

# Alaska Correctional Ministries, Inc.

## Sharing the Good News of Easter

### Mentoring is ALIVE

Alaska Correctional Ministries shares the great hope of Easter with those in prison and equips volunteers to effectively minister to "...the least of these" in prison. Walk into any of our prisons and you will notice a lack of hope. But as a mentor, you can change that despair into hope. Mentors are the frontline of prison ministry. This is where YOU can have a direct and lasting impact in a prisoner's life.

Karen Barnett has been a mentor to women incarcerated at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center since 2002. She has mentored many women; some who have moved on to successful lives and some who have not.

In this interview, she shares about her commitment to mentoring.



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### Alaska Correctional Ministries: Why did you start mentoring women at Hiland?

Karen: In 2002, the Chaplaincy Program and Alaska Correctional Ministries was just starting the MentorNet program at Hiland. I was very interested in using the concepts of mentoring with women in prison. This was the right season of my life to become involved in a high commitment program... my children were out of the house, I had just finished school and I was ready to devote my time in the prison mission field. I have been a Christian all my life and have always been involved in the church, but it was time for me to step outside my comfortable "Christian ghetto" and really apply God's love to others in need. Over the years, my husband has been very supportive of the time I spend mentoring women, and I have been encouraged by the ACM staff and other mentors. I have also been strengthened through the women I mentor. By continually pointing them to the cross to meet their challenges, I have a stronger relationship with my God.

### ACM: Many people are apprehensive about going into a prison. Tell us about your first visit to Hiland.

Karen: I went in as part of a large group...the first MentorNet group. We had been to volunteer training together, and then we were matched up with another mentor and the incarcerated woman we would mentor. I felt we had lots of support from Chaplain Ensich and the ACM staff in prison as we took our first steps inside. We knew our mentees had volunteered to be in the program and that they were looking forward to meeting us. My first impression of Hiland was that it looked like a college campus! I was surprised to see it was very clean and bright and generally quiet. I had never been in a prison before but I felt comfortable from the beginning. Through the years I have found the prison staff supportive of mentors and volunteers who are willing to follow the rules and help the women sort through their life challenges.

**ACM: What does a typical mentoring day at Hiland look like for you?**

Karen: I try to develop relationships with the women by listening, counseling and praying. Sometimes just acknowledging a woman is enough to begin the relationship, but sometimes it takes much longer. Being there consistently and for many years, women become comfortable with me and the relationships become more spiritual. They share about their families and sometimes about their cases. I stay objective about their situation and pray with them that the right thing will happen in their lives.

**ACM: The Bible tells us to be obedient to those in authority over us and for the women at Hiland this means the correctional staff. Tell me how you model this to those you mentor at Hiland.**

Karen: I follow the rules and ask for clarification if I don't understand a rule. Most of the staff are very supportive, especially those who are Christian. They know the mentors play an important role in helping the women break criminal habits and behaviors that lead back to prison. I try not to take up the women's offenses with officers, and temper what I hear with grace, knowing I am only hearing one side of the story.

**ACM: When the person you are mentoring has finished her sentence and is released from prison, how does your relationship change?**

Karen: Well, of course each relationship is unique, and each woman's needs are different. Many women have a difficult time immediately after release because there is suddenly so much to do....secure housing, employment, transportation, even clothing sometimes. Even if they have a pre-release plan, it can be challenging to make it all come together in a timely way. The women are especially vulnerable at this time and need lots of encouragement. I try to be that encourager, but also hold them accountable as far as they have given me permission. I might drive a woman to her appointments or I might take her to church or bible study. In the best cases the mentoring relationship becomes a lifetime friendship, and the woman becomes well established in the community and in a church.

**ACM: Experience says that it is important to have regular and consistent contact with mentees. How often do you visit at Hiland?**

Karen: I visit at Hiland on the same day every week. When I'm out of town, I send postcards or letters to the women I am currently mentoring. Many of these women feel abandoned by friends and family so it is very important for me to be consistent in my visits and to follow through in doing what I say I'll do. I am trying to model a healthy relationship to these women and a strong commitment to accountability is a big part of that.



Susan Marthaller, Karen Barnett, Jackie Bennett  
Enjoying a Mentoring Relationship

My mentor has always made me feel like she cared about all of my needs. She has always listened, encouraged and helped me work through problems. She made me feel valued and loved at a very low point in my life. When I was released she introduced me to people at church, used her contacts to direct me to potential employers and helped me find a place to live. I made a strong connection to the body of Christ in a church family because of my mentor. She continues to give me strength, encouragement and counsel. A mutual trust was built in our relationship and so I want to be accountable to her. My mentor models a Christian life style everyday and I strive to act the same way.

## Transition Home Needs

Paper Products – tissue, toilet paper, paper towels

Cleaning Supplies

Twin sheets & Blankets

Twin Beds (mattresses & frames)

Computers

Gas powered lawnmower

Provide employment opportunities for ex-offenders

## Quilts of Love

There are many ways to become more involved in changing the life of a prisoner. One very tangible way is to provide a handmade quilt to each prisoner in the Transformational Living Communities. These unique quilts remind the men and women in the programs that they are loved and cared for, right where they are. You can wrap a prisoner in God's warm embrace with this AGAPE gift.

*"Our lives are in pieces from childhood abuse, rejection, addiction, anger, pain, unforgiveness, etc. Made whole again from the complete love of God, sending his Son to die for us on the Cross.*

*What your precious quilts represent to me are the pieces of my life made whole again at the foot of the Cross.*

*When I received my quilt I felt loved, Thank You! Not for what label was put on me by society or the image I put on for the world but truly loved for who I was and who God says I am. If anyone is in Christ, she is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come! Again thank you so much for your blessing!!"*

*Your Sister in Christ,*

*CW*

Chaplain Mike:

I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for all the support and encouragement you have shown me since my release to New Hope. Your guidance has been truly valuable in my successful re-entry. Thank you for having faith in me and giving me the opportunity to reside in New Hope... without New Hope I would have had nowhere to go!!  
God Bless

## YOUR GIVING IMPACT

- 3 in-prison TLC's serving over 150 prisoners each year
- 13 prison chaplains ministering to over 4000 prisoners every day
- 2 transition homes providing a safe, sober, and affordable living environment for up to 30 ex-offenders daily



Alaska Correctional Ministries, Inc. P.O. Box 210188 Anchorage, AK 99521

Donate Today [www.godinprison.org](http://www.godinprison.org)



## Kate White Band Benefit Concert

As I consider where my life has brought me, I can say with passion and conviction that I am supposed to bring hope, encouragement and healing to the hurting. I am called to the broken. They may be sitting in church pews every Sunday or they may be shooting up on the streets and homeless. But they are both wondering if God hears their prayers, if He really cares and if He IS listening, will He act.

I share this with you because as an Artist I am a singer/songwriter, worship leader/band leader, violinist and speaker. But none of these are my passion in and of themselves. They are HOW I fulfill my passion. They represent the unique gifts, skills and abilities God has given me to best communicate an aspect of His heart to a hurting world.

So this is my small contribution. I sing about this wherever I go. God is at work in the good and hard times. He cares even when you can't see Him. He's not afraid of your questions and has known them all along. He wants to hear them and accepts you right where you are. He wants you to bring it all to the table, good and bad, and He will meet you there.

*Join us for a free concert of hope, encouragement and healing*

***Friday, May 21<sup>st</sup> 7- 8:30 PM***

*Faith Christian Community*

*4240 Wisconsin Street , Anchorage, AK*

***All proceeds benefit Alaska Correctional Ministries***