



Kairos Prison Ministry

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Living Sacrifices

By Jeff Hunsaker

My call into a love affair with Kairos Prison Ministries began fifteen years ago. As a team member, weekend rector, Advanced Kairos trainer and administrator I have seen Kairos change the lives of the prisoners we serve, and the perceptions of the volunteers we recruit, train, and work beside. I have seen the entire culture of a prison change in the midst of the Kairos movement, and have witnessed prison staff come to Christ as a direct result of this ministry. I love Kairos because I see the living Christ in the men and women it touches.

We can never forget that those called to Kairos must first, last, and always be disciples of Jesus Christ. The most effective disciples touch people because they understand the value of discipline in discipleship. Discipline in any organization, is basic to continuity, credibility, success and growth. Our Kairos Prison Ministry needs to rediscover the sacrificial discipline that is the essence of our calling.

I remember a plenary session address by Rev. Albert Holmes at the 1994 Kairos Summer Conference in San Antonio, Texas. During his remarks, Rev. Holmes challenged us to answer three questions about Kairos:

1. Whose ministry have we been entrusted with?
2. What kind of ministry have we been entrusted with?
3. What is required of those to whom this ministry has been entrusted?

As we begin to explore some answers to these questions, allow me to quote a few passages from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians – the same focus scripture used by Rev. Holmes in his conference remarks:

And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and given us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (N.A.B.)

I can't imagine that our "apostolic" mission gets any more basic than these few words from Paul. I use the term "apostolic" because it is same the word used by Eduardo Bonnin Aguilo who began the Catholic Cursillo movement with two condemned prisoners in Palma, Majorca in 1949. Our fully ecumenical Kairos Prison Ministry, which dates to 1979, is a direct descendant of the Cursillo Weekend movement. This brief history will help us to answer our first question:

Whose ministry have we been entrusted with?

As Paul discovered on the road to Damascus, "apostles" don't just sign-up by dropping a response card in their church collection plate. Apostles – all of them – are called. By whom? Scripture tells us that Jesus Christ called His apostles in the first century, and I believe He calls us now. It is always Jesus who calls ministry into existence, and it is always Jesus who calls His apostles to do His work. Remember Paul's words to the Corinthians: *And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and given us the ministry of reconciliation.* We know that Kairos is a "ministry of reconciliation." We have seen the fruits of that reconciliation as God has worked in the lives of thousands of prisoners to reconcile them to Jesus, to their families, and to themselves. So, the answer to our first question is that the Kairos Prison Ministry is of God. It is God-created, God-powered, and God-ordained. As "apostolic" Kairos team members, we must never lose sight of the reality that this is God's ministry and not our own; that this is a ministry of Jesus Christ, and not of any particular denomination or personal theology. "...**whosoever** believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16b)

What kind of ministry have we been entrusted with?

The Apostle Paul had no doubt concerning the type of ministry he had been entrusted with. *God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

From the very beginning of the Cursillo movement in prisons, and of our own Kairos ministry, we have believed that ours is a ministry of reconciliation. As Rev. Holmes put it, "Reconciliation ... means to restore, to bring back into relationship – to make friendly again. This is what God did through Christ."

I believe we are charged to do the very same things with the prisoners we meet. But we cannot meet that challenge in the same ways, and using the same models, we did in our Emmaus and Cursillo experiences on the "outside." Kairos is a unique ministry to a particular environment – the prison - a "foreign land". Kairos is not a ministry of denunciation. In prison, like nowhere else in the mission field, we must never denounce, publicly condemn, or inflict any sense of guilt upon the men we shepherd. Nor is Kairos the place to try to "reform" the inmates we meet. We simply share the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ with full confidence that God has a salvation plan in place to reconcile them to Himself. Neither is Kairos a ministry of "exhortation." As Rev. Holmes admonished us in the Summer of 1994, "We must do more than play with people's emotions, by using clichés and phrases that we know will stir up old memories and incite guilt and regret."

