

KAIROS INSIDE PRISON MINISTRY

NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION

(rev 2-21-2024)

Introduction:

Welcome aboard! We are so glad that you have decided to join us in this exciting ministry and serve as a disciple for Christ. The prison system is the greatest mission field in the United States. So often we think of a mission field as being somewhere else – a place we have to travel to – sometimes even in another country. But we have such a large mission field right here in our own backyard. It could be in the prison right down the street or in the next county. Or maybe it could even be with people sitting in their pews in our own church. Did you know that 1 out of 100 people in the United States is or has been impacted by someone incarcerated in a jail or prison? Kairos gives us a unique opportunity to serve right here in our own backyard. We serve to change our local community, state and society. God is at work through Kairos. We are called to a noble service.

Overview:

Kairos Prison Ministries International currently serves in 38 of the 50 states and also 9 other countries around the world. Kairos is like a huge umbrella. Under that umbrella are actually three separate programs. The first program is called Kairos Inside. It's called Kairos Inside because – quite frankly – that's where we go. We go inside the institution. We – the volunteers – go inside to work with those who have been incarcerated. There are currently 47 prison units in Texas that have Kairos Advisory Councils. We work with the McConnell Unit in Beeville.

Kairos Prison Ministries, under that umbrella, has another program called Kairos Outside. It's a program that is very similar to the Kairos Inside program. But it's geared towards those who were left behind. Think about it. When someone gets locked up they have to leave people behind. It could have been their mother, grandmother, wife, sister, girlfriend, or maybe even an older daughter. Life is not easy for those on the inside. We get that. But it's not easy for those left behind either. Well, now they can go through a weekend program also. They can learn how to have that loving relationship with Jesus Christ. They can learn how to seek his comforting care. There are 13 Kairos Outside Councils in Texas. There is an active Kairos Outside Council here in the Corpus Christi area.

The third program under that Kairos Prison Ministry umbrella is called Kairos Torch. Kairos Torch is another program that is geared toward incarcerated youth. Unfortunately, Kairos Torch is such a new program that there are currently only three Kairos Torch Councils in Texas – one in the Amarillo area – one in the Austin area – and one in the Houston area. Hopefully this program will continue to grow and expand. There is a definite need for it.

Kairos Inside at McConnell:

Our Kairos Inside program is administered by the McConnell Advisory Council. This council is composed of about a dozen team members that are elected by the team members. Each council member serves a three-year term. Every year about a third of the council is up for election. Any team member can serve on the Advisory Council. The council meetings are open to any team members who wish to attend. Only council members may vote on proposals.

Our Kairos Inside program consists of several parts. The first is the 3 ½ day Weekend program. This is the most visible part of Kairos. It is the

part that most people think of when you mention Kairos to them. The Weekend program takes place twice a year – every six months – the last weekend in October and the last weekend in April. The Weekend program is run by a Weekend Leader selected by the Advisory Council. The Weekend Leader then puts together the team that will present the program at McConnell. The team will consist of two parts. The Inside Team will actually go inside the McConnell Unit each day. The Outside Support Team will prepare everything each day that must go inside the prison unit and then sends it there. The staging area for the Outside Support Team is at First United Methodist Church at 106 E Cleveland Street in Beeville. This Outside Support Team is a very important part of the program. The Inside Team seems to get the most attention from the outside “free world” community. But the Inside Team would not be able to function without the assistance of the Outside Support Team.

Kairos is a continuing ministry which means it is ongoing beyond the Weekend program. The Weekend program teaches the participants how to take part in Weekly Prayer and Share Fellowship Groupings. The Weekly Prayer and Share Groupings are held on Thursdays from 4 to 6 pm. Also, on the 2nd Saturday of each month is a Monthly Reunion program. The Weekly Prayer and Share and the Monthly Reunions are run by the Kairos Community inside McConnell. The Kairos Community consists of all inmates in McConnell that have been through the 3 ½ day Weekend program. McConnell has a very large and active Kairos Christian Community. They elect their own Advisory Council in the prison and run these programs themselves. Any of our Inside Team members can return for any of these Weekly Prayer and Share Groupings or Monthly Reunion programs. We usually have a smaller group of about a dozen members that attend these sessions. We are there as their guests and serve only in a support or advisory role if needed.

