



Testimony

FALL 2019 NEWSLETTER



Tierra Nueva / New Earth is an international Christian ministry based in Burlington, Washington that seeks to share the good news of God's total liberation, healing, and transformation in Jesus Christ with people on the margins—especially those affected by addiction, incarceration, and immigration.

We are dedicated to proclaiming the Good News of God's Kingdom (on earth as it is in heaven) with the oppressed for our mutual liberation, holistic healing, empowerment, and total salvation. We do this through pastoral advocacy, chaplaincy and re-entry support, evangelism, discipleship, and healing prayer.

Tierra Nueva / New Earth is

Sunday Worshipping Community
Family Support Center and Migrant Chaplaincy
Gospels & Psalms Group
Pastoral Advocacy
Jail and Prison Chaplaincy
The People's Seminary
Tierra Nueva Honduras

Our Core Values at the heart of what we do:

- 1) Host God's Presence
- 2) Connect People with Jesus
- 3) Read Scripture with Jesus
- 4) Walk in the Empowerment of the Holy Spirit
- 5) Empower Disciples of Jesus
- 6) Bridge Divergent Worlds

This annual offering is a glimpse of what we've been blessed to encounter in our work, thanks to your equipping and partnership. There are dozens of ways to keep tabs on us—primarily through our website, Tierra-Nueva.org.

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Mike Neelley on Worshipping Community

Our mission is to seek after lost sheep until they are found and bring them home to a gathering of friends where their return is celebrated. We do this among those affected by addiction, incarceration, and immigration.

Our Sunday Worshipping Community is one of these gatherings of friends and nothing highlights lost sheep coming home like our Summer Skagit River baptisms. If you've received our weekly emails, you know the stories.

(If you aren't receiving our weekly emails, punch in your email at the footer of our website Tierra-Nueva.org or send a note to Alvin at admin@tierra-nueva.org.)

One story we highlighted was of our new community member, Mark. He showed up for the first time at our July river baptisms. He described having had, after a life of atheism, a white light come around him as he was dying from alcohol poisoning. He heard a voice say, "I'm not finished with you yet." Mark

gave his life to God and wants to serve Jesus with all the energy he used to put toward hating Him. As he came out of the water, reborn and made new, he stretched his arms wide and shouted, "You are my new family!" He later told me that he doesn't normally talk like that.

Mark's story highlights the details of our mission. And it doesn't end with baptism and celebration. Mark talks about the reality of walking out being found.

"I was incarcerated from the age of 8 to 46 with only four short releases until I was finally released in 2006. It is safe to say that I was, or am, completely institutionalized. Each time I came out into

the world, I experienced culture shock. I was unprepared for the world I encountered. But I have to say that none of that compares to the culture shock I am experiencing now, having moved from lifelong atheism and opposition to God to Christianity.

In going from atheist to believer, my whole worldview changed. I find myself questioning everything I've ever believed, every decision I've ever made. I used to think people who believed in God had a low-level mental illness. Since my conversion, my confidence in my reasoning and deductive abilities are shaky. If I was wrong about God, which other of life's fundamental truths have I been wrong about?

As an atheist, I believed that extending forgiveness to the evil person was evil. As a Christian, I am commanded to forgive as I am forgiven by Jesus. As an atheist, I believed that power, money, and material success were the measure of a good life. As a Christian, I know that service to others, spreading the good Word, and furthering community is a spiritual currency far greater than gold. As an atheist, I believed that turning the other cheek invited greater attack and exploitation. As a Christian, I know my example of peace, my turning away from retaliation and toward forgiveness, can slay prejudice and bring the lost into the fold. As an atheist, I did not believe in the power of God's love or the Devil's determination to keep us from it. As a Christian, I know that God loves me and no one can stand against me with Him on my side. As a Christian, I now know that dark forces are at work against me, trying to separate me from God. As an atheist, I believed

prayer was a crutch that the weak used to deal with fear or the unknown. As a Christian, I know that the power of prayer is as powerful and real as a loaded gun. As an atheist, I was not connected to anything but my own ideas. As a Christian, I have a road map for life in the Bible. As an atheist, I believed some men were weak, some strong, some evil, and some good. As a Christian I know all people are God's children, my brothers and sisters, and should be accorded that respect.

