



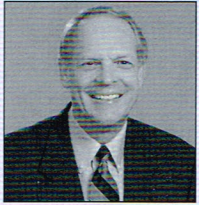
The Falls Church

CURRENT

That Christ be King in Our Lives and in the Lives of Others

October 2006

From The Rector



This is a thoughtful time in the life of our church. We are working our way through a study of the New Testament book, 1 Corinthians, in sermons, in our own devotional times and in small groups.

The Vestry is studying the letter as well. Why? Because it deals with apostolic advice to a church that must choose between Christ

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Sin Once Hidden, Now Forgiven (But with Consequences)

By Russell Woodgates

“So many men, and certainly many in our church, are caught in the same web of pornography as this dear brother in Christ. I pray all will read his account and those who need to, step forward and seek healing.” – John Yates

By the time you read this I will be living in a federal prison. I'm certainly not alone. More Americans are behind bars today than at any time in history, and they represent a greater-than-ever proportion of the general population. Still, there's a reason why each prisoner is there, including me.

More than three and a half years ago I abruptly retired from a longtime federal

job after it was discovered that I had been using my office computer to access Internet pornography. But because some of the Web sites I had visited also contained child pornography, my former employer notified the authorities, which led to an investigation with possible criminal charges resulting. In less than a day I went from being a confident, well-regarded 50-year-old professional to feeling unbelievably broken, stupid, sorry and scared. Whom could I tell? I contacted John Yates.

In his office, after hearing about what I had done, and the result, he assured me of the Church's love and support. But he also revoked every privilege I had enjoyed at The Falls Church as a lay minister. That meant no

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Dreaming Under the Spires of Oxford – TFCers Attend Wycliffe Hall Summer School

By Kristin Hansen

Addison's Walk is not just any old footpath. Alongside the peaceful River Cherwell in Oxford, England, it is the very trail on which C.S. Lewis in 1931 took a late-night walk with two friends and fellow "Inklings" J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson. Their discussion on that path was instrumental in Lewis giving his life to Christ eight days later.

It was on Addison's Walk that I

spent several hours this summer reflecting on the life and spiritual journey of

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TFCers in Oxford: (Clockwise from left) Thomas Heard, Kristin Hansen, Ed Glancy and Susan Larson.



Healing

Paying Atonement, Accepting Forgiveness

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more lay reading, chalice bearing or other participation in Sunday services. Thus began a long process of self-examination, repentance and restoration.

How could someone like me – a born-again, Spirit-filled, cradle Episcopalian and 17-year member of The Falls Church – get into such trouble?

There's no single answer, but understanding came to me through clinical and group therapy, private counseling, sacramental confession, personal accountability relationships, extensive reading and much prayer. The process exposed me to some very uncomfortable facts about myself and my perceptions, while exposing them to the healing light of God's truth.

I had known all along that my addiction was unhealthy, but now I understand how my corrupt communications online and my viewing of illegal images were so harmful to

me and others. My online activities not only offended against Man's law but also against God's Word, which tells us not to focus our imagination on anything that is not honest, true, just, pure or virtuous. Pornography is none of those things. Moreover, I now better appreciate how indulging in pornography-fueled fantasies is an arrogant, personal rebuke to God's explicit directives on how we are (and are not) to relate sexually to others.

Thus the light of God's truth exposed my hidden sin for what it was. It made me feel not just sorry but ashamed; not just stupid but truly sinful. That knowledge put me in a new frame of mind toward God, whereby I made the vital transition from mere regret to true repentance; from mere admission to true confession. Only then was I able to confess with honest contrition my sin against God and His loving purposes for myself and society, and sincerely ask for His forgiveness.

Inner healing gradually followed as I undertook an extended time of study, prayer

and repentance under the spiritual direction of clergy and inspired teaching ministries.

I came to understand how unresolved psychosexual issues going back to my childhood had made "diseased images" of pornography attractive to me. As I submitted those issues to God's healing process, my desires began to change.

It has been 46 months since I last saw a pornographic image or visited an obscene Web site. The idea of doing so again is truly abhorrent to me. I can identify with St. Paul's reference to the former sinners of Corinth when he writes, "such were some of you." For me, that translates more personally as, "such was Russ." The "peaceable fruit" of my long cleansing process has yielded an exhilarating, liberating effect on my soul. What a blessed relief to be completely guilt-free and able to go to sleep each night with a clear conscience!

