



*Life is messy, but Jesus gives hope  
to all who need to be set free  
behind bars of steel  
and walls of bitterness.*



## January Newsletter

### Christmas Party in the Jail



I wish you could have been there! We had Sunday school children color Christmas pictures on 600 paper bags, then stuff them with candy, homemade cards, and wishes for a merry Christmas. There were tears in lots of eyes as the regular jail visitors, plus lots of one time guests, passed bags out to everyone in the jail. Men and women both commented wistfully that their own children would have made something very similar for them. They wanted to sing Christmas songs, so we sang a few that were easy to remember. I read through most of the Christmas story in Matthew and Luke, and talked about the joy, fear and suffering it meant for Joseph and Mary. We talked about Jesus, and the unimaginable sacrifice He made, even to assume the form of a human, not even a great, powerful human, not even an adult human, but a baby, dependant on the care of two sinful and fallible parents, and subject to the ordinary difficulties and pain of a poor child growing up in a conquered and oppressed nation. What did He do when the local bully pushed Him down on the rocky playgrounds of Nazareth? He cried like each one of us did, and sought the comfort of His mother.

And we talked about what these facts mean for us today. As the writer of Hebrews tells us, (NIV)

2:18 - Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

4:15-16 - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.



The guest who visited the high security cell pod with me spoke of his own struggle in life, and the victory Jesus has brought to his circumstances and pursuit of the kingdom of God. Many inmates were visibly moved, and asked for prayer for their walk with Christ, and for their families who hurt for them, especially at this time of year. I prayed for several men who had brought forward special concerns, and others gathered around, laying hands on the one receiving prayer. Many of the inmates lifted heartfelt prayer for their brother also, and for mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, and wives, separated by walls and by the consequences of actions deeply regretted. God was moving! Some laughed. Some

cried. Some repented of past decisions and actions. Some celebrated new life, that God would send His own Son to search for them, suffer and die for them, and raise them to new life! It was all that Christmas was supposed to be – God come down among us!



**Mentoring.** The pilot program for the Butte County Sheriff's Community Impact Mentoring program has been a great success. Aside from the Sheriff's office, all the committee members represent Christian ministries in the Butte county area. That was not by design – it's just that those who follow Christ are the ones who responded with compassion to the call for help. As I attend the committee meetings and meet weekly with my ankle bracelet releasee (a released inmate on a kind of flexible house arrest), I see and hear the difference that a caring mentor makes in the life of someone struggling to figure out how to make life work. Yet, there are so many more men and women who need that one-on-one support. We have learned from this pilot program of five mentors, and we are preparing a second, larger mentoring training session February 23<sup>rd</sup>. So far we have 25 new mentor trainees signed up. Mentoring is not mandatory, so every mentee is there because they asked for a mentor. Many are looking for any help they can get to learn how to succeed outside the jail. The inmates are screened before they are released, and none have been convicted of violent, sexual, or serious crimes. They are selected as the most likely to succeed on the outside, and those requesting mentors are the ones most likely to benefit from someone coming alongside to help. Jesus can help these releasees, and change our community – and He can use you! Pray for the releasees, as they learn to walk in freedom. Pray for wisdom for us on the planning committee, and pray that Jesus will show you, and many others, how you might be called to help.

**ARM Web Site.** We have a web site up and running – sort of. It is working, but still under construction. Thank you to Caleb Alldrin, a sharp young student at Butte College, for volunteering to put the site together, and give it a look that helps our message and mission get out there for people to see. May God use it to bring the lost to faith, and God's people to mature service! Check it out at <http://www.armbutteco.org>

## **Praises and Prayer Requests:**

- We have our structure and approvals in place. We have places we can work. Now our biggest need is for partners to join us. The fields are white, ready for harvest. Nowhere else have I seen such eagerness for the gospel. Nowhere else have I seen such potential to transform our community's life and health. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will raise up workers, teachers, mentors, pray-ers, helpers, and givers in this new year. Pray for churches and Christians in Butte County to hear of the need, and rise to the call of our Savior.
- Please pray that God will raise up prayer warriors and a Prayer Coordinator, someone who would take the initiative to get our specific prayer requests out to those who have committed to hold ARM's ministry to inmates and their families up before our Lord.

I'm excited to see what God is doing, and going to do!

Thank you for your prayers, your help, and your encouragement. May our God work in your life and among us together in a mighty way in 2013!

Ian and Roxanne Carlisle

