

SUMMER 2007

Partners Report

NEWSLETTER OF PARTNERS IN EVANGELISM MINISTRY TO PRISONERS AND SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN



Dear Partners,

The lazy days of summer are here! So whether you are planning a trip to the beach, mountains, or staying at home, we hope that you will be able to take time out from your regular schedule to take pleasure in some of the things on your *to do* list! Knowing that many of us have a pile of books that we'd like to read during the summer months, we thought we would give you something to put on top of the pile—A Partners' Summer Report!

Usually we write a joint letter to our partners. But for this report we are doing something different—we are penning our own update! So enjoy reading about Partners' ministries to Catholic prisoners and service men and women, as well as the witnesses of three people whose lives have been touched by your generosity. And please continue to be a *partner in prayer* with us.

God bless you all,

Angela M. Burrin
Director, Ministry to Prisoners

Bryan Keilty
Ministry to Service Men and Women

PS: We also ask you to consider making a summer donation to Partners.

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!



Partners in Prayer

Father—Your love for all your sons and daughters is immeasurable and unchanging. We pray that all our prisoners and service men and women will know and experience your great love. May it give them courage to face daily challenges and free them of any fears, doubts, confusion, or depression. Help them to love others as you have loved them.

Jesus—The peace you give surpasses all understanding. Grant peace to the families of prisoners and our service men and women during the absence of their loved ones. We pray for peace in the world and in the hearts of all people.

Holy Spirit—You are the source of all spiritual gifts. Grant that the gifts of wisdom and understanding, especially, be bestowed upon chaplains and persons in authority. May they be channels of your gifts to all in their care.

Summer Gift! \$40, \$80, \$120

As you make up your summer budget, please remember Partners!

Why? Because we at Partners want to send *The Word Among Us* to 60,000 prisoners and service men and women by the end of 2007.

Your summer donation will help us reach this goal!

Remember! Your donation is tax-deductible.

To make a donation go online at www.partnersinevangelism.org, call 1-800-775-9673, or use the enclosed form and envelope.

I Finally Found My Purpose In Life

By GySgt A.W. Brown

Growing up in south Chicago in a predominantly African-American community, with several catholic churches within a few miles, the Catholic Church was very influential to me as a youth.

I was raised by my great aunt and uncle who were very devout Catholics, but never aggressively led anyone other than their children into the church.

However, we were made to attend Mass on Sundays and occasionally attended CCD. Even today, I can still remember wanting to become an altar boy, shaking hands with the priests and admiring their vestments after Mass.

The years went by, and I never completed CCD and received the sacraments. As I grew older and became a teen, I joined the Marine Corps and left Chicago for good. In the sixteen years since, I have traveled to over thirty countries, studied two other religions, and worshipped many idols other than God. I have married, had a child, and have been successful in my career to this point. My great aunt has since passed away, but her example of faith in God has stayed with me. She taught me to be honest and truthful with myself, and believed that I would come back to God when the time was right. The time came in January 2007 when I deployed to Iraq, four days before my son's first birthday.

One of my many goals was to improve my physical as well as

mental and spiritual condition. Upon arriving, I settled into the professional mission and then commenced working on the personal mission. I met with the Catholic chaplain and started RCIA classes.

mindset, particularly during the weeks [Lent] leading up to Easter. The magazine is available here at the Base chapel in a location for service members and civilians of all faiths to take one and share.

Being in Iraq and facing death each day no longer preoccupied my thoughts twenty-four hours a day. I studied for three months with an intensity and a motivation that I never had before. I went back to the basics each day: prayer, study, and going through my deployment not



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The experience was very motivating. I felt like I knew more about Catholicism than I had initially thought. Learning about the sacraments, Mass, mysteries, and church etiquette, and preparing for baptism made me feel like I had finally found my purpose in life.

The first publication I picked up at the chaplain's office was *The Word Among Us*. The daily meditations and readings were instrumental in starting my days in a positive

worrying about the past or what lay ahead. When Easter came it was one of the most important days in my life, along with the day I was married and when my son was born. Since I have accepted Christ into my life and celebrated the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, my life seems to have more meaning and fullness. A void has been filled. My next mission is to actually continue to work at strengthening my faith once I return home. ■

I Opened My Heart to Let God Back In

By Bill, a prisoner in Colorado

I am once again inside the most comforting embrace of the Catholic Church.

I would like to thank you for all the wonderful and precious words in *The Word Among Us* for those of us who are freshly renewed in God's good grace.

I was born in Denver. My mother was a devout Catholic and my father a Protestant. I was enrolled



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in Catholic schools and raised a Catholic. We lived in an area that rapidly became a low-income area. As a child I was exposed to all kinds

of negative influences and frightening experiences.

When I got to junior high a very traumatic event took place in my life. A relative molested me repeatedly for several years. I collapsed inwardly. I prayed for it to stop or for someone to hear my cries. But it didn't. So I rebelled against everything and everyone. I began to hate life and everyone in my life. I started getting involved in drinking and using drugs.

After graduating from high school I joined the army. And at age twenty-five I found myself in prison. I blamed God for making my life so miserable and continued to do so for the next twelve years as I went in and out of prison.

But in May 2006, as I once again lay on the mattress in a city jail coming down from drugs, I closed my eyes and fell asleep. I had a vision of Jesus. He came to me and told me that it was time to come back to him. Then I saw a beauti-

ful altar and the Lord carrying the cross. He looked directly into my eyes and told me everything would be all right.

