

## FCI Kairos # 20 Weekend – May-2022 Witness report.

Kairos Prison Ministry is a four day (Thursday evening through Sunday afternoon) Christian experience based on the Cursillo weekend in Catholic and Episcopal Churches, Via de Christo in the Lutheran Church, and Walk to Emmaus in the Methodist Church. Since its beginning in a Florida Prison in 1976, it has spread to 40 states and 9 nations as of the start of Covid-19 pandemic.

In March of 2020 the team for the 20th Kairos weekend at Foothills Correctional in Morganton was already meeting to get ready for a spring weekend, when the NC Department of Public Safety—which oversees all state prisons—shut down all visitations in prisons. The planned weekend #20 was postponed to the fall of 2020, then subsequently postponed every six months until this spring.

During the last two years many of the inmates have lived in segregated cells, food has been brought to them, outside programs and volunteers have been prohibited and for much of the pandemic even family members have been barred from visiting them.

Our team was required to provide proof of full vaccinations and we were assured that all the inmates who participated in this program would also be fully vaccinated.

As the weekend began, I was excited to learn that Kyle T., a Kairos grad from Marion #1 in 2008 and Kirsten A., a Kairos grad from Foothills #4 (I was involved in both of these weekends) had continued their long sentences by going to a 4 year inside prison college program at Nash Correctional, sponsored by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary of Wake Forest. This resulted in them receiving a college degree in pastoral ministry and being designated by the State as Field Ministers, assigned to other prisons to help the Chaplains there. It was exciting to learn how the Kairos program had impacted and shaped their lives over the last fourteen years.

The weekend progressed very normally, with speakers, table talk, songs and chapel meditations, I gave the talk on The Church, which always concludes with a rousing affirmation “WE ARE THE CHURCH!”. After talks and table discussions the inmates work together to produce a poster explaining their insights from the talk.

After Friday’s all-day events the team met afterwards and the near unanimous observation from team members who sat at the tables was that these participants, segregated and alone for the last two years, were starved for companionship and friendship. Everyone was eager to talk and listen, smile and hug, in a way that was much greater than usual. They even put their arms around each other and spontaneously erupted into chorus lines, hopping and kicking, by Sunday. This was entirely spontaneous, and we veterans had never seen this happen before.

We just went back last Saturday for an all-day follow up to help them form prayer and share groups inside their wings of the prison, and all thirty showed up, a rare occurrence for everyone to return.

I was blessed to be a part of this. I felt I got a sense of how lonely the incarcerated have been during the pandemic. For many, it’s been like living in segregation, meals brought to your cell, no visitations, for two years.

Christ, have mercy.  
Chris C., Music Leader