

## MINISTERING TO WOMEN

Increasingly, women are making up a larger percentage of the incarcerated. They are there for many of the same reasons that the men are: drug-related crimes and backgrounds of neglect and dysfunctional and absent families. Jails and prisons, however, have traditionally focused on the men, leaving a gap in both educational facilities and programs for women. In this issue we highlight the reports of two of our facilitators who have found meaning in the reigniting of hope in the hearts of those who have lost it. It is a daunting challenge with near impossible odds, but "all things are possible" through Christ. If nothing else, the love shown is itself a testimony of Christ and His nature.

**Linda's Story** I facilitate one of the Personal Insight classes for women in the Sarasota County Jail. To so many of the women there, the whole package that we offer is very appealing. They are grasping for any help to keep them from the same mistakes over again, and we offer many options. Not only do we provide classes for them while in jail, but we also follow up with so much more after they are released. They are thrilled with the concept that they will still have a group of people willing to help. We have women who mentor them, members of the church who will pick them up for church meetings, and people who will make sure that they have rides to and from the FIT meetings on Thursday nights (many have lost their licenses for DUIs and other charges). Our network also includes ladies who write to them while they are incarcerated. Many of them are alienated from their families and find it amazing that strangers not only care, but love them through Christ.

-Linda

## Helen's Story

### **ONE MISTAKE - 16 YEARS! by Helen Campbell FIT Women's Coordinator**



Jennifer Martin sits in an interview room at the Hillsborough Correctional Institution in Riverview. She was sentenced to 16 years in prison for a car accident that killed one passenger and severely injured another. She was speeding. "If I hadn't spent this time in prison," said Jennifer Martin, "I might still be rebellious and self-centered. Prison has been very good for

me. It was here, I finally met Christ." Martin recently saw her son for the first time in years. "I knew the moment I saw him that the bond was still there. I try to tell myself it will still be there if I don't see him for eight more years."



In 1998, Jennifer Martin caused an automobile accident in Tampa that killed one of her passengers and severely injured the other. Martin had no alcohol in her system but she was speeding — going over 80 in a 55-mph zone — and that was enough for a jury to convict her of manslaughter by culpable negligence. At her sentencing, the mother of the man she killed, Jacksonville chef Josh Nicola, told the judge that her 5-year-old grandson used a stick at his father's grave to dig through the grass into the dirt. "To get closer to my daddy," the boy said. Then there's victim Scott Schutt and his sister, Lori Stewart. Scott's injuries forced him out of the U.S. Coast Guard and permanently onto a walker. A few years ago, he gave up his license because of a slew of speeding and careless driving tickets and accidents. Now, he rides an adult tricycle around his Jacksonville neighborhood, greeting people with slurred speech and sometimes imagining things that aren't there. The question Jennifer constantly struggles with is whether the families can ever find it in their hearts to forgive her for this tragic event.

Jennifer has learned a great deal about forgiveness in the time she has spent in jail. She will be the first to say that

when she first got to prison she was filled with self-pity and anger. She faked jailhouse religion, and says she didn't really believe in anything. In fact she admitted there was a time when she even hated God. Then one day during a Kairos Prison Ministry Weekend in November of 2008, she was shown Agape love and finally realized God's love really did cover a multitude of sins. She made a full confession of Christ in her life and not only received the beginning of a new life in Christ but also was filled with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. What a change in her life after that amazing weekend. Her alternate lifestyle ended immediately along with all the hate and self-pity. God's forgiveness is still as real to her today as it was the day she finally gave Christ the control of her life.

**H**er record in prison was spotless even before she accepted Christ. Although, before salvation, Jennifer was extremely bitter and cynical. Now, she leading a thoughtful, examined life and looks for the best in everything. Jennifer has discovered she has a reason to demonstrate to others the love of Christ and what happiness really looks like. Her goal is to better herself and along the way help anyone who is in need. She takes every class that's offered — preferring Bible and cooking classes — and hopes to go to culinary school and work part time as a chef when she gets out.



Jennifer has shown a hunger and thirst for the Word of God that is contagious. Those who knew her before are amazed at the transformation in her behavior, her emotional state, and in her generous smile that is always on her face.

**B**ut God was working behind the scenes on Jennifer's behalf. In April, 2008, the surviving passenger's sister wrote Martin in prison. "I know the accident was just that — an accident", she said. "Poor choices were made by all three of you that night, but I don't think you set out to hurt anyone, and "I forgive you." Jennifer has waited a long time to hear those precious words.

**S**ince her total commitment to Christ, He has given Jennifer many gifts and surprises, all for the good since she turned her life over to Him. On a chilly February day this year, after seven years in prison, Jennifer Martin got an unexpected half-day furlough to go to her grandmother's funeral, a privilege her warden said is "granted only to the most trustworthy inmates." When Martin's parents picked her up at the prison, she climbed in the backseat. There, in front of her, was a little boy who looked just like her. "Mommy!" he shouted, throwing his arms around her neck. Martin, 28, hadn't seen her 8-year-old son since he was a toddler because her estranged husband won't allow him to visit. Fighting tears, she wrapped her arms around him. After the service, she and her child walked to a shady area at the cemetery. She swung him around, carried him on her shoulders and chased him. She buried her face in his hair. Two months later, she can still close her eyes and smell his shampoo. The boy began to cry as they dropped Martin off at prison. Eight more years without him would be unbearable, Martin thought. But, she told him: "Today was a gift from heaven and we have to believe that miracles do happen and there will be more." Martin concedes prison has been good for her, and she can accept what happens. But she despairs that she might not see her little boy again until he's almost grown.

**T**he one thing God has shown her that has helped the most is that it's in His hands, not hers. She's learned that God can be trusted not just with her todays, but more importantly, with her future. Forgiveness has released her from her own personal prison. She's trusting God for the physical release as well. Her confidence is that God knows when the correct time will be for her to walk free. More importantly, she realizes there must a maturing and preparation to deal with life as Christ would want her to. She wants to be spiritually strong and stable before she walks out of the prison gates to her freedom. In the meantime, her only goal is to grow stronger and stronger in Christ. The Personal Insight class through Florida Integrity Training allowed her for the first time to realize that she has tools now to use in the process of maturing. Her desire is to take every class offered in the Florida Integrity Training curriculum to accomplish what she needs for her spiritual grown. With God's help and encouragement from other believers, her faith is high and her heart is fixed.