



Lawyers' Christian Fellowship Newsletter

www.lawyerschristianfellowship.org

JANUARY 2006

Opening of Law Term Services

**30th January 2006
10am**

SYDNEY CBD



St James Anglican Church, King St

speaker
Bishop Robert Forsyth

PARRAMATTA



St Johns Anglican Cathedral, Church St Mall

speaker
Justice Peter Young QC

The Year that was and the Year ahead

As we enter another year, it is good to reflect on some of the highlights of the year gone by.

In January, we had our inaugural Fellowship Dinner for informal fellowship. Bruce Baird MP addressed us on religious freedom in Australia at the Law Week Dinner held in conjunction with the St Thomas More Society. In July, we conducted two seminars with Macquarie Christian Studies Institute titled "Bridging the Gap" in which we explored tensions between Christian Faith and legal practice. These seminars were followed by a series of informal workshops titled "Christian Faith in Legal Practice" which examined these questions in more detail. At

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Dinner

at

Rossini's

30 January 2006

7pm

Members and friends are invited to an informal dinner at Rossini's to start the law term.



Shop W5 Alfred St,
Circular Quay

Many of you will remember our Christmas function in 2000 when we enjoyed the hospitality of Michael and Margaret Orpwood. Last year ended on a note of sadness with news of Michael Orpwood's death on December 15. Our sympathies go with Margaret and the wider Orpwood family and his close friends.

Michael had been diagnosed with cancer late last year and died after two doses of chemotherapy had failed to halt the progress of his cancer.

Michael, a Queens Counsel, was until his recent retirement Deputy Parliamentary Counsel. On his retirement he took up the position of Chancellor of the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney. A great supporter of evangelism Michael wrote a biography of the Anglican evangelist John Chapman. He was a passionate family man and an active member of his Church.

The emails that he wrote in the last weeks of his life to friends and family reflect his continued trust in the promises of God. The following reflects something of that:

I am seeing with greater clarity that all the beautiful and beguiling things of this world and of this life are merely shadows of the reality that is to come. This seems to be God's way. The Passover is swallowed up in the Cross. A greater than Moses comes to lead His children into their true inheritance. David, the Messiah King, submits to the Son of David whose suffering and death provide the full and perfect atonement. The temple gives way to the body of Christ. So many examples could be given.

His encouragement and fellowship will be missed by those of us who remain in these shadowlands.



We've Lost a Friend

year's end, we were greatly encouraged by our President, Justice Peter Young, who addressed us at the annual Christmas function.

In November, we started dialogue with younger Christian lawyers to see how the Fellowship can minister to them and those who come into the profession in the future.

Naomi Stafford is leaving Sydney shortly to practise in Lismore. We thank Naomi for the enormous effort she expended on behalf of the Fellowship over so many years. Please pray for God's blessing on Naomi, especially for a smooth transition as she makes her new life.

In the coming year, the committee plans another Fellowship Dinner on 30 January, the same day as the opening of law term service. The St Thomas More Society will be hosting the Law Week dinner in late March. Planning is underway. On 10 August, the Macquarie Christian Studies Institute will be conducting a seminar titled "Law for the Long Haul" designed to help lawyers grapple with spiritual issues they face at different stages of their careers. We plan to follow this seminar with workshops tailored for lawyers beginning their careers, those in mid-career and those who are nearing the end of their careers. We also have in mind a seminar on dealing with the problems of sexual abuse in churches.

A major initiative we plan to introduce this year is to foster relationships with Christian law students at universities and practical legal training courses so that we can minister to their needs as they enter the profession.

Please pray for the work of the Fellowship, for new committee members and the proposed contact with students.

I trust that you will look out for advertisements for these activities in the current newsletter and in issues to come.

My very best wishes for the new year in serving our Lord and supporting one another in the faith.

Martin Drevikovsky Chair

From Parliament to Porridge LCF Breakfast with Jonathan Aitken

Director Prison Fellowship International

Continued from September 2005 newsletter

The third thing I noticed after a day or two, as I started to get under the skin of the prison community and get to know individuals, was that I started to see that despite all the superficial macho posturing and aggression and muscle flexing that a lot of these young men,

for all be bad things they had done, were themselves rather vulnerable people. I came across this initially as a result of a not unamusing little incident which happened when a young black prisoner came up to me and said "Could you do me a favour I got a problem, I have got a letter here from a lawyer but my problem is I can't read. Would you mind reading this letter to me." So I read it to him and it was a letter evicting him and his family from their council flat in South London. He was upset by this. Then he had an idea that he could get his brother to pay off some of the rent arrears and save them from eviction. He said "I have another problem now I don't do no reading nor no writing either. Could you write this letter for me." So I wrote a letter for him and he signed it and I addressed it and then he did something rather odd with the letter. He lifted it up high like a sort of town cryer and skipped off down the wing saying over and over again at the top of his voice "That M. P. geezer he's got fantastic joined up writing."