Everything is changing in me. My coming to Jesus was a white-light experience but my walking with Jesus is a stumbling in the dark, full of struggle, confusion, and wonderful surprises I could never have imagined."

Each week as our Worshipping Community gathers, we tell stories of what God has been up to that week—testimonies of God's tangible goodness. These stories encourage and build up our faith that God is powerful, alive, and intimately involved in our lives. It is our prayer that you will be encouraged and built up by what you encounter in these pages. *

Pastor Mike Neelley is the Executive Director of Tierra Nueva. He leads all staff and serves in Sunday Worshipping Community, Jail Chaplaincy, and Pastoral Advocacy.



Nancy Murphy, Pastor Julio on Gospels & Psalms Group

Over the past two years, I have found solace in the Psalms Group that gathers at Tierra Nueva every evening at 9 PM. Pastor Julio warmly greets everyone that shows up each evening. At nine sharp, we open in prayer and each person chooses a Psalm to read aloud while Pastor Julio anoints attendees with oil and prayer.

I'm a mother. I have an angry and lost child—my baby—in active addiction out in the world. In my days of sorrow, I receive moments of hope in the Psalms Group. As we sit together, I am encouraged by those who also know the pain of addiction and loss. It is a mixed group of survivors, those recently released from incarceration, many committed to their sobriety, many in need of mental health care. It is a place where Jesus and people are loved. I am at home in this group.

I am a grandma. I sometimes have my grandchildren with me on the weekends and have had the privilege of bringing six of them along with me. They love it! Brooke, now ten years old, has read Psalm 150 so many times she has memorized it. She is remembered in our Psalms group as we often say together, "Praise the Lord," in the sweet shy way she says it at the end of the evenings. "Let everything that has breath Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord." Brooke's father is not what she needs him to be, but as she has attended the Psalms group, she knows God will answer our prayers for his complete healing. She believes! Brooke's eight-year-old brother is Myles. He also loves the Psalms Group. His focus has been on reading the longer chapters, which is a struggle for him as he is a careful, tentative reader. Everyone makes time and space for him and he is elated.

A few weeks ago, as they piled into my car, Myles excitedly told me that he had a new favorite Psalm. I thought he said song, so I asked him to sing it for me. He laughed and said, "No Grandma, not song" and emphasized the word Psalm. "Psalm 139." I asked if he was reading it at home, and he and Brooke smiled as they announced that there is a little library at their daycare. They found a Bible and have been holding their own Psalms Group. I weep for joy thinking about this little gathering. (If you haven't read Psalm 139 recently, please do. It's a perfect reminder of how beloved we are.)

We are being healed as we read the Word together. Please pray for Brooke, Myles, their dad, and this old woman's heart.

Thank you Pastor Julio for your amazing faithfulness and open heart as you practice hospitality each evening and raise others up. *

Nancy Murphy is an active participant and volunteer at various Tierra Nueva ministries.

Pastor Julio is the Director of our daily Gospels & Psalms group. He also serves the Family Support Center and is the doorkeeper for the building.

Psalm 139:13-16 ESV

- 13 **For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.**
- 14 **I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.**
- 15 **My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.**
- 16 **Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.**



Victoria Morales and Salvio Hernandez on Family Support Center

There's a widow whose son is deported to Mexico, other son was killed, and whose daughter is physically disabled. She herself is not able to drive and attend to her family's needs. Fifteen years ago, a friend brought her to the Family Support Center for help.

When we first met, she began to tell me, in careful Spanish, about how she suffers in isolation because her mother tongue is Mixteco, one of 16 indigenous languages from Oaxaca—with 29 dialects, each completely unrelated to Spanish, with no written form.

“Don't worry, I speak Mixteco too,” I said, in Mixteco.

She began to cry, saying that God brought her here to us, to me. “Please come with me to pay my bills.”

