

Prayer Story: 24/7 Prayer Watch in *Sun City Prison*

How did the prayer watch start?

Johannesburg Prison in South Africa is not the place where anyone wants to live. It is also called *Sun City* because even the nights are like day due to the 24/7 bright security lights. About 11,500 inmates languish in overcrowded cells in four prison buildings (called A, B, C and Female).

But now the Son of Righteousness is starting to shine in and from *Sun City* as more than 400 inmates call on the Name of the Lord night and day in 73 24/7/365 prayer watches. Inmates joining these watches are praying an average of about 12 hours per day – trusting God to help them pray the full 24 hours every day! Prisoners are calling out to Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, for revival to come to *Sun City*. They pray for *Johannesburg* and South Africa and yes, they pray for **you!**

It all started when in 2006 *Jericho Walls International Prayer Network* in Witwatersrand responded to calls from the *Johannesburg Prison* to teach them about prayer. We were shocked as only five permanent staff members were responsible for overseeing the spiritual health of 11,500 inmates – the chaplain and a spiritual care worker in every prison building! As there were numerous Christians inmates that were hungry to learn to pray, a course called the **24/7 Prayer and Care Lifestyle Course** was developed to teach them how to pray.

Fifteen inmates in the female prison of *Sun City* were the first to complete the course. They started ten 24/7 Prayer watches with other Christian inmates that they mobilised to pray with them! Then we got a BIG SURPRISE! Nine of the successful students wanted to be trained as trainers! Of these, seven completed the course successfully, who in turn, trained another 66 inmates, with *Jericho Walls* personnel only overseeing the process. One of the five modules of this course teaches students about 24/7 prayer watches and encourages each student to become a 24/7 watch prayer coordinator. They are encouraged to then recruit other inmates to take daily slots in their prayer watch.

What tips can you give others on starting a prayer watch?

To start a prayer watch in a prison, you must have lots of patience and time and the Lord's love for prisoners and their wardens. The best way to start is to present the existing *24/7 Prayer and Care Lifestyle Course* in the prison. Those attending the first course will also be those starting the first prayer watch (or watches). It is important to watch for potential trainers amongst students as the training is done. In-prison trainers often assist you in your efforts to a great extent, but they would need continuous support from you.

What must you guard against?

You are representing Christ to the prison authorities and inmates (both Christian and non-Christian). Therefore do not become discouraged or angry when red tape takes up a lot of time; schedules do not work; promises are not kept; and when having to stand for hours in front of locked gates (or behind them!). Please, keep all your promises. Count the cost before you begin – it is high, but so rewarding!

What training do you provide for those interested in starting a 24-hour prayer watch in a prison?

The *24/7 Prayer and Care Lifestyle Course* (see the details of the modules elsewhere), is presented once a year in Pretoria (this year 13-14 August 2009), or regionally, or at specific prisons when there is sufficient interest from the prison or the group of spiritual care workers of the prison. You may be instrumental in getting such training organised. (Contact Elize at the *Jericho Walls International Prayer Network* office in Pretoria, Willem Joubert or Michelle Coetzee at the Witwatersrand office).

Do you see any fruit of your prayers?

Yes, the tremendous growth in the number of prayer watches in prisons! The spiritual atmosphere has changed in the prisons where the most watches are running, namely Medium B and C. Both inmates and wardens testify to this fact. Wardens have now requested also to be taught how to pray as they see the lives of inmates change.

This is Mohammed (not his real name) from Medium B prison's story:

Mohammed was convicted of aggravated armed robbery. He attended one of the first classes of the *24/7 Prayer and Care Lifestyle Course*. "It changed my life. I learned to pray and talk to God. I realised the importance of praying 24/7. A new life opened up to me in prison! I started to pray 24/7 for all those around me, using the principles of *Luke 10 Transformation!*" Mohammed also started a 24/7 prayer watch that runs 24 hours a day, every day! He immediately volunteered to become a trainer of the course and after receiving the train-the-trainer training, he trained 69 other inmates and motivated at least 30 of them to start 24/7 prayer watches in their sections!

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