You need no “qualifications” to serve in this ministry. All you need are good listening skills and the ability to share God’s unconditional love. As you participate in the Team Meetings you will gain a clearer understanding of how this ministry functions. There is also a Program Manual produced by Kairos Prison Ministries that provides all of the information about the program. These manuals are available for purchase at the Team Meetings.

TDCJ Volunteer Training

In order to be allowed to go inside the Prison Unit you **must** take the TDCJ (Texas Department of Criminal Justice) Volunteer Training course. This is a TDCJ rule. It is a short online course that goes over all the rules (the do’s and don’ts) pertaining to going inside a prison unit. There is no cost involved. All you have to do is go to the TDCJ website and click on the Volunteers tab. First you must register for the course. Then you will be able to log onto the Volunteer training course. Once you go through the training course there is a short quiz. The whole thing will take about 1 ½ to 2 hours. Once you complete the course and quiz you will be approved by TDCJ to go inside a prison unit as a special volunteer. Your certification is good for two years. So every two years you simply go back online through the course and quiz. Once you complete the volunteer training let the Weekend Leader know so that our records can be updated. Even if you plan to serve on the Outside Support Team we recommend that you take the TDCJ Volunteer Training.

The 3 ½ Day Weekend Program

Our 3 ½ day Weekend Program takes place twice a year. It occurs the last weekend of October and the last weekend of April. It is run by a Weekend Leader chosen by the Advisory Council. The person selected to be a Weekend Leader must attend Advanced Kairos Training – a

training program run by Kairos Prison Ministries. These training programs are held in numerous locations around the US each year. There are usually two or three each year at different locations in Texas.

The Weekend Leader will schedule a series of Team Meetings prior to the weekend program. These Team Meetings typically begin about 2 ½ months before the Weekend Program. There are usually about 7 – 8 meetings that take place on Saturdays – normally about two weeks apart. The schedule may have to be adjusted at times due to holiday schedules or other unforeseen circumstances. These meetings are very important. They not only help everyone know what to do for the upcoming weekend program – they also help the team bond and come together in a true spirit of Christian discipleship. Please commit to attending all team meetings. They are normally held at Grace United Methodist Church, 14521 Northwest Blvd, Corpus Christi. They may occasionally be held at other locations if the facility at GUMC is not available on a particular date.

Prior to the first team meeting the Weekend Leader will send out invitations to prior team members asking them to join the next weekend program. The invitation will also go out to others who have expressed an interest in taking part in the program. The invitations will also include a Team Application form. The applications will also be available at the Team Meetings. All who wish to serve in the Kairos program must submit a Team Application. Even “veteran” members who have already served on numerous weekend programs. A new Team Application must be submitted and on file for each weekend program.

Our 3 ½ day program takes place inside the McConnell Unit outside of Beeville. Our program starts on Thursday morning at the First United Methodist Church in Beeville and ends with the closing ceremony inside

the McConnell Unit. We start gathering inside the gym at the Church at 8:00 am that Thursday morning. We will also hold our final Team Meeting that Thursday morning. The program inside the prison unit begins Thursday afternoon and ends Sunday afternoon. The 42 Participants (inmates) who take part in the program are selected by the Prison Chaplain's department.