We went together and completed the tasks. I began to visit her and shared how, in Luke 12, that Jesus says,

22 Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.

I said, “God takes care of me. He loves me and I am not alone. He loves you too and now you have me as your sister.”

She affirmed, “God loves us both, Victoria. Please continue to visit with me and teach me more God.” I assured her that I would be back to see her again.

I've been meeting with her every week for all of our years together. I'm grateful for our relationship and continue to pray with her in grief and sorrow. *

This year, I began to minister with a single mother. She has a lot of problems and her two children do too. She was referred to the Family Support Center for help. She is struggling with her health, she injured her hand at her hard-labor job, and her car overheats every time it runs and is not reliable for more than ten miles at a time. Now, I take her to her various appointments: various errands and appointments, local physical therapy sessions, and a medical specialist in Seattle.

She always thanks me for helping her and I always say, “Madam, do not worry about it. We are here to serve you.” On one of our trips, during an especially hard time in her life, I asked if I could share some Scripture with her. She said, “Of course. Yes please do.”

I told her how in Matthew 11, Jesus says **28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gen-**



tle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

After sharing this, she understood that God is with her and for her. She is not alone and she says, “Why should I worry if God is with me?” She is smiling more now as we talk, she's more relaxed and at peace. Now, when I pick her up to take her to her appointments, she prays for God's protection over us as we travel. She thanked me for this good daily practice that she is also sharing with her children. She keeps saying, “Thank you, Salvio. You have taught me something good.”

I always tell her, “Thanks be to God. I am just an instrument of Him. I only share what the Holy Spirit directs me to share,” because my life is as it is written in Isaiah 61 and Luke 4:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. *

Victoria Morales and Pastor Salvio Hernandez together are Co-Directors of the Family Support Center. They also lead our summer Migrant Family Advocacy efforts, are often making home visits to our community members, and provide interpretation at our Sunday Worshipping Community.

Andrew Lewis on Jail Ministry



My first time visiting a prison was as a seminary student in New Jersey. I went to a worship event that my friend, a chaplain intern, was putting on at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility. As inmates entered the chapel, I was warmly greeted by men from all sorts of backgrounds and personalities. What they shared in common (aside from being under the age of 28) was passionate faith. The worship began with a hip-hop choir praising Jesus, singing “More power. More love. More of you I want in my life,” followed by rap verses written from hope in Christ, even in the midst of confinement. It concluded by all fifty-some worshipers holding hands in prayer and fellowship. It was a powerful and empowering experience. The invisible walls between us all were broken. We were united—a testimony to the Spirit of Jesus in our lives.

I was transformed and I wanted more.

Now over a year later, I have the opportunity to visit people in prison twice a month for Spanish-language Bible Study. I’m more often visiting our community at the Skagit County Community Justice Center in Mount Vernon, but also visit the Washington State Reformatory Unit in Monroe, a prison the next town over from where I grew up.

I remember well my first visit to Monroe. Pastor Bob and I wait in the chapel compound as men file in. We greet the attendees, exchanging handshakes. In this unusual space where none of us are hosts, it is hard to say who welcomes who first, but I sense an immediate connection with them. I even discover one of the men, nicknamed Jericho*, is originally from the same town in Guatemala where I had lived for a year and a half after college. He lights up at that and

*names and nicknames have been changed to protect privacy

shares stories from growing up there, remarking “Andrew knows what I’m talking about.” I smile in agreement. All of the men engage with the Scripture with personal insights and profound inquiries. We are all engaged with the Word and what each person brings to the gathering table, listening intently to one another, and testifying to how God speaks to each of our lives. These brothers share a deep desire for connection with one another and a deeper longing for connection with our God of truth.

