How 10,000+ Are Baptized Annually

It was my privilege to speak on the status of Jail-Prison Ministries in the USA at the Global Missions Conference in Austin a few days ago. My “teaser” statement in the printed program referred to the fact that there are over 10,000 baptized each year in the USA as a direct result of efforts by churches of Christ and individual Christians, followed by: “Come to hear how this is being done.”

I wish I could say that most of the 500 registered GMC attendees were in my class but we had twenty. Plus, I shared time with Chris Magadu who reported on similar prison missions in Zimbabwe where they baptize 2000 a year with three volunteers! But, let’s return to answer the question: “How are we able to baptize 10,000+ in the United States every year?”

Let’s start by reporting on the rapid growth of jail-prison ministries. I first ministered in Dallas County Jail in 1971. We conducted the first National Prison Ministry Workshop in 1974 (the 47th National Workshop will be in Louisville, Kentucky in 2020). We publish a “directory” of congregations and individuals involved. It listed 24 congregations and 110 individuals in 1975. Over the next 25 years (2000), the number expanded to 603 congregations and 1,257 individuals. Twenty years later (2020), the list contains 1,018 congregations and 2,385 individuals! Prison Ministry has to be the fastest growing single ministry today in churches of Christ. With this many involved, there has to be a staggering number of responses.

One early snag was overcoming the lack of baptistries in jails and prisons. Many authorities denied baptisms on the basis of “lacking the physical facilities to accommodate immersion.” This led to organizing Baptistries Around the World in 1991 with the goal of putting either a permanent or portable baptistry in every jail and prison. To date, we have placed 395 in 37 states, including 108 in 39 foreign countries! We construct and ship our own portable units and partner with American Rehabilitation Ministries (Joplin, Missouri) for the permanent units. ARM estimates an average of 37 immersions occur annually per baptistry. This translates to 14,615 baptisms each year and . . . growing!

When the central office for NewLife Behavior Ministry relocated from Dallas to Corpus Christi in 2002, we started individually numbering each “license” issued to maintain a record of where our curriculum is used. To date, we have issued 5,000 course licenses that represent 44 states. There are fourteen courses in the NLB curriculum, and each consists of thirteen lessons. Each lesson has twelve letter-size pages (2,184 pages if one complete set is made of all the courses). If 5,000 license-holders made one complete set of all fourteen courses, it would amount to 10,920,000 sheets of paper. This much teaching will result in huge numbers being baptized.

We have over 2,000 baptism requests annually through our office and Kings Crossing Prison Ministries alone! In another section of this newsletter you read of a Tulsa ministry baptizing 400 a year. These two sources account for 25% of the 10,000 baptisms. In Corpus Christi, we have over 30,000 correspondence students. If we send each student one complete set of all fourteen courses, it would amount to 65,520,000 sheets of letter-size paper. We add an appropriate tract with each mailing. Can you imagine the paperwork involved . . . grading, record-keeping, stuffing envelopes, postage, etc., to say nothing of Bibles and our teaching tools shipped?

At some point, most of us become “Number-Numbed” and may wish we had not asked: “On what basis can you say that 10,000 or more prisoners are baptized each year as a direct result of efforts associated with churches of Christ and individual Christians involved in jail and prison ministries?” It’s really not that difficult to explain – right?
“2019 Day of Giving”

We cannot be more excited over the “Day of Giving” (Tuesday, November 12) from 12:01 a.m. until 11:59 p.m. This is our fifth year to be invited by the Coastal Bend Community Foundation to participate. Our “goal” this year is to break through the $100,000 ceiling. We cannot do it without the help of many friends marking their calendars and remembering to go online to give on this day.

This continues to be a learning experience and a big challenge for technological dummies like us. “They” (the experts) say we need to rally our “social” friends (email, Facebook, Twitter) to go to www.coastalbenddayofgiving.org and donate at least $10. We are used to knowing where almost every dollar comes from but this is a total game-changer.

Gifts may be pre-scheduled beginning November 3. We urge as many as possible to do this. This is one way to be 100% certain your gift counts. You plan it and it gets done even if the “Day” slips your mind on November 12. And it gives us an early “look” at where the total stands. Then, we can go into “full court press” mode, if necessary. Help avoid panic attacks!

Help us gain additional friends-followers on Facebook and Twitter. Jump on board. If you need assistance, contact Raquel Rivera in our office (361-855-3372) on November 12th and she can “walk you through” what you need to do. We humbly ask you to share this information with your friends. This form of communication gets the “word” out to tens of thousands instantly. When folks sense your passion for this ministry by your gift, they will be motivated to go online and donate $10 or more and the total goes UP!

Tulsa County Jail Ministry

[ Taken from “Good News” report by Dr. Stafford North]

Jim Pinkston, one of NLB’s newest Regional Directors, heads up a team of workers from Park Church of Christ in Tulsa (Oklahoma). They are doing an outstanding work in the 21 “pods” of Tulsa County Jail. Each pod is made up of 100 prisoners. The facility holds 1,500.

Four ladies teach weekly classes in three female pods (coordinated by Elaine Russell) while male instructors teach in the pods for men. One teaches a class in Spanish while another instructs those who are hearing-impaired. Each pod has a classroom that accommodates 25 participants. The NewLife Behavior curriculum is used to introduce a better life to those seeking such.

Baptisms are allowed every 90 days. The last time there were baptisms, 97 were immersed. They started about 8 a.m. and finished at 4 p.m. Following the baptisms, more NLB curriculum is shared with the “new-born babes” in Christ.

In addition to reaching out to those in Tulsa County Jail, volunteers from this ministry conduct services at the Rogers County Jail and the Dick Connors Correctional Center. About 400 are baptized annually from the combined efforts.

Remember and Honor

Family and friends contribute to NLBM to show respect for family members and loved ones. A gift may be in one’s memory or to honor a life lived well. We list donations and notify the individual or family. Thank you for being so thoughtful and generous!

In Memory of:  Donor:
B. D. Griffith, Jr.     Buck/Janet Griffith
Tony Craig           John Henry Pruitt
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