

Kairos History

In 1975, Tom Johnson, an attorney and Catholic Cursillista from Miami, Florida, attended an ecumenical Cursillo gathering in Atlanta, Georgia. Though delegates came from several denominations presenting Cursillo weekends, this Atlanta gathering was heavily Lutheran. The original Cursillo movement was derived from the Roman Catholic church of Spain.

Tom Johnson had been imagining a Cursillo program in prison for some months. During the Atlanta meeting Tom learned some of the delegates were planning a prison weekend in Iowa. Tom approached the Iowa delegate, Pastor Gene Hermeier and asked permission to attend. One week later, Tom was observing a Cursillo weekend in an Iowa prison. Excited by the experience, he returned to Miami determined to begin Cursillo weekends in Florida prisons. That first weekend was held at Union Correctional Institution at Raiford, Florida in the fall of 1976.

By 1978, six or seven states were presenting a Cursillo short course in prison. The national Cursillo office in Dallas surveyed these prison Cursillos and determined they should be ecumenical, and supervised by a central authority. They felt the format should be modified to better meet inmate needs. Cursillo asked the Florida group to design such a program. The first Kairos was presented in 1979. Following that first "Kairos" weekend, Cursillo asked other areas who were doing Cursillo weekends in prison to stop using the Cursillo name and join Kairos.

Kairos dates its history back to that first weekend at Union C I in Raiford, FL in September of 1976. Kairos is now active in 33 states and in the countries of Australia, Canada, England, Costa Rica and South Africa. The ministry is active in over 300 ministry sites and 35 Kairos Outside ministries for women whose sons and husbands are in prison. Kairos has requests for its program in Honduras, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Nigeria, and several other countries.

Kairos does this with a paid staff of eight people and over 20,000 volunteers who pay for the 618 weekends we present each year. Recidivism studies in Florida and South Carolina found that Kairos experience brought a drop in recidivism of about one-third when compared to a control group.

By bringing the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ into prison, Kairos is widely recognized as a highly effective program to positively change inmate attitudes.