Following the first portion of our Bible Study, Paolo, a long-time member of the group, leads us in worship, hooking up his electric guitar to a small amplifier and distributing music. He is a songwriter, combining heartfelt poetry with melodies of beautiful adoration, revealing an intimacy with God once confined to the solitary hours in his cell, now bursting forth freely in communal worship. “May the voice of truth be heard, may we unite with light and love,” he sings in Spanish. I sense the Spirit of Christ move boldly in us as we sing together. As with the inmates in New Jersey, I experience a strength of unity of the Holy Spirit, though this time we are in a small room with only our voices over gentle guitar. After several refrains Paolo hands me the guitar to play. Bob begins to pray over the men individually, laying hands on each of them. As voices quiet, the atmosphere remains fervent. I can see our brothers’ emotions expressed more freely. Some are moved to tears, even as they rest their eyes in prayer. I also am heartened by the Holy Spirit’s comforting presence as the living God ministers to us all.

I do not want it to, but the Bible Study

concludes. On our way out, I exclaim to Bob that there is such richness of faith in the men. He explains that Tierra Nueva has been walking with these guys for a long time—many of them for years. He has seen remarkable transformation in them. Paolo’s gentle and peaceful spirit strongly contradict his initial charges that brought him to incarceration.

My experience of unity with the brothers who are locked up is a testimony to the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Yet the depth of faith I witness is also a testimony to the enduring energies of Tierra Nueva staff and supporters from years past to present.

Faith is a posture; formation is a process. Transformation is the two complementing each other. Witnessing transformation in and through Jesus happens in unity, as people from all walks of life come together and welcome one another as they welcome the Holy Spirit. *

Andrew Lewis, Pastoral Advocate, serves in Tierra Nueva’s Jail Ministry and Sunday Worshipping Community.



The Greatest of These: *Matt Malyon on Jail Ministry*

I had two very kind and loving fathers. My biological father, who passed away on March 31, 2000, and my step-father, who passed away just this year—October 5, 2019.

I've been thinking a great deal about both of these men. These men loved me in ways both known and unknown, in ways that always give me pause for reflection. How am I doing? How do I accept grace when I fail as a father? What are the ways I can grow as a loving father? How can I continue this legacy so that my son can say someday, "Dad was imperfect, but he was a good man, and I always knew I was loved and accepted for who I was."

It was with these thoughts that I entered the jail recently to talk with the men in the Skagit County Community Justice Center. I had a Bible, a journal, and print outs of 1 Corinthians 13.

"We're going to talk about God the Father's love today," I told the men sitting around a steel table that was bolted to the floor. "I have something to tell you: He is good, and He loves you, and He's patient and full of grace... the best kind of dad, better than we've ever experienced. And this passage talks about that kind of love—the Father's kind of love."

There were nods around the table.

"I didn't have much of that," C. said.

"True, true," another man, R., said.

C. shifted in his seat and wrapped his blanket up closer to his head. "Let me tell you..." he said.

For nearly an hour, the two men in the study talked about their upbringings. They were both the youngest step-child in family settings given over to loneli-

ness and addiction. Both experienced their fathers as neglectful and uncaring at best—mean-spirited, abusive, and absent at worse. Both had been repeatedly told that they'd never amount to anything. Both of them were fending for themselves by the age of five.

"I was a feral kid," C. said.

R. nodded in agreement.

"Five years old," C. continued, "I was making my own meals, stealing food, or finding it in the garbage."

"And putting yourself to bed, right?" R. said.

Near the end of the conversation, C. recounted a recent story. He'd been at home, feeling lonely and angry, and began texting his father.

"All the hurts from forever just came out. I was so angry, man. Really angry. I just said everything." C. wiped tears from his eyes. "A few minutes later, I get a text from my dad saying he's willing to talk things through if we go to a counselor."

All three of us paused and stared each other.

"What do you make of that?" C. said me.

I paused and thought carefully.

"I hear an opportunity for real repair work, for restoration," I said. "I hear good things."

"Me, too, I think," C. said. "After I did

that, those texts, it was all out of me. And his simply taking it—I felt so much better."

Transitioning back to the text, we read it out loud together and talked about how earthly fathers—even the best of them—fall short of the ideal love portrayed in 1 Corinthians.

"God the Father will not fail us," I said near the end of our time together. "Even if earthly circumstances seem otherwise, God the Father is with us. His is perfect love. He loves you so deeply, R. So deeply, C."