The most stunning truth I learned from God's Word, with a shuddering realization,

Resources

Illusions of Intimacy, by Signa & Conlee Bodishbaugh (\$18, incl. postage, from Christ Anglican Church, 3761-B Government Blvd., Mobile, AL 36605)

Outlines a step-by-step repentance, recovery and maintenance program for Christians being corrupted by sexual addiction (especially Internet pornography).

Reconciliation, by Martin L. Smith, SSJE (ISBN 0-93638-430-1)

An essential resource for anyone wanting to formally renounce a period of hidden sin or just get some nagging guilt "off their chest"; guided questions prepare one for a confidential, sacramental confession with a priest (see BCP pp. 446-452); N.B. – the author's few references to sexuality imply unorthodox assumptions but are easily disregarded.

Wild at Heart, by John Eldredge (ISBN 0-78528-796-5)

Explores the haunting boyhood question, "Do I have what it

takes?" and describes how learning to hear the Father's voice can help a man stop projecting a false identity and become the unique man he's meant to be.

Crisis in Masculinity, by Leanne Payne (ISBN 0-80105-320-X)

A foundational text for understanding true biblical masculinity and how it properly functions in both genders; how to prevent or recover repressed or unaffirmed masculine traits in children and adults.

"Living Waters" – Confidential weekly meetings, October through May, sponsored by Regeneration of Northern Virginia (703/591-4673)

Worship, lecture, textbook study, small group discussion and personal prayer ministry for men and women seeking a structured Christian approach to the understanding and healing of different psychosexual issues. During the summer Regeneration also conducts "S.A.L.T. – Seekers After Liberating Truth," a confidential weekly group for men interested in overcoming various forms of sexual addiction, including Internet pornography.



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was that I had complacently put my soul in grave moral peril by secretly savoring a sin habit which I knew was wrong - "If we willfully persist in sin after receiving a knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin remains: only a terrifying expectation of judgment and a fierce fire which will consume God's enemies." (Hebrews 10:26-27)

Being a respected "man of God" in the Church had not prevented me from making a private accommodation with hidden sin. I had foolishly given myself permission by reasoning, "I'm not hurting anybody. God knows about my problem and He'll help me overcome it ... eventually." But, in fact, I was being willfully disobedient, persisting in wickedness by my own choice. I now thank God that He suddenly ripped the roof off my sin, exposed it, ended it and thereby delivered me from the divine judgment which would surely have come to me ... eventually.

The work of the Church includes disciplining Christians who sin and restoring them to right standing and full fellowship. That's the process I have gone through. In the last 18 months, John Yates has permitted me to resume my lay ministry activities, as well as to become a lectionary coordinator, member of the healing ministry and more. In the words of

the old hymn, I have been "ransomed, healed, restored [and] forgiven." Nevertheless, I must now spend up to a year in prison.

After more than three and a half years, the criminal justice system finally prosecuted me. Although looking at child pornography had never been my principal interest, I had seen it many times, and it was on my office computer. I pleaded guilty as charged. The judge acknowledged my sincere work toward rehabilitation and said the main reason for his sentence was not to punish me but to send a message of deterrence to the general public.

So, having spent so many months rendering unto God, I will now "render unto Caesar." I do so in full acknowledgement of my crime but also with the promise of God's favor and goodness toward me as a forgiven sinner.


Of course, this outcome has been a severe disappointment, is an overwhelming embarrassment and will be an enduring disgrace, but I view it as an answer to many prayers, as part of God's pathway of peace for me.

I realize that it may be difficult for some in the Church to see me as wholly forgiven and cleansed. I know it is harder still for non-Christians to regard me apart from the stigma and shame associated with my former sin. I accept that.

Unfortunately, there are tens - perhaps

hundreds - of thousands of churchmen looking at pornography every day, on the Internet or on videos and DVDs. That fact in no way excuses or minimizes what I did, but it does indicate how widespread the practice is in the Church. The Rev. Paul Walker, this year's Shrine Mont Retreat speaker and the TFC-sponsored Episcopal Chaplain at UVA-Charlottesville, says the number-one problem young men talk to him about struggling against is online porn. And those are the Christian students. Several years ago, a national survey of Evangelical pastors revealed that 40 percent of them struggle with some form of pornography habit.

