com.