I thanked the men for their honesty, for their sharing. We closed in prayer, asking that the Father would make his presence known to each of us, in ways that we could understand and know. I asked for His comfort and protection upon the two men in a way that provided lasting peace. On the drive home I repeated the prayer—for the men I'd visited in the jail, for our community, for me. *

Matt Malyon is the Director of Underground Writing and volunteers with Tierra Nueva's Jail Ministry.

Receiving Healing from Jesus, the Good Shepherd:

Gracie Ekblad on Jail Ministry



Recently I led a Bible Study at the jail about the Good Shepherd. The women shared experiences of fake “shepherds” they’ve encountered. They described these pseudo-protectors as negligent, manipulative, controlling—even predatory: “wolves” in shepherd’s clothing. When we read John 10 together the women were intrigued by how Jesus is totally different.

“The Good Shepherd” leads us lovingly into the safety of his fold, rescues us from predators, heals our wounds, and wants us to be free to “come in and go out” of sheepfold to find pasture (abundant life). I closed our Bible Study by inviting the women to open their hearts to Jesus, and voice any needs as we prayed around the circle.

Maria*, the last woman to ask for prayer, expressed a desire to know Jesus more. Then the guards came, which signaled the end of our time together, so

*names and nicknames have been changed to protect privacy

we prayed quickly. All the other women returned up the stairs to their cells but Maria lingered looking as if she had something to more to say. I felt a special urgency to tell her that she was not invisible. God sees her, and wants to care for her. She seemed deeply moved and resonated with what I said.

“Yes, when I saw you today, I felt like my heart told me ‘she is going to help you.’”

A couple of days later we got a call from Maria requesting a personal visit. Again, I felt an urgency to see her so I did not delay.

A guard led me into one of the visiting booths. Another guard let Maria in to

the inmate side of the booth. She sat down opposite me and we picked up the phones to talk through the Plexiglas wall between us.

“Thank you for coming so quickly, she said with a big smile.”

“Yeah, I felt that it was important to see you right away for some reason,” I replied. “How are you doing?”

It turned out that Maria had been suffering from severe back pain, fever, shaking and brain fog—signs of a kidney infection. On top of that she has been suffering from diabetes, a thyroid condition, a blood disease and a heart murmur. The jail nurse congratulated her on having more ailments than any other inmate. But it had been two weeks of suffering pain on several fronts without treatment. It’s not uncommon for inmates with serious health conditions to wait a long time for medical treatment. Some of those disturbing cases came to mind as Maria talked about how bad she was feeling and how afraid she was that she would not be treated in time.

Anger started rising within me, then a thought dropped into my heart and I spoke without really thinking about what I was saying.

“Well, Jesus is the best doctor ever. We’ve seen him heal a lot of people here.”

“Really?” she asked, looking totally shocked.

“Yeah, and he can heal you too! I’d be happy to pray for you now if you want!”

“Yes, please...”

So I prayed for Maria and then invited her to express her needs to God in her own words. Switching to Spanish, she poured out her heart and forgave those who had neglected her health and others who disrespected her in the jail.

Then we called on Jesus the Good Shepherd, the Great Physician.

“How do you feel?” I asked.

Maria looked stunned for a minute and declared, “All the back pain in gone!”

About three weeks later, she turned up at Bible Study and enthusiastically gave me a big hug. Her face was glowing and joyful. All the other women in the pod were watching the football game, so we sat down together, just the two of us, marveling and rejoicing about all that God was doing in her life.

“Yes, I am still healed. All the pain is totally gone from my back... I feel happy, free... like nobody can hurt me. Not like I’m in jail. I feel like a free bird, even though I am flying around in a cage... I am free on the inside! I cry, not out of sadness now, but because of the joy that God has given me. I feel a kind of pain in my heart, but it’s a good pain. I feel like I’m going to burst inside because of this happiness. Everything is possible with faith in God!” *

Pastor Gracie Ekblad is a Senior Leader of Tierra Nueva and a Co-Director of The People’s Seminary. She serves Jail Ministry, Sunday Worshiping Community, and as a Pastoral Advocate.