The next day two men came to the jail to spread the Word. Every time this happened before, I would just go back to my cell, but this day I stayed out. And with tears in my eyes I opened my heart to let God back in, and I have never been so happy. Even though I am in prison for a couple of years, I have never had the peace I have now. I thank God every night for everything I have gone through because it makes me appreciate his love more now. He never stopped loving me. He just let me learn how valuable his love is and how wonderful his grace can be if we let him take control.

Please pray for all those who are inside here and haven't opened up the door to let him back in again. And pray also for me, that I can continue to grow in faith every day. ■

Free In My Heart

By Henry, a prisoner in Michigan

Since I've been in prison, I've had many different feelings, including self-pity. But a lot changed when I began reading *The Word Among Us*.

I was born and raised Catholic. However, I always felt like a failure, even to God, because I thought I couldn't meet his expectations. I became a slave of my own lusts and fell away from God and the Church. I hated myself. I couldn't forgive myself for the things I had done

wrong. It was Satan's way of saying, "I've got you. You are my slave."

Yes! I was a slave to Satan because I wanted to do what I wanted to do—whether out of anger, greed, lust, or guilt. But then I received *The Word Among Us*! Through reading the articles, the daily Scripture readings, and meditations I was able to forgive myself. I know he's forgiven me. And I've given all my negative feelings to God. I now have such a peace. I have gotten back



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into praying the rosary. I am going to make it a point, with the help of Jesus, to help others before they do things that land them in prison.

Lord, help me to continue to follow your ways so I don't fall back into slavery. ■

Sacramental Grace in Times of Combat

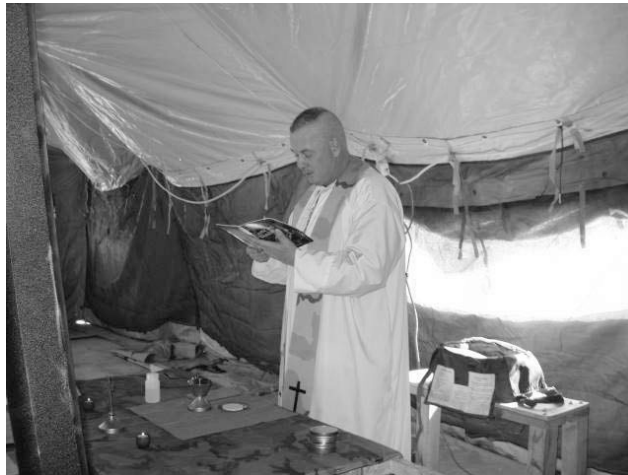
By Mitch Taylor

Today, I placed my hands on my wife's abdomen and felt the life of my child, who will be born shortly before Christmas. Two years ago, I had real cause to wonder if I would ever father a child or even see my wife again. For seven long months of 2004-2005, my wife was with our families in Michigan while I was with my fellow Marines and Sailors of Company C, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment in the Babil and Al Anbar provinces of Central Iraq. The fact that I am today experiencing the joy of my family rather than suffering the pain of post-combat stress or worse is, I believe, a result of the sacramental grace available to me as a Catholic, particularly through three of the seven sacraments: reconciliation, Eucharist, and matrimony.

Six months before my unit was to deploy from Camp LeJeune, North Carolina, for my second tour of Operation Iraqi Freedom, I told my chaplain of my plans to have a civil marriage before deployment and seek the church's blessing upon my return. Since I had heard about a lot of service members who did this, I was a bit surprised when Father said, "I don't like that idea," and asked to meet with my fiancé, Erica and me.

After getting to know us a bit better, Father explained that if our marriage was not blessed, he would not be able to offer me the sacraments while we were deployed; he also spoke about the strength I would gain during the separation forced by deployment, from the sacramental grace of matrimony.

As we talked about the importance to us of having our families present for the wedding and the difficulty of arranging that before the departure, Father recommended that we have a simple ceremony at Camp LeJeune's Chapel, then celebrate a Nuptial Mass with the usual festivities after returning from Iraq. That is exactly what we did. My brother and Erica's sister came to North Carolina, and with Father, witnessed our exchange of vows.



Father had also guided us through the Sacrament of Reconciliation as part of our preparation.

Roll the tape forward: It is now any one of well over 200 days in hot, dirty, miserable, and very dangerous central Iraq. In general, Operation Iraqi Freedom has in-country an average of two Protestant chaplains for every Forward Operating Base (FOB); there is one Catholic chaplain for every five. The priest in our Battalion traveled to seven FOBs per week. We often commented that he was in harm's way as much, if not more, than most of the grunts (Infantry Marines) in our unit. Thursdays was the day that he usually came to my company, which

operated on and around the Main Supply Route (MSR Tampa). We inspected passing vehicles, homes, and other buildings for explosive devices, contraband weapons, etc. Our typical shelter from the sun, airborne weaponry etc, was a bridge or overpass of this "freeway" (MSR). We were nicknamed the "Troll Patrol."

In the midst of all the discomfort and danger (eleven in our Battalion were KIA and nearly 300 wounded), it was a challenge to keep our spirits up. Of course we carried photos and letters from loved ones; but I believe that in the sacraments of our Catholic faith, I found much more. Our company was fortunate to have a former seminarian who hopes one day to be ordained and serve as a chaplain. Because of his and Father's visits, I was able to receive Holy Communion about twice a month. Each

time, I found myself uplifted and strengthened by the intensely hopeful thoughts of returning to Michigan, putting on Dress Blues, seeing Erica in a wedding gown, and sharing Communion with all our families and friends in the Cathedral of St. Andrews, Grand Rapids.

That is exactly what we did on September 10, 2005. We had been home from Iraq exactly seven months, the same amount of time we had been over there. I am now honorably discharged from the Marine Corps, pursuing a business career, purchasing my first home with Erica, and looking forward to yet another sacrament, the baptism of our son. ■