At least they admit it. I sorely wish I had done so sooner, but I was a coward. I urge anyone struggling with this all-too-pervasive evil to start making use of the many available resources for help. [See box on page 8]

Please pray for me while I am away. I am asking God to help me bring the light of His truth to others who are ready to receive it. Also, pray that during my enforced absence I will continue to "grow in the knowledge and love of God." If you feel moved to write, I would deeply appreciate a card or letter. Call the Parish Office (703-532-7600) for my mailing address. I look forward to being with you again next summer. 

Welcome, Heather!

There's a NEW face in Pastoral Care. We are pleased to announce that Heather Knight has joined our staff at The Falls Church. She has been working full time as the Pastoral Care Administrative Assistant since September 11.

If you have questions regarding baptism, weddings or desire to make an appointment with Nicholas, please call Heather at 703-532-7600, ext. 8117. Martha Berg, (who had worked in that capacity,) is now serving as the Executive Assistant for Rick Wright, Senior Associate Rector. Look for Heather's complete bio and picture in next month's *Current*.

An Evening of Healing Prayer Tuesday October 17, 7-9 p.m. Southgate Room 114

This is a wonderful opportunity to receive individual "soaking" prayer for a protracted period from some of The Falls Church's specially trained prayer ministers. We have seen many wonderful healings from this type of prayer. If you would like prayer for physical healing, inner healing, or any other needs, please call Chuck Cook at 703-354-5469 and he will schedule you for either 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. or 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. The number of spaces is limited, so you must call and reserve a space. If you have to cancel please let him know so people on the waiting list can be called.

Each prayer recipient will receive periods of soaking prayer with the laying on of hands from several different prayer teams interspersed with periods of Scripture reading and meditation and opportunities to simply sit in our Lord's presence.

Upcoming Evenings of Healing Prayer: November 14, December 12

God's Grace in Prison

Below are excerpts from a letter TFC member Russ Woodgates wrote to John Yates in March. And an article which begins at **

My time here so far (a little more than halfway towards my official release date of July 26) has been eye-opening, sometimes disturbing, frequently annoying but otherwise truly enriching! The quality of fellowship I enjoy daily is unsurpassed by anything on "the street." Most of my "brothers" got caught up in the drug culture. Now they are committed to serving Jesus in tangible ways: marrying their babies' mothers, memorizing Scripture, attending regular Bible studies and praying for each other.

I've been doing a lot of reading: Pilgrim's Progress, Colson's Born Again and Loving God, three of Jim Cymbala's books, as well as a very thought-provoking book by a longtime Virginia prisoner, Jens Soering, The Convict Christ, which applies scriptural principles to present-day prison and criminal justice issues in ways I had never before considered. I also completed a correspondence course on "The Kingdom of God" through a Raleigh Bible college. I'm also catching up on some secular reading. Right now it's John Mack's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of T.E. Lawrence, A Prince of Our Disorder. I read Seven Pillars of Wisdom as a teenager and have never forgotten it.

I'm in regular correspondence with several TFC folks - among the nearly 100 who have sent me cards or letters since my October article appeared. All have been supportive, praise God. I've also enjoyed some visits, including one every couple of weeks from my mother, Sylvia, who continues to be in good health and high spirits despite her 92 years. I look forward to getting "plugged in" again to the "new" TFC.

** It's the happy years that are wasted; more meaningful are the suffering years. So said Marcel Proust, author of The Prisoner. If he was correct, I can look forward to a meaningful future, indeed.

It has been more than four years since my life forever changed after getting caught in possession of child pornography (see Oct. '06 CURRENT). Right now I am nearly two-thirds through a federal prison sentence for that crime. I've given up my quiet parkside Washington condominium to live with two others in a cramped cinder-block cubicle the size of a walk-in closet in a 160-bunk housing unit. Three times a day I stand with 1200 other men for ample but predictable and bland meals. There is no privacy, no comfortable seating, and little letup from the din of good-natured but obtrusive and annoying shouts and hollers among so many of the inmates (ear plugs are a frequent necessity).

With everyone wearing khaki shirts, trousers and coats plus black steel-toed work boots, we resemble an advancing army of UPS delivery men whenever we march en masse to the chow hall. My orderly job (19¢ an hour) in the compound carpentry shop is mostly that of a janitor sweeping and vacuuming sawdust. I'm also adept at squirting WD-40 onto every creaky, squeaky prison door hinge can gain access to. In my free time I wear gray flannel sweatshirt, shorts and sneakers. I participate in a step aerobics class and walk four miles on the rec yard track every day or so. A small library usually has the Sunday Post and Times as well as USA Today. There are three TV rooms in each of the eight housing units.