Kevin Riley on Jail Ministry

In Matthew 25, Jesus gives us clear instructions on how we are supposed to care for those who are struggling—in particular, verse 36 (“**I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me**”) and again in verse 45 (“**Then he will answer them saying, ‘Truly I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me,’**”) and that is where I find myself on most Thursday nights.

Thursday nights are a real blessing for me. I get to go into the Skagit County Community Justice Center to do just that.

- Visit the Naked: When you have your freedom stripped from you, you are left naked and vulnerable to the actions of other inmates, as well as the staff.
- Visit the Sick: So often I find myself sitting across the table for those who are detoxing from drugs, or have significant mental health issues.
- I Was in Prison and You Came to Me: I know that every person I visit in the

justice center is part of Jesus and that when I visit them, I am also visiting him.

That is in part how I met my friend Duncan. A few months ago my wife saw a post on Facebook from a friend of hers, Pauline, asking for letters of reference for her husband who was in jail. I had Danielle ask Pauline if her husband would be open to a visit from a chaplain. (As a chaplain, I have the ability to have inmates pulled out of their housing units for one-on-one visits.)

To which she said he would, and honestly I forgot. Until one night in the inmate worker pod, I found myself sitting across from Pauline’s husband Duncan. While I cannot get into the specifics of Duncan’s case, I can tell you that he is in between a rock and a hard place. Over the past several months I have been blessed with the opportunity to not only get to know Duncan, but his family as well. I get to be counsel for him, I get to pray for him and bring in stories of hope found in Scripture. As we also get to host his family for dinner and plan on going on hikes together. It is here that Danielle and I find ourselves in a

unique position for ministry. We get to surround this entire family with love, care, compassion, and understanding while laying the ground work for a continued life in Jesus. We get to inspire, equip, and engage through the Holy Spirit—as well as showing the true nature of our Father’s love.

And we want to invite you into this with us. Every time I see Duncan, I ask him how I can pray for him, and last night was really powerful. I took in the Lord’s Prayer for Bible Study. The main focus was the forgiveness aspect of that particular prayer, “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us,” and at the end of the study we all prayed forgiveness on those who were involved in their court cases. We prayed forgiveness over judges, prosecutors, jail staff, arresting officers, and most importantly forgiveness of ourselves. It was such a freeing experience for everyone who was there. Here is where we would like to invite you in to stand with us in prayer for Duncan and his family.

The last time I visited with Duncan one-on-one, I told him that I truly believe in the power of prayer and asked him to write me a letter on how people could pray for him.

Here is that letter:

How can you pray for me?

That is a question I struggle with.

My first thought when asked that is of my wife Pauline, my daughter Ariana and my sons, Declan and Dixson. I think of their safety and security -- their physical and emotional wellness and of

course their financial stability. So first I would invite you to join me in prayer for my family. Asking God to protect and provide for them in my absence.

How can you pray for me?

*Well since I’ve been incarcerated I have dedicated my time to self-reflection, re-discovering my relationship with God and helping my fellows who suffer by sharing my faith, hope, and courage. If you wish to pray for me, pray I have strength to persevere and endure this difficult time with an open mind and open heart. Pray that I will never forget the incredible burden that has been placed on my wife, who is now left to fend and provide for a young teenage girl with two boys still in diapers on her own. Pray that my attorney counsels me honestly while guiding me through the legalities of my case. Pray that the testimony from the expert toxicologist on my behalf has value to the judge and jury. I’ve always had trouble asking for help or admitting my faults; pray that I remain humble and practice humility, so that I can quiet my mind and listen to God’s will for me. At the end of the day, I pray for all who share my prison, innocent and guilty. That we may find love and forgiveness in Christ. I pray for the men of Tierra Nueva and give thanks for the hope I’ve received because of them. I am grateful for the many blessings I’ve been given from God in my life, and I ask him to re-unite me with my family. Pray for love, pray for family, pray for hope, pray for mercy. **

Pastor Kevin Riley serves Tierra Nueva as a Pastoral Advocate and as a chaplain with Jail Ministry. He is also the pastor of Mount Baker Presbyterian Church.



