



# Opening Blind Eyes

Rev D.W. 'Rip' Van Winkle, Ph.D. ~ Executive Director

On Sunday, March 6<sup>th</sup>, Washington State Reformatory, the prison where Opening Blind Eyes serves, reopened and began allowing limited religious programs. They invited OBE to provide the Protestant non-charismatic worship service on that Sunday. It had been 6 weeks since any worship services were allowed at the institution, following the murder of a corrections officer in the WSR chapel in January.

Unlike before, where I could roam the institution at will, two officers accompanied us everywhere we went and told us that we will “never be alone inside again.”

It is obvious that the officers do not feel safe while working there. They are angry with the administration, one another, the volunteers, Christians, and the inmates. An officer who is usually friendly and easygoing while checking us in seemed very troubled on Sunday. I assured him of my continuing prayers. On a lighter side, I was glad that some officers teased me by announcing, “Johnny Cash is on his way!”

The WSR on-site chaplain attended the worship service (the first time a chaplain has attended our services). He encouraged the inmates to pray during Lent for the community’s healing. Christian inmates are undergoing persecution because the murderer was known as a Christian leader inside the prison.

A record crowd of inmates attended the service. I led music, the liturgy, and preached a sermon entitled, “It’s not the seed, it’s the soil.” The theme was that the failure of some Christians does not prove the Gospel is false. Jesus said that some would gladly accept the Gospel only to fall away quickly, while others would allow the thorns of anxiety and wealth to choke the Gospel. Only some seed would bear great fruit. We can be fruitful by responding in faith and faithful obedience to the Gospel message.

The inmates received the message gladly. They were grateful for the opportunity to worship together after being locked down for 6 weeks. They offered prayers for the fallen officer’s family, for all of the officers, and for other prisoners. The unity and fellowship of both Protestant and Roman Catholic prisoners demonstrates the power of the Gospel.

The prison is opening back up slowly. It’s hard to say when I’ll be able to resume my weekly one-on-one counseling sessions. I appreciate your prayers for that important aspect of the ministry. If last Sunday is any indication, the inmates are hungrier than ever to meet with someone who can help them deal with their pain and isolation. It is a joy to serve God by proclaiming the Gospel in prison. Thank you again for your support that makes this possible.

Please continue to keep the inmates, the officers and us in your prayers. We are needed now, more than ever.

( Detach here and return in the enclosed envelope)

## Count Me In !

Opening Blind Eyes

**YES! I want to Partner with Opening Blind Eyes to provide Christian Counsel and Education for inmates at WSR.**

I pledge \$50 a month for the next 2 years

I cannot pledge \$50 a month but I can give a onetime gift of :

\$25       \$50       \$100       \_\_\_\_\_

I will be praying for Opening Blind Eyes

**Your gift to Opening Blind Eyes is tax deductible as allowed by law. You will receive a receipt for your records**