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RELIGION IN PRISON:**MASTERLIFE GRADUATION**

By JESSE DETERS*

November 10, 1995, saw another chapter written in the history of the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Camp C Visiting Shed became the scene of the first graduation for *Masterlife Discipleship Training for Leaders*.

Masterlife is a six-month, in-depth discipleship training process. Its goal is to make Christians more than just believers—it's to make believers disciples. The goal of discipleship is to follow Jesus, to learn to do all the things He instructed His followers to do,

and to help others to become disciples. Discipleship is the Christian's lifelong commitment to the person, teaching, and spirit of Jesus Christ.

Warden Cain and Outcamp Warden Darrel Vannoy chose Camp C for this *Masterlife* pilot program. Chaplain Burnie Schmidt implemented the program and supervised its progress. Schmidt knew exactly where to find a teacher, because he was enrolled in discipleship training himself. He asked Christian Missionary Jerry Potts, his own instructor at the First Baptist Church of Slaughter, Louisiana, to head the class. Potts accepted.

This first class consisted of thirty Camp C inmates who were involved in the religious activities provided by the Chaplain's Department. The Camp C administrators at the time were Camp Supervisor Major David Meredith, Capt. Kenneth Farbes, Capt. Charles Stewart, Capt. Robert Schott, Capt. Kenneth Fontenot, and Capt. Davy Kelone. They reviewed attendance records of the various religious activities at Camp C and combined that with their personal knowledge of



WARDEN CAIN ACCEPTS CERTIFICATE FROM DETERS

* Jesse Deters is assigned to the Outcamp Literacy Program as a clerk/class coordinator/tutor where he teaches two classes a day and assists the Outcamp Literacy Program Coordinator with outcamp literacy classes. He is the legal advisor for the Concept Club at Camp C and instructs a number of classes for the club. In addition to *Masterlife*, Deters completed the first *Experiencing God* Bible study and facilitated a table group in a subsequent study. He is also member of *Kairos* (a prison ministry also exclusive to Camp C) and a full-time student enrolled at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

individual prisoners. They compiled a list of potential students which assisted Chaplain Schmidt in selecting the thirty inmates who became discipleship training students.

Those students, Instructor Jerry Potts, and Chaplain Burnie Schmidt gathered in the Camp C Visiting Shed every Friday Night from 6:00 until 9:00 P.M. The first class began on April 7, 1995. At the very beginning Brother Potts told the class that many obstacles would come to interfere with the discipleship training because "the forces of evil" would be in conflict with God's purpose for the students. His prediction became reality. Almost every week different students would bring problems they were experiencing to class. Potts encouraged everyone to make prayer lists and pray daily for divine intervention. A list of names was distributed to members of the First Baptist Church of Slaughter with requests for intercessory prayer.

MASTERLIFE STUDENTS

Arbuthnot, Donald	Hilburn, Dale
Balfa, John	King, Edward
Bastida, Leonard	Landry, Gary
*Chapman, Jerry	Lane, Kevin
*Cox, Robert	Martin, Michael
Daley, Donnie	McLemore, Jerry
Deters, Jesse	Parker, Gerald
Donald, Claude	Reynolds, Richard
Edwards, Gerard	Smith, Cleonis
Flank, Raymond	Vaughn, Edward
Franklin, Joe	Veal, James
Hayes, Ray	Woodburn, Kenneth
Womack, Kenneth	Zierhut, Bruce

*(The names marked by an asterisk completed Masterlife I but not Masterlife II, due to transfers. Four of the candidates not listed were transferred prior to completing any portion of the course.)



MASTERLIFE GRADUATING CLASS



CHAPLAIN SCHMIDT WITH DETERS

A problem developed when the administration decided to exchange six dormitories of the minimum security inmates in the Main Prison with medium custody prisons at Camp C. As a result the majority of the students enrolled in *Masterlife* were relocated to the Main Prison. Chaplain Schmidt took this problem to prison authorities and a decision was made to transport the Main Prison students to Camp C for the remainder of their discipleship training.