Jantina's Letter: *Danielle Riley on Jail Ministry*

Jantina is a woman I have known for over a year. She has been at every Bible Study I have led at the Skagit Community Justice Center with such an open heart and a child-like sense of awe at everything the Holy Spirit has for her. If another woman came in with any need, especially prayer, Jantina was there for her. Her journey did not end in release from jail, but in transfer to Purdy, the women's correctional facility in Gig Harbor, Washington. Her sentence is long (ten years) and she lacks any community or family support on the outside.

Here is a letter from her:

Hello out there. I'm Jantina and prison is the best thing that could have happened to and for me. I've always been a believer but never put my all in Him. He brought me here to prune me, to give me yet another chance to get right or get left behind. Faith and trust are very powerful words and they're hard

to put into practice when I've been such a hard-head all of my life. I can tell you I'm tired of being separated from my Creator. I go to three different Bible Studies and worship programs and can't get enough. It has always been hard for me to ask for help. If I couldn't get it, I would just go without. I'm working on that and I know "a closed mouth doesn't get fed." I've asked my Father many times to find someone(s) to adopt a 57-year-old who loves the Lord and craves His love. I am wanting to grow in knowledge by going to college and maybe get a degree in business.

I like writing to those who care enough to write me and I could really use and would appreciate financial help also. I have no more family out there to aid me and communicate with.

I have one very dear friend, Danielle Riley, who has been a mentor to me for over a year. I know this may be a lot to

ask for, but I am in need of a brother or sister in the way of the Lord to be kind, assist me, write me, and help me in my spiritual journey. I know times are hard for everyone everywhere and although I feel alone, I know I have God's love and He will never leave me and He can provide for me in here by touching your hearts.

Regardless of what happens or what comes of this letter, I hope and pray that by God's grace and love, He will bless y'all with good health, happiness, calmness of peace, and watch over you, protect you from any evil darts that the enemy throws at you and your family daily. Amen.

*Love,
Jantina*

Here is the information to write to Jantina:

Jantina Marie Sellers
DOC # 400820 Unit: CCU - E113
Washington Corrections Center for Women
9601 Bujacich Road NW
Gig Harbor, WA 98332-8300

For more information on how to support her, please check the Washington Department of Corrections website or contact Danielle Riley at 360-547-2491 / danielle@tierra-nueva.org *

Danielle Riley serves Tierra Nueva as a Pastoral Advocate and as a chaplain with Jail Ministry.





A Dream of Witnessing Racial Violence by Christians: *Bob Ekblad on The People's Seminary*

The Context

Recently, I attended the 24/7 Prayer International annual conference, held in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Over 1000 people from 29 countries gathered together to worship, pray, hear speakers, and participate in workshops on many topics related to themes of prayer, mission, and justice.

Just prior to this conference, Gracie and I went together to Beirut, Lebanon for teaching and ministering to a group of 65 Syrian Christians who had come over for five days from Damascus. The

day after we flew back to Europe, civil unrest broke out in Lebanon with protesters calling for reform, including a change of government.

Gracie then returned home while I stayed in France taking six days of personal retreat, which included three days at Taizé, an ecumenical spiritual retreat center which draws thousands of young people from around Europe. I really enjoyed coming together for corporate prayer and worship three times a day, led by the dedicated and humble religious order of Taizé brothers.

I flew from Paris to Belfast, another city marked by deep division and unrest. I led a seminar at the 24/7 Prayer conference entitled: “Raising up Leaders from the Margins,” with the help of Jessica Cargill, one of Tierra Nueva’s church members and rising leaders. I

also taught a seminar entitled “Bearing witness: Comforting the Vulnerable and Confronting the Powerful.” Corporate worship at the conference was beautiful—it took place morning, afternoon, and evening.

The Dream

In the middle of the night before the final day of the conference in Belfast, on October 27, 2019, I had a dream that was as vivid as an actual lived experience.

