

Chaplaincy Biennial Report 2009

The past two years in AG Chaplaincy have been marked with exciting growth, effectiveness and impact. What spurs our chaplains to passionately minister in areas where few Christians can or sometimes even dare enter? It is their distinctive calling to follow Christ who openly served outside the temple and synagogues. Our chaplains minister in a number of diverse areas such as the military, the bedside of a dying hospice patient, in our nation's prisons, to bikers, or even through the television airways to a lone cowboy. Chaplaincy ministry is growing and we have added 60 chaplains to our roles since 2007 for a total of 560 chaplains serving across the country. The ministries of these men and women are extremely effective. They have reported 35,445 souls saved in the last two years as well as 2,257 people baptized in the Holy Spirit and 3,426 water baptized!

The workplace is a fertile mission field full of lost and hurting people who need to hear about Jesus. How big is our mission field? There are over 3.1 million individuals incarcerated in jails and prisons, eight million bikers, over 2.6 million people who serve military in both Active and Reserve/National Guard components, and 2.7 million hospital and nursing home patients (daily average). These totals only represent a small fraction of the people groups for whom chaplains provide ministry.

A biker bar or a motorcycle rally may not seem like a fruitful place to share the gospel, but to our Motorcycle chaplains, these are prime opportunities to introduce lost and hurting people to Jesus. "Hell's Angels," "Outlaws," "Pagans," "Bandidos" -- these represent only a few of the hardcore motorcycle groups scattered across the country. As their names imply, they are not groups you'd want to offend. Law enforcement agencies conduct ongoing investigations into their activities such as murder, rape, assault, burglary, prostitution, weapons offenses and intimidation of the public. It is within this dangerous subculture that many of these chaplains minister by living out the Gospel, befriending bikers, and bringing the message of salvation. They minister one on one by making friends with them, building relationships and earning the right to share Jesus in their life. Few of these bikers will darken a church door so chaplains must go where they are. "Chaplain Russ Cockrum says, "Jesus would have been right at home in a biker bar. He was accused of being a friend of sinners. He met people where they were so He could take them to where He was going."

In 2008 more than 2.6 million men and women were serving our country in the military. An additional 5.7 million people were treated in Veterans hospitals. Add to these staggering numbers, the total of 23 million military veterans who currently live in the United States. This is a huge mission field for our endorsed military/VA chaplains. However, it is not only to the service men and women that our chaplains provide ministry—they often have the opportunity to minister to people of other countries where they are stationed. Shortly after the news of the Somalian pirates hit the airwaves, the ship that Chaplain Jarrod Johnson was assigned to, sailed to the Gulf of Aden to conduct anti-piracy operations. One of our helicopters spotted a skiff stranded at sea and packed with 52 Somali men, women, and children. They were leaving their war-torn country to find a better life. The crew of the Navy ship rescued the migrants and kept them onboard for 7 days. During that week, Chaplain

Johnson interacted with the migrants on a daily basis. He heard their stories, mediated their arguments and most memorably, cared for and played with their children. It could only have been God who allowed this ship to be in the right place at the right time to save and impact these lives.

Hospice chaplains such as Glen and Norma Davies, often sit at the bedside of a patient who is waiting to die. For some patients, even talking is too painful and exhausting so the chaplain merely sits quietly, holding their hand journeying with them through the most difficult time of their life. More than that, chaplains represent Christ, assuring families and patients that God loves them and has not rejected them. Hospice chaplains minister to people during their most frightening hours. Terminally ill hospice patients not only suffer physical pain, but many endure spiritual heartache as well. Many patients left the church when they were younger and, for whatever reason, never returned. They've been wounded. Chaplains try to bring the church back to the patient.

The rugged cowboy culture has also not been forgotten by our chaplains. "Cowboy Church" is a 30-minute program on RFD-TV which is co-hosted by Chaplain Russ Weaver and Susie (McEntire) Luchinsinger, who is the younger sister country music artist Reba McEntire. Millions of rural area residents now take the opportunity to attend church twice a week from the comfort of their own homes. Chaplain Weaver said, "We have an opportunity to get into 30 million households now, our goal is to bring the gospel and encouragement to those in rural America and the cowboy culture."

Assemblies of God chaplains are at the proverbial "tip of the spear." They fight spiritual battles for the souls of men and women, many of whom have given up hope that God even knows their name. But God has not forgotten them. And our chaplains will continue to take the gospel to every man, woman and child they can find, until the last soul is saved and Jesus comes to take us home.

