

The INMATES' INSPIRATION



GREG GARDNER

Bishop Gerald Green ministers God's word to inmates during Martin Correctional Institute's "Friday Night Deliverance"—the most popular program at the prison with more than 120 men in attendance each week. MCI officials say Green's preaching and teaching is making a huge difference in the lives of the inmates he reaches.

BY GREG GARDNER

In a model program for Florida prisons, Bishop Gerald G. Green is saving souls one inmate at a time as he ministers each week at Martin Correctional Institution.

At the end of his work week, Bishop Green leaves his day job as a computer programmer/machinist in Stuart for a brief rest before he heads to MCI to minister to more than 120 inmates as part of "Friday Night Deliverance."

"Bishop Green is loyal and dedicated and he is consistent," says Charles Lawrence, assistant warden for programs at MCI. "On a day like today (Hurricane Sandy passing the Treasure Coast) I guarantee he will be here. You can't put a price tag on that. He is a great resource for MCI. It's creating a safer component at the prison. A very low percentage of these inmates are involved in infractions. A lot of these guys have never been to church. Bishop Green is the magnet that brings them here. You can't tell the difference between that environment and a church in the free world."

Except for the men in their blue uniforms, Bishop Green's services, with his great, thundering voice, could be from the pulpit of Any Church, U.S.A. "Don't let the devil call you by your past while the Lord will call you for your future. And the devil will tempt you not to come (to church). He wants you to disobey God's word and activate death over your life," he roars as he paces the front of the chapel, making eye contact with each inmate.

Adam Jolly is a 48-year-old Stuart man who has served 20

years of a 50-year sentence on a crack cocaine charge. Jolly facilitates the "Friday Night Deliverance" program and wants to join Green's Worship Center in Port St. Lucie to minister to inmates when he is released from prison. "It was a mission God gave me," Jolly says. "I've been saved 16 years next month. In prison men have a good feeling for who is genuine and authentic. They look to him for a sense of guidance and hope from a sense of desperation. They are very receptive to that."

One reason Bishop — as many people call him — is so effective in getting through to inmates is that they can identify with him. In his younger days, he was arrested on drug charges. Probation and God turned his life around as the young man shed his past to be the role model he is today.

Every Sunday, state inmates from the work release center in Fort Pierce are in the congregation at the Worship Center to hear Green's sermon. Church members give the inmates guidance and counseling on how to rejoin society after their release from prison.

Jerome Harris is a 42-year-old concrete contractor who met Green while serving a sentence for drug possession at MCI. "I met him at the work release center and I have been with him ever since," Harris says. "Since I met the bishop, my outlook on life is very different. He teaches us what the word of God says. Knowing it is sincere, that is what encouraged me to be a part of that ministry. I want to give back. I want to hire inmates who get out of prison to stop that revolving door. I want to be that kind of man for my family and the community. God is using him (Green) to change so many lives."

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With a non-stop schedule, Green juggles two full-time jobs although he has not drawn a salary as pastor at the Worship Center for the past 11 years. He and his wife, Novlet, have grown the congregation from six members to more than 130. The church is remodeling a recently purchased building in Port St. Lucie for new, larger and less expensive facilities.

"She (Novlet) is actually the associate pastor and runs the women's ministry," Green says. "She is the watchman on the wall for our ministry. I am the head, but she is the neck that turns it." Novlet ministers twice a week to children at the St. Lucie County juvenile detention center.

Afternoons during the week are devoted to church business, including weekly Bible study and prison ministry, counseling, hospital visits, church business, and prep for two Sunday services and sermons. Saturday is supposed to be family day, but the men meet once a month to discuss church business.

"You can't burn the candle at both ends, so I try and be in bed by eleven," says Green, who was ordained in the Church of God. "It is the necessity to bring humanity back to the place where we can live as the creator wanted. We are so far from the original plan. That is what drives me. When you know people are thirsty and hungry and you find bread and water, you want them to drink and eat."

Senior chaplain G.S. Collins works out of MCI, but oversees 11 other state prisons in this region. Of the thousands of volunteers he has seen over the years, Green is in the top three. "I know for a fact there is no other program like this in our region," says Collins. "Bishop Green has served without incident. We accommodated the program around his schedule. We usually work the volunteers into our schedule. We think it's a great benefit to MCI. It's the only service like that

Name: Gerald G. Green

Age: 55

Occupation: computer programmer/machinist and pastor

Family: Wife Novlet; four children, sons, Tavaine, 34, and Matthew, 22; daughters, Amber, 21, and Cerise, 17

Background: Raised in Jamaica, coming to the United States in 1977 and Port St. Lucie in 1989.

What most people don't know about me: "I was on the Jamaican table tennis team when I was in college. I am afraid of heights, but I love to fly."

Fondest holiday memory: "It was a 10-day trip to Israel and my wife and I were certainly in awe of the culture. We visited all the historic places that Jesus traveled to and were able to relive the events of Jesus' ministry here on Earth. We swam in the Dead Sea, visited the Mount of Olives, Garden of Gethsemane, the Empty Tomb, Sea Of Galilee and the Wailing Wall."

where we start early (3 p.m.) and end late (7:30 p.m.)"

At a recent "Friday Night Deliverance," there were no correction officers in sight until two showed up at the MCI Chapel for a quick head count. And then they were gone.

Addressing inmates as "soldiers," Green worked the men into a gospel chorus as his followers received the Lord's blessing through his touch.

"He has a gift of public speaking that makes their lives fulfilling," says chaplain Collins. "He has that gift of connecting with the inmates. He delivers a powerful message that impacts the inmates' souls." 

