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# Prison Congregations of America, Inc.

Vol. 24 Issue 4

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

# God Gives Us Moments

By Rena Griggs

*Deuteronomy 30:19 (Amp) "I call heaven and earth to witness this day against you that I have set before you life and death, the blessings and the curses; therefore choose life, that you and your descendents may live."*

As we look at our lives in retrospect, while we may reflect on a particular year or a specific season when we recall experiences of great significance, ultimately we almost always break them down into memorable moments in time that are indelibly etched in our minds. Very often those moments involved choices. Sometimes with intentional preparation and consideration to inform the choice, and other times the decisions were made in a millisecond – a spontaneous reaction to an unexpected situation. In either case, the choice can be life changing.

God gives us moments. He sets before us choices that determine destinies. Our own, as well as those who come under our influence, whether for a lifetime or a moment in time.

God gave David a moment as a young shepherd boy on a day in its beginning, he probably didn't see as set apart from any other. He tended to his chores, then secured the sheep so he could do his father's bidding in taking lunch to his brothers on the battlefield. Brothers who teased and tested him, who gave him no credit, and who seemed to resent him without a

cause. He could have easily rebelled and refused to make the trip, which would have been understandable considering how ornery his brothers were. Instead he set out in obedience to the simple, seemingly insignificant task that was asked of him, which ultimately put him in the right place at the right time to make the right choice

in a God given giant slaying moment that had epic generational impact leading all the way to the crucifixion of the Messiah, his descendent.

God gives us moments. He offers opportunities that, when captured by right choices, form the path leading us into the purpose for which He has called us. What we do in those moments, one after the other, tend to separate the

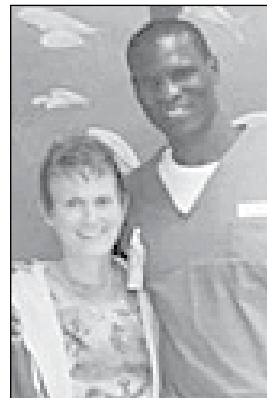
chosen from the called. The few out of the many.

God gave me a moment over thirty years ago, a choice between life and death, that quite literally marks a monumental turn of the trajectory of my professional life, and more importantly, the constitution of my personal character and world view from a social justice perspective, that has led to this very moment in the here and now.

As a rookie police officer I witnessed the murder of an eighteen year old young man by a seventeen year old youth, who fled from me and was eventually tracked by my accompanying K-9 officer back up in a field far off the road, in the dark of night. The shooter, who happened to be

**continued on page 5**

"... to collaborate with Christian denominations and prison officials so that prison congregations are established in state prisons across America."



## PCA Pastors' Retreat a Time of Conversation and Renewal



Rev. Susan Beck, Rev. Carol Wieger, Mary Mortenson, Rev. Wayne Gallipo, Rev. Lee Schott, Rev. Paul Witmer, Rev. Rick Admiraal, Rev. Jerry Collell, Rev. Paul Stone, Rev. David Bentz, John Stramiello, Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan

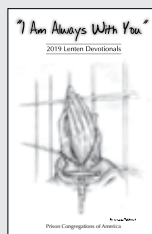
In September, PCA pastors met for retreat at the Sophia Center, Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas. Evaluations indicate that the pastors who attended the retreat found the time valuable, and a good combination of programming and free time. The hospitality shown them by the Benedictine Sisters was incomparable! Psalmist and musician, Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan, engaged with the group throughout, offering his heart as well as his music.

### Please Consider a Special Christmas Gift

There is much excitement in "PCA-Land" as details of the transition in leadership are accomplished. These duties also require extra finances, as PCA supports two directors for two months, as well as the costs of moving the office to Denver. Through it all, there is work being done with new congregations in Florida, Washington, and Illinois! Please join us for this great new ride!

### 2019 Lenten Devotional Booklet

The 2019 edition of the Lenten Devotional Booklet, "I Am Always With You" will be available on the PCA website in February. If you are a donor this year, you will get a booklet, but they are available to anyone who asks, so let us know if you would like one. ([mary@prisoncongregations.org](mailto:mary@prisoncongregations.org))



## Partners at the Cross: With Gratitude & Hope

By Mary Mortenson

The PCA Board of Directors and staff gathered with 100 of our closest friends and supporters for the annual fundraising banquet at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, SD on October 20th. This year was a time to remember the strides the ministry has made in the last ten years, as well as to look with excitement to the future. To that end, sweet and touching things were done for me, including the board presenting me with a beautiful crystal award. Right after the event, the Board voted unanimously to call Renae Griggs as the new Executive Director of Prison Congregations of America. Renae is smart, articulate and capable. As you can tell from her cover article, she is also faithful. PCA will be in very good hands!