If you have read anything about prisons anywhere, you know they are usually houses of horror. By God's grace I am in a low security correctional institution which functions as a kind of showpiece for the Bureau of Prisons. That means the food is better, along with the programs, facilities and staff. Inmates are screened for violence, so I have no fear of riot, rape, murder or suicide. Yes, a double fence surrounds the compound, outfitted with motion sensors and topped with a massive Slinky of razor-sharp concertina wire. But there are no watchtowers or searchlights. The guards are unarmed and, for the most part, approachable and friendly.

Unlike most other joints, inmates here do not segregate themselves among racial and ethnic groups. There are no gangs. Most of the men are drug felons convicted under harsh new sentencing laws that have put them away for from ten years to life. Next are sex offenders, ranging from those with a pornography possession charge like mine to repeat rapists and child molesters. The rest of the population includes bank robbers, stock fraudsters, money launderers, moonshiners (yes, that's still a problem), aging Mafiosi, bad cops, a mayor, at least one federal judge and a US congressman. Prison etiquette dictates a "don't ask, don't tell" policy concerning one's offense, although any determined inmate can usually find out.

Like monks, we prisoners live and work in a cloistered compound. Instead of bells, loudspeaker announcements reverberate inside and out at frequent intervals, breaking the silence to direct movements of men to meals, work and recreation. Poverty, chastity and obedience are strictly enforced. Initiates must learn how to show and to receive "respect" among themselves and their superiors.

One old-timer said I must learn how to "fake it to make it"... But as a Christian I must reject that approach and walk instead in the strength that God gives me to be who and what I am, by his design, trusting him to be "my vanguard and my rearguard."

One mother who wrote to me told me how she tries to raise her sons "to be confident in who they are, to not be intimidated by who they must feel they are expected to be." That's a problem for many inmates, especially the younger ones. I found it to be a problem, as well. [But] instead of becoming another sullen prison poseur, I believe I am succeeding at walking in my true biblical masculinity. It's not easy, given some of the menacing personas I circulate among. Getting to know (and to get along pretty well with) men I would ordinarily want nothing to do with has been a cardinal achievement. I work mostly with [these men], who have taught me how to take a joke and play one on other guys. We've rigged a makeshift FM radio in the carpentry shop to play country music or classic rock all day. Some of the stories these guys tell about growing up in broken rural families are stunning: grave robbing, wife swapping, moonshine-fueled carousing, and family fistfights.

But I've never related to people who operate with more frankness. They'll tell you what they think of you to your face. But they'll also take care of you if you need anything. I've had to learn a new way of reading and sending physical and verbal cues in order to avoid misunderstandings. In this way - and for

some reason - God is "seasoning" me in a fashion I wish I had undergone 40 years ago.

My Christian fellowship is mostly with several young black men. Although their tattoos, gold-plated teeth, braided hair and aggressive physical demeanors reflect their "thug life" pasts, they now walk in daily obedience to the Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, demonstrating a deference towards others that no one might have thought possible before coming to prison.



OUTSIDE CHURCH WALLS

Every weekday at 6am, once the housing unit doors are unlocked for breakfast, a half dozen of us head instead for the rec yard basketball court, where we stand in the pre-dawn dark for a quarter hour of devotions. One of us offers an opening prayer, another reads from "Our Daily Bread," and a third says the closing prayers. Surprisingly, these streetwise brothers follow liturgical impulses. Invariably, one of them speaks these same words to "Father God" every morning, "... as humbly as I know how, begging your forgiveness and mercy. Thank you for waking us up this morning, clothed and in our right minds, with the use of all our arms and legs. Thank you, Father God, for forgiving us our sins. We ask you to lead, shield, heal and deliver us..." Could Thomas Cranmer have said it any better? What nicer way to start the day than with that offering of praise to God for life itself and for his promised help? The effectual fervent petitions that follow so often depend heavily on faith in that grace and favor, as when we prayed for one man's seven year-old niece hit in the leg during a drive-by shooting at her birthday party.

...we often find the pauses between [the Lord's] Prayer's phrases punctuated by profanities from a nearby cubicle. This is reality-based Christianity. And it has born real fruit.