In the dream I am in a big Christian worship setting, like Taizé and 24/7 Prayer International combined. Suddenly, I’m standing on a dirt road in front of a house in an idyllic rural setting. I hear children humming and singing worship songs further down the road to my left. I watch as a group of kids walk happily along towards me. I somehow know they are coming from an amalgam worship conference of Taizé and 24/7 Prayer International. They were singing songs I recognize from these settings.

I notice they are white children, and watch them turn and walk merrily up the driveway to the house behind me off the main road. I think to myself how great it is that they have benefitted from such quality Christian input from these conferences, and wish my own children could have benefitted when they were young.

Suddenly, I am interrupted by a disruption down the road to my right, towards the center of town. I look down the road and see a group of white men I as-

sume to be the fathers of these children, dragging a shirtless black man along by his arms.

The men drag him into the town square, and put him in a pond in the center of town. He is up to his waist in water. The white men divide into two groups, each holding the black man’s arms stretched apart. Another white man comes up with a thick, green hose and begins spraying his chest, face, mouth, and eyes with high-powered water. There is a big piece of plastic held behind the man’s head, making the water hit against the back of his head. The man looks desperate and afraid, but is unable to break free.

I watch in shock and then begin walking down the road in the direction the children had come from, heading out of town as quickly as I can. I think that I must call the police, and then decide to get off the road so the men can’t see me since I am a witness—the only outside witness that I know of.

I begin hiking up a big hill, towards higher ridges. Then suddenly I’m face to face with two people on their way down. They tell me there is a heavily-watched wall and tower on the ridge above, and everything I do will be under surveillance.

“Everything you do is being filmed and everything you say recorded,” one of the men tells me.

I feel intimidated, but think again that I must call the police, though I remember thinking it will probably not make a difference. In the end I’m not sure I ever called, but think I did.

Then I am suddenly right in the center of the town at the crime scene—standing on the road in front of the pond. Everything is disturbingly quiet, cleaned up and set in order. The water is calm and the scene idyllic. The grass is cut short around the pond, like a golf course putting green. I see the piece of plastic that was held behind the man's face and body when they were spraying him, set upright in front of the beautiful pond.

Two of the white men are working in their yards. I nod towards them and they notice and barely acknowledge me, continuing their work. I notice ear buds in their ears. Had the police come? There is no sign that law enforcement had been there. I wonder where the black man is. Is he dead or alive?

I couldn't sleep the rest of the night as I pondered this dream. I was shown a scene of brutal, racial violence used to silence and intimidate—enacted by white men at the heart of what looked like an idyllic, white Christian community. In the dream, the men appear united in mob violence against a lone individual who is the only one unlike them—a black man who has become their victim.

As the only outside witness, I feel powerless to effect change. I am far outnumbered by the men, who I hadn't attempted to confront. Whether I report the crime to the authorities or not seems to make no difference—a normal reality to people of color.

As a white man myself, I am able to re-enter the town and stand before the crime scene with no questions asked.

But since I have now seen firsthand the otherwise-hidden racial violence that unites the community, how should I respond? Speak out as a witness to expose and confess? I return home to the USA the next day with these questions in mind.

On a weekly basis, I see injustice against people of color and poor white people. Men and women sit accused in our jails, unable to post bail or afford specialized legal counsel. People are released from incarceration with unreasonable fines, financial burdens, requirements to report to probation officers and remain in regions of the state where they have no support—their driver's licenses often revoked. Homelessness is increasing as housing is scarce and overly expensive. We at Tierra Nueva witness and carry these injustices—but to whom can we report them? I bear witness to you rather than remain silent. *

Pastor Bob Ekblad is a Senior Leader of Tierra Nueva and a Co-Director of The People's Seminary. He serves Jail Ministry, Sunday Worshipping Community, and as a Pastoral Advocate.



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God's Peace to you in this season.

Gratefully,

Mike Neelley
Mike Neelley
Executive Director

Tierra Nueva
PO Box 410
Burlington, WA 98233



The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the Lord!

Psalms 146: 7b-10

Tierra Nueva

Tierra-Nueva.org

PO Box 410
Burlington, WA 98233

360-755-5299