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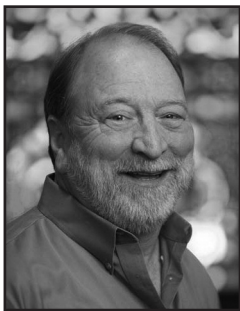
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## New Challenges, New Prayers, Same God

by Frank Zeidler, Jr., Executive Director



The year 2020 will be remembered forever for the havoc that Covid-19 wreaked on society. To varying degrees, everyone suffered the fallout from the government shutdowns for 2-3 years. As a regular reader of The Insider, you are well aware that the Saints Prison Ministry ex-

perienced 13 months of inactivity, followed by months of intermittent prison re-openings and a painfully slow resumption of ministry opportunities.

2023 was supposed to be the year that the ministry was back to normal. The soccer team had an abbreviated season in January and February. The basketball team visited five different prison populations, opting to make a trip to Florida while waiting for NE prisons to get back on track. And all seven softball teams have a summer's worth of prison visits scheduled. If only it were that easy...

We have always been aware of the spiritual warfare involved in prison ministry, and this ministry specifically. Internally we talk about it often and you have read about it in the past. Much of the enemy's arsenal is no longer effective, but we are seeing a different kind of attack now. This attack is indirect and much harder for the leadership to counter.

One of the repercussions of the pandemic years is a changing of the guard. During those times of uncertainty, many of the Chaplains and Recreation personnel found it to be a favorable time to move on - whether to a different career or retirement. Relationships that had been built over years of scheduling and visits disappeared, replaced by unfamiliar names with no knowledge of the Saints work. In many cases, this resulted in having to start all over

with introductions, explanations of the ministry, and trepidation on the part of new schedulers and even Wardens.

If you have been outside the four walls of your home in the last year, you have seen a Help Wanted sign. Corrections Departments nationwide are not exempt from this dearth of employees; every prison we contact shares the staffing issues they face. The difference between our challenge and a restaurant needs servers is simple - we are not considered necessary to the function of the prison. So, if we have a visit scheduled, and the prison has a staff shortage that day for any reason, we are the first thing on which they pull the plug.

An unexpected, but understandable, challenge is a shortage of missionary-athletes on many of our teams. The inactivity of the 2020-2021 months led some MAs to find different outlets for their desire to serve. Moreover, the inconsistency of the current schedules has led some to hedge their commitment - keeping other prospects open for a given Saturday just in case the Saints game gets canceled. It is hard to fault anyone for this - it seems we get negative messages from prison more weeks than we don't - but it is a challenge this ministry has never faced in the past.

Prison staff that has no knowledge of the ministry... staffing issues throughout the prison system nationwide... missionary-athletes facing uncertainty in their opportunity to serve. New challenges that require new direction for your prayers. We have always asked our supporters to pray for safety, travel, open hearts, and MA families. But now we have to think about areas we've always taken for granted: staff willingness to host our teams, adequate staff to allow the events to occur, and renewed confidence among our missionary-athletes which rekindles their passion for ministering in prison.

New challenges... new prayers... but, thankfully, the same God that has sustained His work at Saints Prison Ministry for almost 36 years. Nothing He can't handle!

## The Inside Story

### Life in the Spotlight

On a recent crusade, our team had an experience that demonstrates a key principle of being a Saints Prison Ministry missionary-athlete. Our MAs are keenly aware of this, but it is unlikely our supporters understand this aspect of being “on the road” in ministry.

This is the coach’s recap of the incident:

*During this crusade, we were between facilities and trying to grab a little lunch. As we entered a local fast-food restaurant, several of our players noticed an older couple sitting down waiting for their food. The gentleman had a World War II veterans’ hat on. Some of our team mentioned, “you don’t see many of them anymore.” One of our men also commented, “Look boys, a real hero.”*

*Several of our team walked over and thank the man for his service. He quickly became overwhelmed and had tears in his eyes. As our team felt led, they went over and spoke to the gentleman and his wife. They were happy to entertain us, and he genuinely enjoyed the attention. With a big smile on his face, he told us about his adventures in the war. You could tell we made his day. When we were getting ready to leave, the gentleman came over and put his arms around several of us. He thanked us for our*

*service to the men in prison. And we were able to tell him that we do it because Christ told us to. He smiled and nodded and said, “Yes he did, yes he did.”*

Sometimes we are not only to minister to men in prison. We didn’t get into a deep conversation with him about Christ. We didn’t get them to fill out a response card. But I know we ministered to that gentleman and his wife as much as we ministered to anybody in a prison that day.

The principle that all of our athletes understand is simple - we are always ON when traveling on a crusade. It is often verbalized among teammates as “we never know who is watching”, and that is very true. We know the inmates and corrections officers are paying close attention and, of course, there are cameras everywhere in prisons. But over the years hotel staff, restaurant staff and patrons, and convenience store attendants have all commented on the attitudes and actions of our teams.