Now this commercial for my graphological skills reached the ears of a surprisingly receptive audience because in a British gaol a third of all prisoners can't read or write at all and another third have literacy problems. So anyone who is willing to read and write letters immediately becomes rather a useful member of the community and so it proved because from that moment onward, thanks to the town cryer, every night there used to form a little queue outside my cell. A rather longer one than the queue that used to form outside my constituency office when I was a member of Parliament. But anyway as a result of reading and writing letters for my fellow inmates, often on the most intimate subjects imaginable, I got to know my fellow prisoners rather well. At first this was a bit of a joke. I remember one lag saying to me one-day "John O. you realise you is having a fantastic impact on the girls of Brixton they can't believe the sudden improvement in the quality of their love letters."

Be that as it may I was making a friend or two. One of the friends I made was a young Irish burglar unsurprisingly named Paddy. Paddy was a young man of considerable energy and he invited me into his cell one evening and we had a cup of coffee and towards the end of our conversation he suddenly started to make almost a speech. The gist of his speech was this – "On behalf of the lads we would really like to thank you for all these letters you have been writing and all the advice you have been giving. The lads and I have been talking and we have decided to give you a present and the present we're going to give you is that you can have, free of charge, anything you want from me library." He then dived under the left-hand side of his bed and started to rummage around in a cardboard box. I wondered for a moment what presentational volume it could be that would come out of the library of a man who could not read or write. What eventually came up was an amazing selection

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of hardcore porn magazines. I said "Thanks but no thanks Paddy". I said it in a way that caused him to flare with umbrage. He said "You too good for us" or words to that effect. Then, before he could calm down and I had a chance to say anything, he had the most ingenious idea as to why I had said this. He said "But if it is boys you are after" and then he went to the other side of his bed. I said "No Paddy it is not a boys, it's not girls. These days I am trying a different path in life. Paddy said "What kind of path would that be then". I said "If you really want to know Paddy it is the path of believing in Jesus Christ, it is the path of following his teachings, obeying his commandments. That is the path I am on these days and it has changed my life".

There was a sudden stillness in that cell - a sort of deep silence. After a long pause Paddy broke that silence by saying something completely unexpected. What he said was this: "You know I would really like to try that path me self." Then a sort of floodgate burst open inside him and out poured a litany of woes grumbles and grievances of the kind you can actual hear in middle-class society just as much as you can in a gaol. What he was really saying was "My life hasn't got any meaning to it and I don't understand why everything seems so pointless. My relationships aren't working, I've got a sort of hole in me even when I have money in my pocket". Admittedly he had a rather original way of getting it. He then went on "Life still doesn't mean anything. What's it all about? Why is life so aimless?" "Me Nan used to believe in all that Jesus stuff and she had something I could see and I can sort of see you have got something. Maybe I should get on this path I would really like to try this path myself."

I realised I had to respond to this. I never wanted to put my head above the parapet and say anything about religion in prison. I said "Well if you feel that way how about we say a prayer together" See I had moved some way from the time I thought prayer was worse than going to the dentist without an anaesthetic. So we said a prayer together on the first night and the second night and a third night. Then Paddy suddenly had the idea that this stuff is too good to keep to ourselves. I thought he was perhaps going to try and find a third member for our prayer group but Paddy was a man of ambition and he had in him the qualities of a good recruiting Sergeant. So he set off around the gaol recruiting. He made some rather remarkable recruits. He brought in, for example, an armed robber, another Irish burglar, a pickpocket, a fraudster and a couple of murderers. Before we knew where we were we had a rather original little prayer group going. So original it gave a completely new meaning to the Christian term - a cell group.

There we were off and praying together and all kinds of extraordinary things happened in that prayer group. I have not got time to tell you about all of them but suffice it to say that we got on a journey and we broke through some of the defensive middle-class attitudes towards our pain, sharing it with each other instead of burying it or denying it or keeping a stiff upper lip. Oth-

ers started to go down the road of real repentance. What is real repentance especially if you are a prisoner? Well there is a good biblical test of it— "show the fruits of your repentance" says John the Baptist (Matthew 3:8). If your repentance is real it does start to show up in all kinds of very real ways. It may not seem much in respectable Sydney but in prison it is a big deal when prisoners start throwing away their porn magazines, stopping swearing and start reaching out to the pariah prisoners - the sex offenders. Or bigger things still - getting in touch with their families or breaking their drugs habits.

These are enormous advances and we wouldn't have done them if it had not been for two groups of people who were coming into the gaol regularly. They were the volunteers from Alpha who regularly ran prison Alpha courses and the regular volunteers from Prison Fellowship. These were wonderful people who helped us and they helped the prayer group to grow. We started with about six or seven people but within four or five weeks it had gone up to over twenty people. Of course we had some who fell by the wayside, but thanks to these courses and this mentoring the repentance was real and the spiritual growth was real. People just changed in the way I have been talking about. I will give one spectacular example before I finish.

