

**Free Inside**  
**A Christian Prison Ministry**  
*A Partner with Vision New England Prison Ministries*  
PO Box 341 Kingsbury Lane, Glastonbury, CT 06033  
email: [info@free-inside.com](mailto:info@free-inside.com) phone: (860) 633-4085  
[www.free-inside.com](http://www.free-inside.com)

**Free Inside News - January 2004.**

A friend of ours in England sent us this cutting, from the November 14, 2003 edition of "The Church Times", the official newspaper of the Church of England.

**Alpha Behind Bars.**

A report by Pat Ashworth in "*The Church Times*", the official Church of England newspaper November 14, 2003.

ALPHA has been running in British prisons since 1995, when a father and son in Exeter prison first asked their chaplain about it. Since then about 30,000 prisoners have done the course, and it is part of life in 80% of Britain's prisons. The Alpha for prisons team at Holy Trinity, Brompton (HTB), in London, where Alpha began, wants every person in prison to have had the chance to take part.

The Alpha for Prisons office was set up in 1997 with crime reduction funding worth 150,000 pounds sterling from Ecclesiastical Insurance. It found a leader in Paul Cowley, a straight-talking ex-offender and soldier who had himself been converted on an Alpha course. Most significant, perhaps, has been HTB's work with those being released: 395 prisoners have now been linked with churches as part of a commitment to caring for ex-offenders.

Each prison runs Alpha its own way; volunteers from local churches and from Prison Fellowship work under the chaplain. The number of prisoners on each course (which can be limited by the availability of officers to escort them to the chapel) varies from 10 to 35. Last week, the Holy Spirit day at the end of a course in Dartmoor was attended by 29 men from the vulnerable-prisoners unit.

They don't have the meal that is central to the Alpha course (nor the weekend away), but where chaplains can bring in special food, they do. "It's amazing what you can do within the prison regime," said Amanda Lee, from HTB. The outline of the teaching is the same as any Alpha course: discussion is a key element, and there is "no banging over the head with a Bible". "Often", says Ms Lee, "no one has taken the time to ask these guys what they think about anything. With Alpha, you can ask anything and express anything, however off the wall."

Now 700 churches are on a data base of those willing, communally and wholeheartedly, to welcome ex-offenders into their fellowship. Trained and prepared in advance, they meet ex-offenders on their release, provide them with basics, and help them to find accommodation if necessary.

"We know it's just the tip of the iceberg," said Ms Lee. "But, ex-offenders, churches, potentially are an alternative community."

This encouraging report highlights the goals that I believe God has given for Free Inside. For every inmate to have the opportunity of considering the claims of Christ by taking the Alpha course.

**Prayer alert:** First Alpha starts at J. B. Gates C. I. this month.

**Prayer goals for the next 6 months.**

- Involvement of Prison Chaplains, I believe that it is vital to cooperate fully with the DOC chaplains.
- Alerting local churches to the opportunities for prison ministry.
- Eventually linking released prisoners with churches and believers where they will be given help and encouragement in their Christian lives.
- To be following up those who have committed their lives to Christ in the first course.
- By the summer have 3 more teams trained and 3 more prisons opened to Alpha.
- To be fully funded both in personal and ministry expenses.

**These are big goals for a ministry just stating out,** but God is bigger than you or I. He *'is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine'*. Will you pray and believe God with me for the fulfillment of these goals.

Sincerely,  
Peter