Three nights a week I crowd knee to knee into a cubicle with four other men for 90 minutes of Bible study and prayer amidst the loudspeaker interruptions and noisy exchanges among the inmates around us. My suggestion that we close with the Lord's Prayer has been enthusiastically adopted... Two of the brothers who feel convicted about being unwed fathers have told their girlfriends that they want to get married - even before the end of their long prison sentences. Our newest member recently converted from Buddhism after dutifully reading all the Christian literature sent to him by his praying 14 year-old daughter. Another has remarked on a completely different temper since disciplining himself to ask God's blessing on his enemies at work. And his enemies seem to have also changed.

The main Christian ministry goes on among the men themselves. Anxieties over unresolved legal or financial problems, ailing loved ones and other outside difficulties are major stressors on inmates (including myself at times). The strong emasculatory effect of being unable to do anything but place a 15-minute phone call (at 24¢ per minute) to a pre-approved number or to write a letter is very great on men used to following their every impulse. Depression, repressed anger and bitterness towards "the system" often result, with the only relief being to overeat, over-sleep or over-exercise.

But by God's grace, he is able to "lead, shield, heal and deliver" them from such anxieties! Thanks to some generous TFC parishioners and staffers, among others, I've received several Bibles and books to distribute. One man, who received *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, by Brooklyn Tabernacle pastor Jim Cymbala, came to me the following evening with tears in his eyes. "I believe God sent you to prison just to give me this," he said, holding up the half-read paperback. The book has many testimonies to God's dramatic answers to "impossible" prayer requests, but also conveys the author's strongly-worded critique of today's often-misguided church leadership trends. Cymbala's message was exactly what this inmate needed to read. In fact, it was an answer to prayer during a time of great worry. He is a disgraced former pastor and is about to go back to his home church after several years.

Of course there are many "jailhouse Christians" here, the type who might keep a Bible on their locker or a rosary on their pillow as a good-luck charm. But other men have real encounters, hearing God speak their name, seeing him in their dreams or witnessing signs and wonders. One hispanic brother stood up in the Chapel last week and testified to being totally healed from a brain-stem tumor. The doctors had given him 90 days to live. That night, alone in his secure hospital room, he got on his knees and cried to God for mercy. Can you imagine how excited the men in Chapel were by that outcome?

One man who has been "down" for nearly a decade told me how, before getting into trouble, he had been "a religious fool." He had carried a Bible, gone to church every Sunday and tithed faithfully. But once in prison, he said, "I spent every single day for six years planning on how I was going to kill every one of my co-defendants when I get out." God's grace intervened, however, and he was transferred here where he met some strong Christian brothers who challenged him to believe in God's forgiveness. "I had an encounter with the Holy Spirit. I submitted to the Word. Only the Holy Spirit can change a man and make him live right." He recently had to draw upon God's grace again during his wife's fatal illness after 31 years of marriage. He was denied permission to attend her funeral.

As a former student of sociology it is easy for me to interpret America's burgeoning prison population as the predictable result of a social revolution which began 40 years ago with the breakup of family integrity, increased social permissiveness, decreased education, widening economic disparities and the popularization of "outlaw" cultures. There has also been a significant change in sentencing guidelines for convicted felons during the past 35 years. But as a Christian, I also see that today's growing class of underachievers includes a disturbingly high percentage of "church casualties" - men who (like myself) grew up in the church or at least know about and have some respect for Christian values. Nevertheless, they have not sufficiently appropriated God's power to stand against the world, the flesh and/or the devil. There is thus a clear and present need for more discipleship of young men in our churches, because God's grace is able to prevent all crimes from being committed by all Christians.

I will never recommend prison as a solution to the criminal mindset born of spiritual weakness. But to those willing to submit to God's purifying fire, confinement does offer a concentrated time where prayer and leaning upon God can produce remarkable changes. I expect to return home this summer chastened but also renewed in ways I did not expect to be. I certainly will not miss any of the many privations I have had to get used to. But never again will I enjoy such rich daily fellowship with other men. My term in this federal monastery will have been meaningful, indeed, with the expectation of more meaningful years ahead. I give thanks daily to God for his sustaining grace and favor towards me and for the nearly 100 men and women who have taken the trouble to let me know they haven't forgotten me.

I expect to again enjoy the peaceful view from my parkside balcony by the end of July. Until then, you can contact the church at 703-532-7600 to obtain my mailing address should you feel inclined to write. Having read this far, you may have an interest in prisoner conditions. I strongly recommend *The Convict Christ*, by Jens Soering (ISBN 1-57075-648-1). He has spent 20 years in Virginia state prisons, and his Christian insights may provoke you to action.