In this case, the team took the initiative to interact with this couple; in other cases, it is the observer proactively commenting on something witnessed or overheard. Regardless, it is a lesson for all of us to remember - when others know that we claim the name of Jesus, we are always ON!

### Results

As of June 30, 2023, the results you see below are a blessing to share with you all! Our teams are working hard to take the gospel behind bars and while it has been a wonderful experience to have all of our teams active again, including the soccer team earlier in the year and the basketball team who went on a crusade to FL in April, we ask that you continue to pray for each Missionary Athlete as they prepare to finish the season strong. We would be remiss if we didn’t tell you that there have been a few setbacks and cancellations as well, however, God is good and still on His throne and we are experiencing great crowds, good softball and sharing the gospel and seeing lives changed.

Please continue to pray for our remaining visits, crusades and the upcoming scheduling of Fall sports. Looking forward to updating you later in the year with more good news of lives changed!

Number of Facilities	Inmates that Watched	Stayed for Gospel Presentation	Gospels Distributed	Response Cards Collected	Decisions for Christ
19	2,276	1,569	2,137	1,188	269

# FROM THE INSIDE OUT

*Correspondence from behind the walls*

I received the birthday card today. I want to thank friends at the Saints Prison Ministry for the card, your time and thoughtfulness. Every year your birthday cards make my day! I have been incarcerated for 31 years. I lost my grandmother, mother and aunt. So I was looking for a birthday card from y'all. I said to myself, "Saints always send me a card." Thanks again!

- Anthony M.

Four years ago I had the privilege of playing your softball team. During that encounter, you pledged to stay in contact with me. Every year that promise has been fulfilled. You have taken the time out of your personal lives and struggles to wish me a happy birthday. This kind gesture I seldom receive from my own family. Words can't describe how grateful I am for your kind words. I pray God blesses you all in the most extraordinary ways.

- James C.

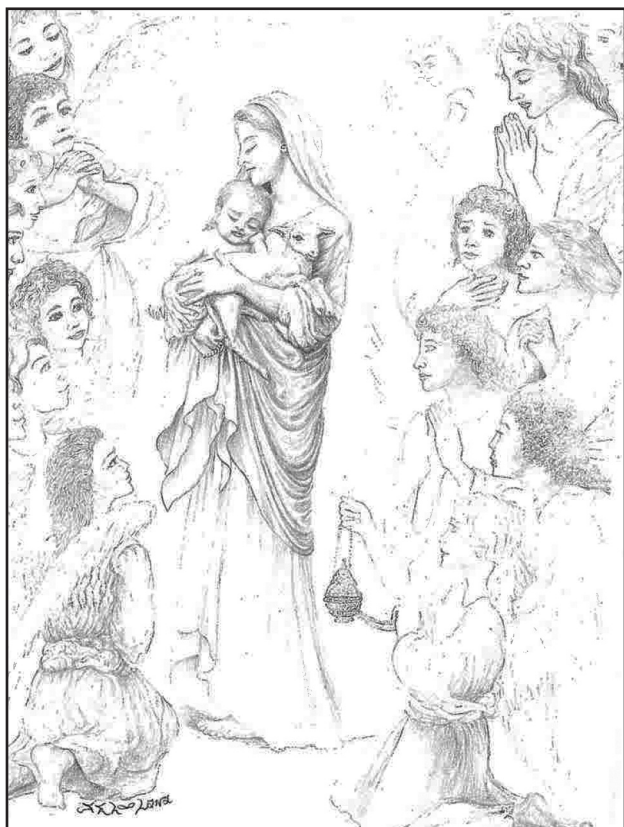
My reason for writing you guys is a simple one, my gratitude and thankfulness towards this ministry's faithfulness. I think of the 10 lepers Jesus healed of their leprosy. Only one of them came back to thank Him and this outward show of

gratitude was considered and recorded in scripture. As I read my birthday letter and other reading material sent last week, I smiled and thanked God for people that actually care. In a world where love is waxing colder by the day, God still has His many, the ones that haven't followed the majority. Thank you and I'm praying for you all that the Saints Prison Ministry will continue to grow and be faithful in every way.

- Maurice L.

Thanks for the birthday card! I am 64 today, the earthen vessel that is. As Paul penned, "Even though the outer man may be wasting away, the inner man is being renewed day by day." It's true. My inner life is the Spirit is much more important to me than whatever may be going on around me. I'm in this world but not "of it." Thanks again for caring.

- Adam E.