Cookies

Each Team Member makes a commitment to provide 100 dozen cookies for the weekend. On Saturday morning, we give every inmate in the prison (not just the 42 going through the program) a dozen cookies. There are approximately 2900 inmates in the unit. They are delivered to them in their housing units by several of our Inside Team members. We also give a dozen cookies to all of the prison support staff (guards, administrative staff, etc.). The 42 Participants are also served cookies along with fruit (grapes, strawberries, orange slices, bananas) during each break all weekend. The inmates do not get this kind of food. It is a wonderful agape gift of love not only for the Participants but also for the entire Prison Unit. The cookies are to be homemade. Included with this document is a page of cookie guidelines. The guidelines have been established so that all of the cookies will be about the same size and to help make sure that they will travel well without breaking. Having to bake 100 dozen cookies may seem overwhelming at first but there are many ways to accomplish this. You can ask church members, co-workers, family and friends to help you provide your 100 dozen. You may hold a cookie baking party. Sam's Club carries cookie dough. You will bring your cookies to the church on the Thursday morning our weekend begins and some of the Outside Support Team will sort them for use during the weekend.

Let me reassure you on one point here. If you are not able to provide 100 dozen cookies – that’s OK. There will be no “cookie police” knocking on your door demanding the balance of your hundred dozen. It will not prevent you from being able to serve on the team. We simply ask you to do what you can. As mentioned, there are many creative ways to get other people to help you bake cookies. Often – all you have to do is simply ask. This gives other people an opportunity to support the Kairos Ministry.

Inmate Letters

Each team member makes a commitment to provide 42 letters – one for each inmate taking part in the program. The letters should be hand written on standard 8 ½ x 11 white paper. The length of the letter is up to you. Typically they are about ½ to ¾ page in length. You will not know the names of the participants at the time you are writing them so you will not be able to customize a letter for a particular person. The letters will be general in nature. We want to reassure the participants that we care about them and support them. We want them to learn that God loves them and wants to have a relationship with them.

Since you don’t know the participants names yet you can simply put on the salutation line something like “Dear _____” or “Dear Brother _____”. You should get the list of participants names just before the start of the weekend – just as soon as we receive them from the Chaplin’s office. At that time you can go back and fill in the name on the salutation line and address the envelope with their name. Also please note that the envelopes **MUST REMAIN UNSEALED**. Bring your batch of letters to the church on the Thursday morning our weekend begins. There will be a bin there for the collection of the letters.

All letters have to be sent to the prison unit unsealed. The security personnel at the unit are supposed to examine the paper. We have

been assured that they have no interest in what you say in the letters and will not read them. They are simply supposed to examine the paper. Apparently – in the past – there have been instances where some inmates would receive mail on paper that had previously been soaked in a solution that contained some kind of drug. Then all they would have to do is roll and smoke the paper. Some inmates can be very creative at finding ways to get contraband into a prison. Please note – this was a problem with the general prison population – not necessarily our 42 participants. But for now no paper is allowed to be brought into the prison unless it is examined first by security. This is not a TDCJ rule. It is a security protocol put in place by the current warden at the McConnell Unit. It is his house. We are his guests while we are there. So we MUST abide by his rules. If the warden modifies or relaxes this protocol in the future we will be notified. But for now please remember that all letters must be sent in UNSEALED.

These letters are a very important part of our program. If you are part of the inside team, please do not mention these letters to them. Many inmates have gone for months or even years without receiving any mail. Many of them have not had any contact with family or friends on the outside. They begin to believe that they have been locked away and forgotten about. No one cares about them. They receive their letters on Saturday afternoon. It is a total surprise to them and many hardened criminals have been moved to tears by the simple act of receiving mail for the first time in a VERY LONG TIME. It is another act of Agape love that shows them there are free world people that care about them and want what's best for them.

Team Donations and Hotel Costs

Putting on a Kairos Weekend is a very expensive operation. Our two biggest costs are food and hotel costs. Food is a big part of our costs.

Not only does the outside support team prepare breakfast for all team members each day, they also prepare lunch and dinner for all team members PLUS the 42 participants each day. Hotel costs are another very big – but very important – part of our cost structure. Our team members will stay at a local hotel in Beeville on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. We are currently using the Hampton Inn in Beeville. We do not want anyone trying to commute from home each day. We will be putting in very long and action packed days each day. Breakfast is served at 5:30 with the inside team leaving for the prison unit around 6:15 each morning. When the inside team returns from the prison unit each evening there will be a brief team meeting at the church. It can easily be 8:00 or 8:30 before we are done for the day. There are some team members that live in Beeville so they can stay at home. But for most of us commuting is NOT an option.

