

Members from prison ministry to be honored

Kairos helps inmates during, after jail time

By Judith McGinnis

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Making a successful transition from prison life to the outside world takes more than a suit of clothes and a new address.

Since 2001, Kairos, an international Christian prison ministry, has given Allred Unit inmates the spiritual tools needed to cope with life during and after their incarceration.

This week Allred's senior warden, Eddie Williams; chaplains Jeff Smith and Timothy Anderson; and staff will receive the first Excellence Initiative Award from Kairos International for their support of the program.

"Allred has been the poster child for the most effective way to operate a Kairos program," said Steve Newton, chairman of the Kairos Allred Advisory Council. "Kairos teams from around the world are encouraged to structure their programs using this model. Instruction manuals provided to those teams were written by active Allred volunteers."

Kairos Inside is a weekend-long course of Christian study for qualified inmates; the application list is usually long. Graduates go on to become "stewards" who help new participants. Floral Heights United Methodist is the "anchor church" for the Allred program.

"By its very nature Kairos provides a proven method of changing hearts, which changes behavior while in prison and impacts the community upon release," Newton said. "The awards, of course, are very gratifying, but our success is measured in the stories of men who have kept Christ as their guide outside."

Former Allred inmate Michael Bryant would agree. Bryant now lives in Central Oklahoma after serving a full eight-year sentence for aggravated assault. He is a veterinary technician and operates a successful lawn care business.

He says as a child he was "drug to church" but never got to see the Bible's lessons lived out in his own family. After a brief encounter with Kairos while at the John Wallace Unit in Colorado City, he said he wanted more.

"You learn to put your life in God's hands, in his will. I knew I would be coming back to Oklahoma City, having to trust in the Lord that everything would work out," Bryant said. "What I learned that when the Lord wants in your life, he's going to get in."

Again and again Bryant said he found himself meeting other Christians who helped reinforced the Kairos message through everyday faith.

Today he is married and enjoying life in a way he never dreamed was possible.

"I don't discount my prison time," Bryant said. "But like Joseph, it was all for a reason."

"Bill," a Kairos graduate who asked to keep his name confidential for the sake of family members, became entangled in the web of methamphetamine. What began as recreational use to fuel his fast-paced career led to a nine-year prison sentence.

"I can't explain the kindness of Kairos, to come into the prisons and show the love of Christ," Bill said. "I had read the Bible before but never really was that serious about it.

"Becoming a Christian helped me see things more honestly and stop denying my responsibilities."

At Allred, Bill was a Kairos steward, taking great satisfaction in helping others experience the difference faith makes.

"There are lines now that I'll never cross again, moral limits that have been set higher now because of Kairos," said the 42-year-old Texan. "A lie is a serious thing now."

Having completed his sentence two years ago, Bill has now rebuilding his career. He has also connected with a teenage daughter he didn't know he had.

"She got on the Internet and found me," he said. "She's a Christian, too. She understands forgiveness."



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