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Autumn 2008

The summer began with an **Alpha's Converge 2008**, that drew 1,300 participants to the campus of Wheaton College, Illinois. Of the 4 Alpha conferences I have attended this was by far the most productive for me personally.

Highlights

- **The energy and enthusiasm** generated in the plenary sessions by passionate and Christ-centered worship.
- **All the speakers**, especially *Nicky Gumbel*, laid out a vision for reaching our increasingly alienated and skeptical generation. A generation that views the Evangelical church with decidedly jaundiced eyes.
- **26 breakout sessions** on topics ranging from “Starting Alpha in your Church” to “Reaching the Emerging Generation” “Alpha in Prisons” “Alpha in the Military” to “Persuasive Listening” by Lynne Ruhl. For me, the session on ‘Creative Listening’ was particularly useful. Listening is a vital aspect of prison ministry. Let’s hope this ‘old dog’ can learn some new tricks, and talk less and listen more.

National Alpha for Prisons Conference

The day after the end of Alpha’s Converge, the national Alpha for Prisons was held at the **Billy Graham Center**. This was a great time of fellowship with like-minded Christians and of learning and encouragement for all of us.

- **Paul Cowley**, International head of prison Alpha and **Jack Cowley**, our USA head inspired us to press on, in what can sometimes be a lonely and discouraging ministry.
- **It was great** to meet other men and women involved in prison ministry with Alpha and to hear what God is doing in transforming the lives prisoners.

Fall Programs

- **Our first Fall program** began at Gates C I on Sept. 3, since then all of our programs have started. Attendances have been good, with a total of 175 inmates in all the facilities we serve.

***Praise God**, have been given the go ahead to begin our first Alpha at Willard C I in Enfield. The date has not yet been finalized.



A few stories of what is God doing in lives?

- **J**, is a cautious individual who told me last week, “I want to find God.” It was a joy to point him to Jesus and explain that by trusting Jesus as his Savior he can find a full forgiveness and acceptance with God. True to his cautious approach, rather than make a commitment then and there he decided to read the booklet “Why Jesus?” and consider the claims of Christ. I showed him the prayer of commitment at the end of “Why Jesus”, he promised to talk to me about it this week. Pray for **J**.

A dream about her granny.

- **JR**, had a dream about her 99 year-old granny, when she woke up she knew she had died. She knew that God was preparing her for the phone call that came later that day from her mother, it confirmed what she already knew. She then told her Alpha small group that she was alone in her room, crying and grieving for

her granny, when she heard a voice in her mind; *"You are grieving as I did for Lazarus."* She is a new Christian and was *"shocked"* by what she heard, she had no idea who Lazarus was. She got her Bible and searched the index to find the *"Book of Lazarus"*. She wondered why the book was *left out of her Bible*. She asked a few other inmates, *"Who is Lazarus?"* None of the Christians she asked could tell her, but a woman who doesn't go near any Christian service or meeting, told her: *"He's in John 11."* She read the chapter and found verse 35 *"Jesus wept"* The Holy Spirit used this incident to give **JR** assurance of faith.

****You're getting the worst roommate in the unit.***

JR, the woman mentioned above was moved to another unit. As she carried her stuff into the unit another inmate told her *"you're getting the worst roommate in the unit"* She asked *"Why is she the worst?"* The reply, *"You'll see soon enough"*. It was with some trepidation that she entered the room. She quickly learned that her new roommate's reputation was well deserved, was angry and verbally abusive to everyone. **JR** asked God to show her what to do, she sensed that God was saying, *"pray for her and be kind to her."*, the woman slowly softened. When she learned that **JR** was a Christian she asked her to pray for her.

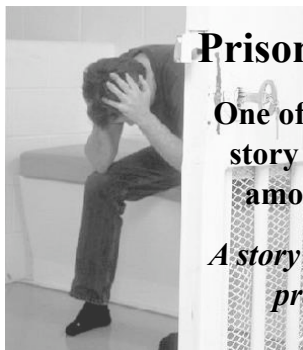
JR asked me to ask **you** to pray for her and for her roommate **LB**.

Will you pray for LB that the Holy Spirit would lead her to Jesus?

An amazing story of a "Welcome Wagon" in prison or Giving "the widow's mite". ("a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others.

Luke 21: 2) A few men in one of our programs told their Alpha small group about a ministry of care that they had instituted. The topic under discussion was Christian service and giving to others, from Philippians 2: 1- 11 on the 'Mind of Christ'.

Four men, two in each of two different dorms created a "Welcome Wagon" ministry. They take up a collection for new guys entering their dorm of stuff they might need. One dorm goes even farther and will regularly collect for guys who need various things. The other group makes sure that each new man is personally welcomed in addition to receiving his *"care package"*. If they have spare Bibles they include one in the bag.



Prison is a lonely place

One of our volunteers shares a story of welcome and caring among Christian inmates.

A story of how God has softened previously hard hearts

One man in the small group said it was 3 months before anyone talked to him, let alone gave him anything. Another man who was new to the group that night commented on what a great idea it was.

Praise God for these two examples of selfless giving and Christian service in an unlikely environment. It is humbling to see this willingness to share the little that these men have with others. Surely, compassion for others is strong evidence that a person has experienced the love of Christ in their own lives?



Please help to restock our supplies of Bibles and books by giving a special donation.

Every Fall our stocks of Bibles and books need to be restocked, so that we will have sufficient to distribute free to inmates during the next year of ministry. We currently don't have enough on hand. We need supplies of the "Purpose Driven Life" in both English and Spanish, by Rick Warren.

We also need to purchase more training materials for our volunteers, including the plates to print 750 copies of the first edition of the "Alpha for Prisons Facilitators Handbook"

An example of the the cost of some of these materials:

900 copies "Purpose Driven Life"	
in English and Spanish:	\$1,200.00
Volunteer training materials.	400.00
Printing plates for "Alpha for Prisons Facilitators Handbook"	300.00
Total	<u>\$1,900.00</u>

Please consider giving an extra donation to this fund.

For example - \$15 buys 10 copies of the "Purpose Driven Life"
 \$50 buys 35 copies, \$100 buys 70 copies.

More on financial matters

We are in difficult and uncertain financial times, the temptation to draw back on our stewardship comes to us all. Let us nevertheless rise to the challenge and give in faith, trusting the one who promises that he will supply our needs according to his riches in glory.

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Rev. Peter Dewberry, Director of Free Inside, is the advisor for prison Alpha New England and a member of the USA Prison Alpha Advisory Board.

Alpha Behind Bars is a ministry of Free Inside in partnership with Alpha USA, Vision New England and Vision New England Prison Ministries