Our council is very fortunate in that there are some local churches that provide very generous donations to our program. We may also periodically hold a fundraising program. There are also numerous ways that you can provide others with an opportunity to make donations to Kairos. These will be discussed in more detail during the team meetings.

We also ask that each team member make a donation to Kairos to help cover some of our expenses. We ask each team member to make a base donation of \$150. If a husband-wife team is taking part the base donation is \$250 for the couple. We also ask that each team member help to cover part of the cost of the hotel room. For a single room the cost would be \$90 per night for the three nights (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) or \$270. If two members decide to room together for the three nights the cost would be \$30 per night per person or \$90 per person for the three nights.

The following schedule shows the combined totals for each situation:

For a single team member –

\$150 Base Team Donation

\$270 Hotel Donation (\$90/night x 3 nights)

\$420

For two team members rooming together –

\$150 Base Team Donation per person

\$ 90 Hotel Donation per person (\$30/night x 3 nights)

\$240 per roommate

For couple sharing hotel room –

\$250 Base Team Donation

\$180 Hotel Donation per couple (\$60/night x 3 nights)

\$430 Per couple

Please keep in mind that these costs are considered to be donations – not team fees. As donations they are also considered to be tax deductible and can be written off as charitable donations. Also keep in mind that if you cannot cover these costs that WILL NOT prevent you from serving on the team. You can pay them in one lump sum or you can even make payments over two or three months. Whatever is most convenient for you. We do ask members to help us defray these costs but if it is a problem for you – we simply ask that you do what you can. You are still a valued member of the team. Payments can be made at any team meeting.

KAIROS COOKIE PREPARATION INFORMATION

HOMEMADE COOKIES ARE A TANGIBLE EXPRESSION OF GOD'S LOVE TO INDIVIDUALS WHO SELDOM ENCOUNTER EITHER LOVE OR CONCERN IN THE COURSE OF THEIR DAILY LIVES. YOUR LOVING GIFT OF COOKIES WILL SHINE THE LIGHT OF GOD'S GRACE INTO THE DARKEST PARTS OF THE PRISON.

These instructions help ensure the cookies are basically the same size for bags sent into the prison. They also help us ensure all your cookies will travel well to our staging area.

PRAY AS YOU PREPARE THE COOKIES

- Pray individually, as a family, or as a group as you prepare the cookies! Ask God to use your cookies as a source His love for the offenders during the weekend. Pray that the offenders will be drawn closer to our Lord and Savior Jesus.

COOKIE PREPARATION

- The types of cookies considered to be acceptable in the prison and travel the best are: OATMEAL, CHOCOLATE CHIP, GINGER, PEANUT BUTTER.
- Cookies should be between 2 and 2 1/2 inches in diameter and not over 1/2 inch thick. Round, whole cookies reflect God's perfect love by their shape.
- **PLEASE DO NOT USE:** ICING, SUGAR, OR ANY OTHER TYPE OF COATING, TOPPING OR DECORATION ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE COOKIES. (Chocolate Chips on the inside of the cookie are acceptable)
- **ENCOURAGED:** Use shortening (Crisco or Butter Crisco) as opposed to margarine or butter. Butter/margarine cookies tend to break very easily during transporting.

COOLING AND PACKING

- **COOL EACH AND EVERY COOKIE THOROUGHLY!** Cookies packed even slightly warm stick together, are difficult to separate as a whole cookie, and tend to break easily. Cool....Cool....Cool!
- Stack the cooled cookies in layers using wax paper between layers or place on end in a plastic shoe box or bin or a cardboard box. Each box should have a lid. You may also place the cookies in gallon ziplock bags and then box. You may freeze them until ready to be transported and/or turned over to your Kairos contact. **DO NOT USE** grocery bags or trash bags as the cookies may break.
- **Clearly** mark each box with the number of cookies it contains. **DO NOT** use Post-It notes, as they tend to fall off. Use a piece of tape.

Approximate size

