

Free Inside
A Christian Prison Ministry
A Partner with Vision New England Prison Ministries
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Caring for Ex-offenders Conference – London October ‘05

Attendance: 360

The theme was on “**Re-entry of ex-offenders into the Community.**” It was one of the best conferences that I have attended both in terms of content and spiritual encouragement.

A moving example of Christian Reconciliation and Forgiveness.

In October 1985, riots erupted in Broadwater Farm an impoverished, mostly black neighborhood in London. During that night of rioting a policeman was brutally hacked to death with knives and machetes. **Winston** was one of the young men convicted of the murder. He was eventually cleared in 1991, because of “unsafe evidence used against him”. Many still believe he is guilty of that brutal murder.



The Broadwater Farm, London Riots October 1985. (Photo BBC)

He continued to serve a sentence for another killing, which he is currently appealing to European Court of Justice, because he says that he killed the man in self-defense.

He was released in 2003, after serving 17 years. During his parole Winston began to attend Freedom’s Ark, an Evangelical Church in Broadwater Farm, where He came to a real personal experience of Jesus Christ. Winston is now a youth worker at Freedom’s Ark, working to reach young people with the love of Christ and especially to deglamorize prison among the youth of London. Under Winston’s leadership the church sponsors a Christian Community Peace initiative, that seeks to bring reconciliation within the community.

Eric was the policeman who booked Winston for the murder of the policeman during the riots. Eric, a Christian, was also a close friend of the murdered officer. His experience in the riots and with Winston in the charge office had such a profound effect on him that he had an emotional breakdown. He resigned from the police force and moved to the north of England, still haunted by the ghosts of 1985.

Members of Holy Trinity, Brompton hosted Eric in their home during the Conference. The evening before the conference began Eric told his story to his hosts and how devastated his life

had been since those events. He and his hosts prayed for God to heal him emotionally and spiritually.

The next morning as Eric entered Holy Trinity Church one of the very first people he saw was Winston. A group of Christians took the two men into a quiet room and witnessed a remarkable act of reconciliation between these two men. Hurt, anger and hatred melted away in the presence of God. Later that morning Winston and Eric stood on the platform and testified to what God had done. Eric said something to the effect, **“Since 1985 I have been haunted by the look of hatred and evil in Winston’s eyes. I stand here today and say that that look is no longer there.”**

Winston and Eric’s story was the talk of the conference.

The conference was opened by the Rt. Rev. Peter Selby, Anglican Bishop of Worcester and Bishop of Prisons. He made some memorable remarks.

“I give you this warning; prison ministry will so enrich your life that it will be difficult to give up, (loud amens from the audience) so make sure it is the right thing for you.” “The Christian position is: no surrender to hopelessness” and “Beware of the ‘prison of apathy’.”

Nicky Gumbel gave the following in answer to the question **“Why Prison Ministry?”**

- Every person, both inside and outside of prison is made in God’s image.
- Every person, both inside and outside of prison is a sinner, we are all in same boat before God.
- Every person, both inside and outside of prison, needs redemption through the Cross.
- There is both forgiveness in Christ and transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- This life only the beginning, glorification lies ahead for every person who is in Christ.

These facts make self-righteousness inappropriate: The only response any of us can make is **“God be merciful to me a sinner.”**

I wish that there was space to write about the other speakers, Paul Cowley, Jonathan Aitken, a former member of parliament in the last Conservative government in the UK. Imprisoned for perjury in a financial scandal, and who came to faith during his time in prison. His testimony is remarkable. Nor is there space to tell you about the workshops that were offered on a variety of topics dealing with the re-entry of ex-offenders into the community.

In the next Newsletter I will tell you about my visit to Dartmoor Prison and a special unit called the **Inner Change Initiative**.

Prayer needs

- Inmates attending Alpha and Alpha II courses at Bergin, York and Gates.
- The start of a course at Williard-Cybulski in Enfield.
- Possible courses for Catholic inmates at Bergin and York. Volunteers are still needed before these can start.
- Continuing work on developing a viable Aftercare ministry with Vision new England Prison Ministries.