The answer to our second question, then, is that Kairos is a ministry of reconciliation. But we know the *reconciliation* comes to people in many different ways. The *reconciliation* ministry entrusted to Kairos by God is unique, in that we believe God has given us a very specific model to work with. Our Kairos model for *reconciliation* demands that we “humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord,” get out of the way, and allow the Holy Spirit to do work we can only dream of. Our experience has taught us that our quietly humble servanthood speaks far louder than any of the messages delivered from the lectern.

When I see our Kairos team members at their best I am reminded of two scripture passages: Matthew 25:36 – “*I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.*” Luke 10:36-37 – “*So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’*”

Jesus blessed those who “came to Me” in prison, not those who questioned, chastised, judged, preached or converted, but those who simply “came.” If we are faithful to the Kairos method that is given in our manual, we become the instruments through which God reconciles those for whom this ministry was intended. The story of the Good Samaritan lauds the unlikely servant who “showed mercy,” rather than those whose piety prevented them from sharing a blessing and, perhaps, a spiritual awakening.

The goal of Kairos should always be a spiritual awakening to the Living Christ, rather than a conversion to Christianity. My observations in dozens of Kairos weekends have led me to the firm conviction that the Spirit comes in the quiet moments to the men and women who seem not to be engaged. For these people it is not so much in the words as in the actions. I have witnessed a man’s life changed by the mere presence of a medical doctor who came to him in prison and became his table servant for the weekend. I have seen men weep over the agape letters they receive, not because of the words, but because a person they never knew reached out to them. In every weekend, I see men and women delight in a simple bag of cookies, not for the treat but because a person they will never meet, took the time to be a “Good Samaritan.” Your faithfulness, a listening ear, and a kind word of love and encouragement are the very sacrificial essence that permits the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work through Kairos.

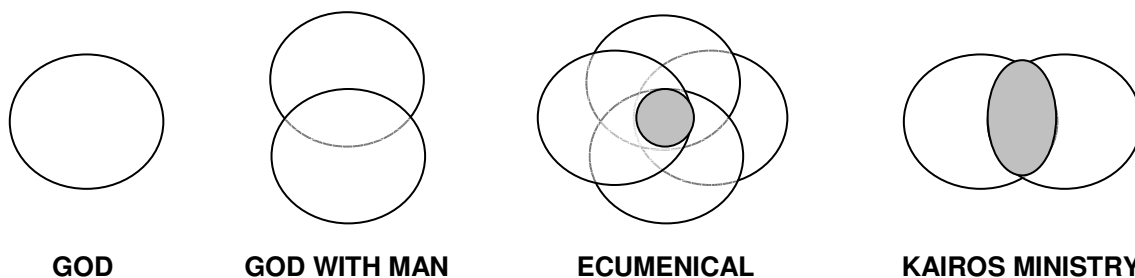
What is required of those to whom this ministry has been entrusted?

Once again, the apostle Paul gives us a hint. *We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.* An “ambassador” is one who carries the message of the sovereign who called and appointed him to a particular mission. As ambassadors for Christ in this Kairos reconciliation ministry, we are His messengers. Our message must always, and only, be the message Jesus brought to us 2,000 years ago: “To set the captives free, to give sight to the blind, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” We are charged to spread the Gospel message of Christ simply, succinctly, lovingly, and with great tact and ingenuity. To do that effectively we must create an attitude of trust that will allow us to deliver to men and women in prison the peace that we received from Jesus Christ – a peace that passes all understanding. And that is the answer to our third question. Yet it seems clear to me that the practical application of that answer has become increasingly difficult to implement in Kairos for several reasons.

Kairos is a ministry and not a movement. Not every spirit-filled well-intentioned Christian is “called” to be an apostle of Jesus Christ in His Kairos ministry. We cannot forget that the Body of Christ has many members with myriad gifts. The spiritual gifts that empower a charismatic evangelist might well debilitate the Kairos apostle. The fervor of the orthodox denominational “fire and brimstone” preacher will put him at an uncomfortable distance from many of the inmates who come to Kairos seeking only acceptance and reconciliation. The fundamentalist who has an ever-burning desire to “altar-call and baptize” everyone he meets, will encounter a skeptical crowd.