I just want to change the video clip now and get to the epilogue because we know what happened to the prayer group because I have stayed in touch with them. I am now five years out of prison and while I was in prison people would often say "You'll never see us again" "When you are out you will be up there with the big cheeses again." But I said I would stay in touch with them.

An amusing little episode, well reported by the British media, was when I got married two years ago for the second time. It was a lovely wedding in the heart of Westminster. The media gave a lot of attention to it, not really so much because of me but because of my new wife who had previously been married to two famous film stars -- Rex Harrison and Richard Harris. This gives me a hard act to follow as a husband. The media were there and they were full of interest as to who had been invited. They recorded the rather fascinating statistical piece of symmetry that there were exactly the same number of ex-cabinet ministers who turned up to the wedding as they were ex-prisoners from Belmarsh. About eight of each. I keep in touch with this group and I know what has happened to them. Of the twenty strong members of the core prayer group one is still the gaol serving his life sentence, two are back in gaol or back on their way to gaol because they have got into trouble again. Seventeen out of the twenty have stayed clean and stayed out of crime and become law-abiding citizens and have also retained to a very passionate extent their Christian faith.

Now that little snapshot I've told personally as it happened. But those involved in prison ministry especially those involved in Alpha and Prison Fellowship know that what I am describing is going on all the time thanks

to their work. They know it in a very carefully recorded and statistical way because there are prisons in the United States called inner change prisons, founded by Charles Colson with the help of George W. Bush then the Governor of Texas. The oldest one, which has been going for eight years, is in Houston. I visited there the other day and they have a repeat offending rate which is nowhere near the national average in America which is generally 68 to 70 percent. In this prison and the other eight inner change prisons the repeat offending rate is below 10 percent. At Houston it is eight percent.

I was in Rimutaka prison four nights ago in New Zealand. They have got a faith based unit and they are doing these courses and the transformation is one I can recognise so easily. I know now from my own experience whose repentance is real and whose is flaky and phoney. But Rimutaka has only been going just under two years. Amazing things are going on there thanks to the Prison Fellowship course called Sycamore Tree. For example they have a drug-free wing. They do mandatory drug testing on a random basis and the random tests show a rate of zero in this faith based unit.

I could tell you much much more but suffice it to say this business of changing lives through spiritual development and growth is something which our society needs. Of course it needs it spiritually and I guess talking to Christian lawyers you'll respond to the Christian message here. But if you were a lot of secular lawyers or secular politicians (and I talk to them too) I think we should all sit up and take notice, for purely secular reasons, of what is going on in these faith based units. It is rather extraordinary at a time when thoughtful people are worried all around the world about the recidivism rate/repeat offending rate no matter which country you are in it is from 65 percent to 85 percent that here and now prisons and units and courses which have been going for the best part of 10 years are slowly gaining a foothold and are turning out prisoners with much lower repeat offending rates. Even in the less successful programs they are doing this and in the best programs the rate is below 10 percent.

You can argue about faith but you cannot argue about the consequences of faith - if you have got tried and tested courses which are producing spectacular falls in repeat offending rates. Eight out of about every ten prisoners released in Britain returns to gaol after a few years. These faith based programs mean that instead of being released and returning to prison and costing the State \$60,000 to \$80,000 a year to keep them in prison, the prisoners go straight, stop doing crime and become taxpayers. So there is a big big gain for society. As well with the spiritual work the churches are really playing their part in society. So when I came out of gaol I thought that what I most wanted to do is this kind of work. First I went off to one place in Britain where the food was worse than prison - an Anglican theological college. There I spent two years studying, and getting to know God better and earned my living as an author which is what I do professionally. I work as a columnist, as a broadcaster but above all as an author. I now try and work with these organisations that helped me so much.

All around the world Alpha is growing a pace and Prison Fellowship is growing a pace. They are growing at a pace for good reasons. First it is just a success - it works. Secondly of course I believe that God's hand is upon both organisations and I do appeal to you who must think about crime and must think about spiritual lives to take these two organisations Alpha and Prison Fellowship with the utmost seriousness and if possible the utmost generosity if you can support them in your prayers or voluntary work. Volunteers are growing wonderfully well in these organisations. In New Zealand the number of registered Prison Fellowship volunteers has gone up from 1,400 some eighteen months ago to 2,900 today. Wonderful work is going on so please support as volunteers or if you have the resources do so financially because they can do so much more if they can mobilise more volunteers like me and those who go into the prison to help.

The newsletter's editor is Steven Nicholson who can be contacted at mcphees@pnc.com.au or on 47511055 or PO Box 4 Springwood, NSW, 2777 or DX 26729 Springwood.

Membership Renewal for 2006

would prefer to receive this newsletter by email in Adobe PDF format and my email address is:

am willing to receive reminders and notices from the Fellowship by email and my email address is:

Enclosed is my cheque for \$ _____ being my membership fee for the 2006 year.

Membership fees: Students	\$ NIL
Practitioners (under three years in practise)	\$ 20.00
Practitioners [over three years in practise]	\$ 45.00

Return to
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