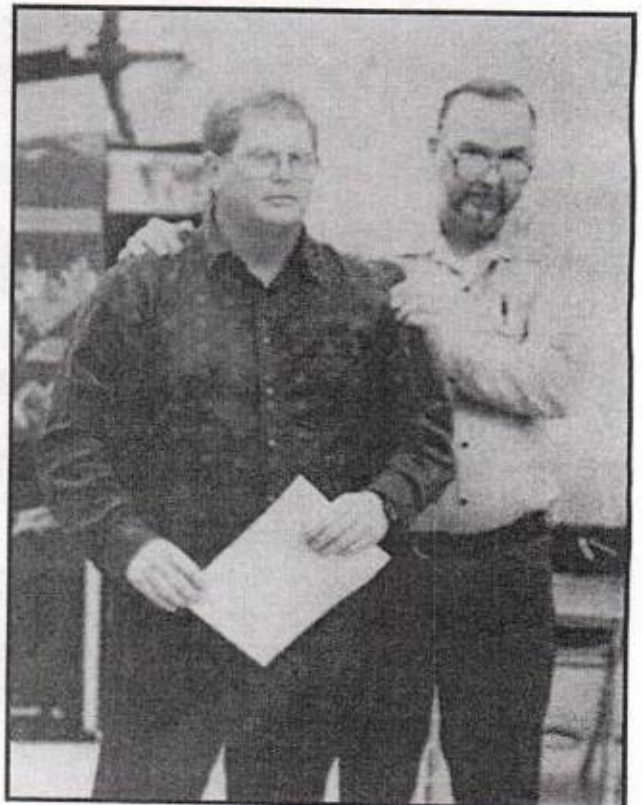
This created extra work each week because the chaplain had to secure signatures of approval from Main Prison supervisors, the outcamp supervisor and camp supervisors to ensure transportation for the students. The pilot program survived this obstruction due to the diligence of Chaplain Burnie Schmidt.

Meanwhile, Evangelist Jerry Potts found much support within the First Baptist Church of Slaughter. When Assistant Instructor Rhett Major was called away Missionary Jerry White stepped forward to assist Brother Potts with the discipleship training. Brother White was a

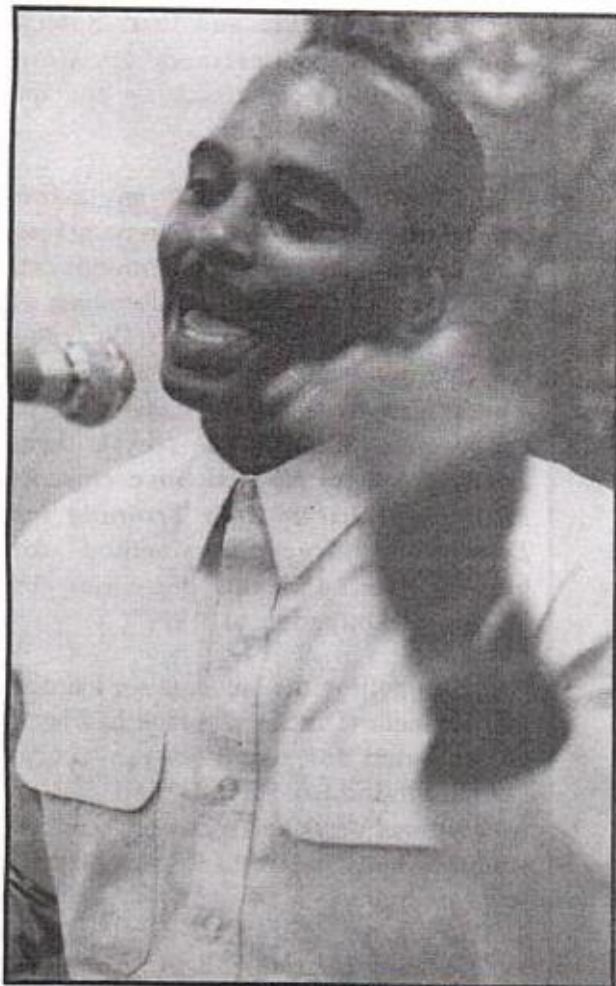
former student of Potts, and became an excellent trainer for the class.

Masterlife caused major adjustments to occur within the lives of the trainees. The students chosen for the class came from many cultural backgrounds. Various religious denominations were represented, including Baptist, Catholic, Church of Christ, Apostolic, Muslim and non-denominational believers.

At first different denominations separated into small groups within the class. The first phase of training, *Masterlife I*, is designed to develop individuals, and Potts worked hard encouraging each student on an individual level. The second phase, *Masterlife II*, is designed to develop fellowship with believers as they witness to others. Here Potts' mature Christian leadership worked effectively to blend



POTTS WITH DETERS



EDWARDS



WHITE WITH DETERS

this strange mixture of individuals into one body in Christ. Separation became reconciliation. Some of the students made public apologies in class. The Holy Spirit was at work.