I do not mean to suggest that any of these gifts and callings is incorrect, unhealthy, or unchristian. Nor do I mean to suggest that any of the persons I’ve described cannot be called to the Kairos ministry. What I do want to emphasize is eloquently stated in the book of Ecclesiastes, “To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.” (Eccl 3:1)

During a Kairos Advanced Training seminar in 1998, past Kairos Executive Director Ike Griffin gave us a refreshing way to visualize the nature of our Kairos Prison Ministry and the special calling required of Kairos apostles. The “symbols” he presented to us were (1) a circle representing God; (2) two vertical intersecting circles representing Jesus Christ interacting with mankind; (3) several intersecting circles representing different denominational and non-denominational faith perspectives; and (4) two horizontal intersecting circles representing a minister interacting with one of “the flock” – a Kairos participant.



For purposes of this discussion, I will focus only on the last two symbols, for this is where I believe we must direct our way. The many circles in the “ecumenical” symbol represent the faith perspectives of Kairos team members and prison inmate Kairos participants who come together for a Kairos experience. On any given Kairos weekend there are likely to be as many different circles as there are men and women attending – yet in the confines of the Kairos experience the circles must, and always, intersect. When we are true to our called positions as Kairos apostles, we must find and focus upon the small gray area on the symbol where all the circles occupy a portion of the same space. It is this “common ground” where I believe lasting reconciliation begins. Anything that is outside the common ground must be left on the outside. The areas outside the common ground represent those dynamics that cause distrust, dissention, fear, guilt and exclusion. I like to think of the common ground as Jesus Christ, incarnate, risen, and active in our lives and in our particular Kairos ministry. When we find that common ground between the Kairos minister and the prison inmate, we will recognize the face of Jesus, inspiring and guiding us in our work.

Once we discover that common ground, led by Christ, we find ourselves inside the fourth symbol – the horizontally intersecting circles. Notice how the “gray area” in the Kairos Ministry symbol got bigger. That’s a bona fide Kairos moment! The common area we built upon in the larger group, though it was only the size of a “mustard seed,” grows and becomes a lush vineyard that will bear an abundance of good fruit. Why? Because we have been successful ambassadors of a simple message of reconciliation: “God loves you and accepts you as you are. So do I!”

Let me share some “points to remember:”

- Pray about whether you are “called” to this ministry. Pray again.
- Leave your denominational & doctrinal preferences at home.
- Remember you are serving a unique prison ministry rather than a movement.
- Once called, fully submit to the authority of the ministry.
- Find the common ground with the inmates and team members you serve.
- Become an ambassador of reconciliation for Christ.
- Plan your work from the Kairos manual, and work the plan you’ve made.
- Always have an open-ear for the prisoner in crisis – be a minister.
- Stress active listening. “Listen, Listen – Love, Love
- Remember that we serve at the discretion of the institution Chaplain, who has primary pastoral responsibility to the inmates.
- Emphasize the power of “loving God & loving neighbor as self.”
- Just “come to me” in prison and be the “Good Samaritan.”

Eduardo Bonnin Aguilo began this ministry that we’ve been entrusted with on death row in a Spanish prison over fifty years ago. His plan was simple and direct – show these condemned men the power of the love of Christ. That same power resides with Kairos today, by the grace of God. Let us always be mindful of His presence in all we do.

God loves Kairos, and so do I.

The international headquarters for Kairos Prison Ministry International, Inc. are located in Winter Park, Florida. The full-time staff of eleven, along with 20,000 plus volunteers, presents 600 to 700 weekends in prisons each year.

For more information on Kairos Prison Ministry, call (407) 629-4948 or visit the Kairos website at <http://www.kairosprisonministry.org>.

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