

Not everyone views life with eyes of middle class values



REV. RONALD P. BYARS

FOCUS ON THEOLOGY

My son and I were talking about middle class values. He is a member of an inner-city school in Baltimore. All the students in his class come from nearby housing projects. It was quite evident to him that he and his students often evaluated things from vastly different perspectives. He was concerned that the "middle class values" might get in the way of his ability to understand how the early adolescents in his class reasoned about their world.

We had both read a story in the *Baltimore Sun* about a man in his early 20s who had just been convicted of several notorious crimes.

The young man had been a drug dealer - and more than once, had killed or arranged the murders of rivals, or people against whom he held a grudge.

His appetite for revenge extended not only to those who got in his way, but also to their relatives. He had arranged for the shooting of one of his enemies - and that enemy's mother, as well.

The *Sun* reporter had interviewed people in the neighborhood where the young drug lord had lived and worked. With few exceptions (mostly older adults), those interviewed insisted that the convicted killer was a "nice guy."

He used to buy ice cream for some of the neighborhood kids when it was hot. He gave money to help someone go to college. He had advised someone's brother not to use or sell drugs. He had an attractive personality. "He didn't get a fair trial."

It seemed as though many of the neighborhood folk

employed vastly different criteria for evaluating the defendant than the reporter did. And certainly the reporter was the bearer of "middle class values."

A few years ago, a young woman of my acquaintance told me why she had quit her job teaching in an urban neighborhood in Washington, D.C. She, too, had been accused of using "middle class values" in judging the behavior of her students.

For a while she felt guilty about that, and wondered how she might shed these values in order to be more impartial. Then, she told me, she made a list in her mind of what middle-class values were.

As she constructed that list, it included such things as honesty, self-respect, courtesy, respect for others, personal discipline, deferred gratification, doing one's best, being on time, etc.

She decided that those indeed were her values - whatever the class origins might have been - and she was not about to consider them disposable.

When American and European missionaries first went to China, they labored against then-current practices of infant exposure (leaving unwanted female babies out in the open until they died) and the binding of women's feet. Many critics accused them of "cultural imperialism" - imposing the values of Western culture on another people.

Others argue that the history of the world is the history of encounters between different value systems.

Those values with the most moral power will prevail in the long run, and in the meantime, it's no crime to testify to your own values with passion, as well as compassion.

My son was not considering giving up his own value system.

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BELIEFS & Values

Core Ministries helps prisoners adjust

BY BARR PITT-TEMPLETON
SPECIAL WRITER

"Most people come out of prison worn out - spiritually and economically - than when they went in. So, as a Christian, I just couldn't stand by without doing something about it."

Those heartfelt words reflect just what prompted Dave Ray, founder of Oakland County-based Core Ministries, a non-profit organization that serves prison inmates across the country, in 1990.

Ray and longtime friend, Bill Broadwick, were active with the Detroit Rescue Mission's ministry board before he decided to establish Core Ministries. Broadwick served on the organization's advisory board before being named president of Core Ministries 18 months ago.

"We have a great desire to help people who have come to an end themselves," Broadwick said. "And Dave is a recovering alcoholic, so he has great compassion for those with substance abuse problems."

Core Ministries, with headquarters near 14 Mile and Coolidge, services prison ministries across the United States by providing guidelines and publications on how to go about volunteering in prison ministry, including the steps to follow to get started.

"There are many people interested in volunteering in prison ministry programs, but they are ill-equipped to deal with what lies behind prison walls," Ray said.

Core has developed several guides addressing the spectrum of the criminal justice system, including its latest publication, "The Outside Brother's Check-Up." All Core Ministries material are trans-denominational and focus on issues and challenges facing today's society.

"We are a prison ministry, but our job is not to visit the prisoners - although Dave still does upon occasion. Our job is to provide the tools and materials to both the inmates and the volunteer ministry that will make the



Prison ministers: Bill Broadwick (left) and Dave Ray look over Tuesday's mail in their Oakland County headquarters. The mail included requests for books and other literature from inmates at various prisons around the county.

prison ministry more efficient and effective," Broadwick said.

The group also writes and publishes all its own materials, including 12 books so far. Broadwick said Core also recently debut a quarterly newspaper for inmates.

"The 'Christian Inmate News' is a 12-page tabloid style paper devoted to printing items submitted by inmates first hand accounts of life behind prison walls. Core Ministries recently had 50,000 copies distributed to state and federal prisons across the U.S."

"The inmates are so happy with this newspaper, I could show you a basket full of letters from them and they talk about how they are grateful to have this contact," Broadwick said. "And our newspaper is going to serve as another way for us to get in contact with inmates."

Articles sent in for publication

reflect a wide variety of subjects and many display thorough research and impressive writing styles.

"Just because people are in prison it doesn't mean that they are dumb. It just means they made a mistake," Broadwick said.

Beyond the press, Core Ministries keeps apprised of trends and statistics regarding inmates, including the impact volunteer ministry visitors have on the prison population.

There are more than 1.7 million men and women incarcerated in the United States, 50 percent of whom never receive a visit from anyone. Crime and recidivism are growing national problems as one of every 155 adults in the United States are incarcerated which includes a population that is 95 percent male and 5 percent female.

Actually, the amount of mini-

stering going on in prisons across the United States is amazing - there are well over 100,000 volunteers - but you never hear about it," Broadwick said.

The M-2 Match 2 Program study, conducted by the California Department of Corrections, showed that the recidivism rate was directly affected by the number of visits an inmate received. Specifically, if an inmate received 12 or more visits while incarcerated, the parole success for that person increased 71 percent over an inmate who received no visits.

"The M-2 study proves that volunteer visits from someone on the outside can change an inmate's life and the human economic and spiritual saving for society are astronomical if we can reduce recidivism," Ray said.

It is also important to consider the fact that almost 90 percent

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