During the graduation exercises, *Masterlife* student Gerald Parker reflected on these dissolving denominational lines and encapsulated the experience when he said: "We still have our differences, but we have learned to set those differences aside for the cause of Christianity."

Gerard Edwards expressed love for his fellow classmates and stressed the "family atmosphere" created in the twenty-six weeks of study and fellowship.



KELONE WITH McLEMORE



BASTIDA

Kenneth Woodburn gave an impressive demonstration of "The Disciple's Cross", while his instructors beamed with pride. Woodburn is one of the younger inmates who has shown a maturing Christian character.

Raymond Flank illustrated "The Gospel Hand" method of witnessing and used several members of the audience to demonstrate the importance of understanding the Word.

Chaplain's Clerk Jerry McLemore and I presented Certificates of Appreciation on behalf of the graduates to: Warden Burl Cain, Assoc. Warden Darrel Vannoy, Camp C Warden Leslie Dupont, Instructors Jerry Potts and Jesse White, Chaplain Burnie Schmidt, Lt. Col. Kenneth Farbes, and Major Davy Kelone. In addition

Pastor Basil Wicker and First Baptist Church of Slaughter members were recognized for their attendance and for preparation of the meal.

I used my chance to say a few words to point at that society places more value on an empty aluminum can than a human life because aluminum is retrieved from roadside ditches and recycled into useful products for society. Yet human lives are "warehoused" in prison with little effort to recycle them and return them as productive citizens. *Masterlife Discipleship Training for Leaders* is a "recycling method" for human lives and the beginning of serious rehabilitation at LSP.

In polling the students we learned that Kenneth (Dutch) Womack had been incarcerated for twenty-seven years; Leonard (Buddy) Bastida had served twenty-three years and many of the other students had been at LSP for fifteen years or more.

Leonard Bastida took the podium and spoke of his early years of confinement in extended lockdown. He fondly remembered awaiting visits on the tier from Chaplain Fontenot so he could have a decent conversation. Bastida spoke of God's plan and the many changes his Christian awareness caused him to make in recent years. Many of the security staff in attendance know the old Bastida, and are amazed that he's had a perfect conduct record for the last four years.

Testimonies from Cleonis Smith, James Veal, Joe Franklin, Gerard Edwards, and Gerald Parker gave all the praise and glory to God, with recognition to Chaplain Schmidt, the LSP Administration, and Missionaries Jerry Potts and Jesse White.

Outcamp Supervisor Warden Darrel Vannoy praised those in attendance for their support of the Camp C religious programs. He gave them

credit for the programs success, and encouraged graduates to work with they younger incoming inmates.

Camp C Supervisor Warden Leslie Dupont pledged continued support and commended those responsible for making all inmate functions successful.

Major Kelone and his wife regularly attend Camp C religious activities. He attended many training sessions as a captain while supervising the "C" team prior to being promoted to his present rank. He spoke encouragingly to the new disciples for Jesus and thanked the First Baptist Church of Slaughter for their support. As a born-again Christian, Major Kelone gave God the praise and glory for the successful results of this pilot program.

Warden Burl Cain expressed pride in the positive inmate programs at Camp C. He asked Associate Warden Vannoy to allow the families to attend and observe the achievements of the inmates who participate in religious programs. In the future provisions will be made to allow inmates to invite guests from their approved



VANNOY WITH DETERS

visiting lists to attend religious graduation ceremonies.

Warden Cain voiced concern for inmates with lengthy sentences who had been imprisoned for 15 to 20 years or more. He asked graduates to reach Angola's youngsters and encourage them to participate in religious activities. He thanked the First Baptist Church of Slaughter, Chaplain Schmidt, and the security supervisors in attendance for being a part of the pilot program.

Masterlife Discipleship Training for Leaders will continue. New books have already arrived for the next class. A list of candidates has been compiled and the selection process has begun. Potts and White have committed to instruct the class and Slaughter First Baptist Church continues to support the program. Warden Cain and the administration remain supportive and promise assistance as needed. The new students will face their own obstacles and temptations, but prayer will remove any limitation from the path of righteousness. The disciples of Jesus are sure to multiply in Angola.



DUPONT WITH DETERS