Scott L., Northern NH CF



Clemmie S., Johnson SP, GA



Scott L., Northern NH CF

# Inside the Mind of Gibby

## Corky

*By Tom Gibson, IL Saints Softball Coach*

Corky Schumacher passed away in April. Most of you reading this column have never heard of him, so I am taking a break from my typical column to introduce you to the man. We all know people who fly under the radar without getting recognized for their impact - and they like it that way. Corky was one of those people, but it is important for you to know that the Illinois softball team exists in large part because of the way God used Corky Schumacher.

I first met Corky in 1995 when I was in high school. Of course, he was just known as "Cassie's dad" then and he volunteered hours of his time to help with our band program. He spent countless Friday nights moving props and large musical instruments on and off the football field so that we could play the halftime show.

Corky also worked with my mom at one of the local hospitals. In 1997 Corky invited my mom and dad to attend Calvary Baptist Bible Church in Peoria. He was initially my Sunday School teacher, but over time we served together through several different church and sports ministries. He taught me the art of not freaking out during a bad deacon's meeting!

The fondest memory I have was playing several years of church softball with him. When I showed up at church in 1998, Corky was at the tail end of a really good softball career. He was a strong, left-handed power hitter who was an excellent defender at first base. It was fun playing church softball with him and then enjoying some pizza and wings after the games. More importantly, Corky was becoming a friend and advisor to me, and I embraced the relationship.

In 2011, I committed to going on a Saints softball crusade to Ohio. I wanted to see what they did and wanted to learn how to be a better minister through using sports. Of course, Corky was enthusiastic about the trip and encouraged me by making sure he hit some ground balls and fly balls to me before I left.

After the first day of that trip, I knew that the Saints Prison Ministry was something special and I called Corky during our team meal that evening. I told him that he had to see this for himself!

Shortly after the trip, I had begun trying to figure out what it would look like to start a Saints team in Illinois. Corky and I spent some time praying about it and discussing it.

And then we did something that most normal Midwesterners don't typically do; we boarded a plane and flew to New Jersey! We had an opportunity to sit down with then Southeast Director Frank Zeidler and Saints all-time great Don Conner to discuss what it would take to get a team started in Illinois. Of course, I was ready to start the team as soon as we got to the airport, but Corky was the much-needed voice of reason God used to make sure I was praying and doing it for the right reasons.

When we got back, we started laying the groundwork for who would be on our team. Corky and I spent that winter sitting down with prospective missionary athletes. Although we agreed completely from the start, his disciplined approach balanced my full-steam-ahead mindset perfectly. We almost had a good cop - bad cop routine where I would explain the ministry and

Corky would grill them on where they stood with the Lord. He would make it clear that this was about the Gospel and not just playing more softball.



Our first trip as the SPM Illinois team was in 2012 at FCI Greenville. We won our first game! Unfortunately, it would be over a year before we won our second game - but it was special to share what we prayed about come into existence with him.

Corky stayed with our team through the 2014 season before retiring and moving to Arizona. Like other teams,

we have had some turnover over the years. There are some guys on our current team who never met Corky, but he is one of the most vital pieces God provided to bring this team into existence.

Outside of my own dad, Corky is probably the most important mentor I have ever had. I appreciate his encouragement, and, at the same time, I appreciate that he wasn't afraid to have a hard conversation with me and tell me things I didn't want to hear. He taught me to take joy in serving the Lord whether it was teaching a Sunday School class, working with the youth group, or spending the day on a softball field in prison.

Corky's passing is a tremendous loss for me. I am thankful that God provided Corky as a friend, mentor, and Saint! I take comfort in knowing that God kept His promise to Corky, and that we will get to rejoice together someday in what God has done in the prisons here in Illinois!



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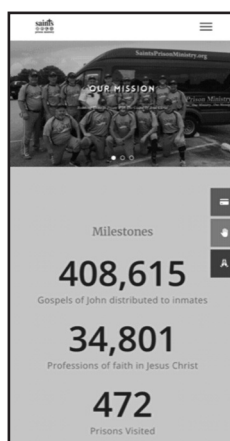
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*Softball Results  
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## We have a new website!

After almost 20 years, our website was looking dated and tired. In 2022, we determined to update it, which turned into a complete rebuild. After many changes, corrections, and modifications...it's HERE!

Please visit [www.saintsprisonministry.org](http://www.saintsprisonministry.org) to see our new look and new format. Check out the stories on the Home page, review the opportunities to get involved, and let us know if you have any comments on the new website. Address comments to [info@saintsprisonministry.org](mailto:info@saintsprisonministry.org)



## Pen Pals Needed

You can fill a volunteer need right from the comfort of your home!

Right now we have more than 100 men and women on our waiting list - many of whom write to us just to remind us to keep them on the list! Please do not make them wait any longer!

For more information, including the Pen Pal guidelines and expectations, please contact the Saints office at 609-845-3197 or [office@saintsprisonministry.org](mailto:office@saintsprisonministry.org)

## THE SAINTS PRISON MINISTRY STAFF

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