# YOUR GIFTS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

**DONOR LIST – GIFTS RECEIVED FROM JANUARY 1 – NOVEMBER 6, 2018**

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Norm & Cathy Washburn  
Verlie Yockey



# Some Things Will Change: Some Stay the Same

With the hiring of Renae Griggs as the new Executive Director, some details of PCA will change. Renae lives in Denver, Colorado, so that is where the PCA office will be. With that will come a new phone number, effective immediately, 720-484-1234. The toll free number, 800-417-6692, will stay the same. After the first of the year, the mailing address will also change.

Don't worry, you can use the Sioux Falls address until you hear differently. Renae's email address is [renae@prisoncongregations.org](mailto:renae@prisoncongregations.org).

What will stay the same will be our dedication to planting congregations in prisons around the country. Once done, we will continue to support the pastors and congregants in any way we can. These are exciting times!

## Web-based Donation Opportunities

**GoodSearch** and **GoodShop** are easy ways that we can contribute to PCA. GoodSearch (<http://www.goodsearch.com>) is an on-line search engine. If you sign up on their site to support PCA, a small donation will be set aside every time you use the search engine. If, when you are shopping on-line, you go to your favorite site through GoodShop, (<http://www.goodsearch.com/goodshop.aspx?charityid=916169&widget=1>) a percentage of your purchase price will go to PCA.



**Amazon Smile** is another online way that you can support PCA. Simply go to the Amazon Smile site and sign up. (<http://smile.amazon.com/>)

## Prayer Corner

At this time of waiting for the Christ Child, knowing full well that He is already here, grant us space to celebrate and to reflect on this greatest of gifts. Join us in thankfulness for the gift of Renae, and for her paying attention to the nudging of the Spirit, which has brought her to PCA.



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## IN MEMORY OF / IN HONOR OF GIFT FORM

*Prison Congregations of America accepts gifts in memory of someone who has died or in honor of someone on a special occasion. Just note your contribution accordingly. Be sure to tell us to whom to announce your gift.*

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## MOMENTS

### continued from page 1

African American, gave up without incident, immediately surrendering. The K-9 officer loosed the dog on him anyway, then threw him down on a huge pile of red ants. As this seventeen year old child lay on his stomach being eaten up by ravaging insects, he compliantly put his hands behind his back so I could handcuff him. Once he was secured, I did what to me now is the unimaginable.

With my knee in his back, I unholstered my gun from my side and I pressed against the back of his perspiring head with the cold steel end of the barrel demanding to know where the weapon was that he used to shoot the victim. The K-9 officer was standing with the dog at the ready no more than five or six feet away, and I glanced up at him fearing his disapproval as I had become conscious of the depravity of my actions. Instead of reprimanding me, he nodded in such a way that the intent of his communication was explicitly clear. He may as well have said aloud, “Pull the trigger.”

At the time, many of my colleagues were resemblant of David’s brothers in terms of their response to women being on the frontlines in policing. We were teased and tested, given no credit, and resented seemingly without a cause. This K-9 officer was a long time veteran – old school, you could say – and one of the most vocal protesters about my presence in uniform on the street. I had a choice in the moment. A choice between life and death, and a choice between the blessing of this seasoned officer or the curse of he and his cohorts about my “weakness” if I didn’t fulfill their perception of my duty as judge, jury, and executioner.

Startled, confused, and ashamed, I immediately put my gun back in the holster and helped the handcuffed young man up off the ground, completely shaken by the shock of my capacity to do what I would never have considered possible of myself. The juvenile was tried and convicted as an adult, ultimately sentenced to life in prison with no potential for parole.

Twenty eight years later, I was wrestling with God about my destiny, like Jacob, refusing to let go until I received the blessing to fulfill His purpose for my life which I knew I hadn’t come to yet. During one of the innumerable conversations with the Creator during this wilderness period of my journey, I heard God’s voice in my spirit so clearly. He said, “I need you in ministry, but there are things I will require you to do first before I can set you loose.” One of the tasks God gave me was to reach out to the shooter I had arrested almost three decades earlier and ask for forgiveness.

God was giving me another moment, intimately

connected to the moment all those years before. He was offering me an opportunity for redemption from a very unlikely place. Redemption I desperately needed that only God knew. You see, in recent history, every time I heard another story about an unarmed young black man being shot by police, I relived that night. I had to repeatedly own my behavior in that field when I decided to abuse my authority and violate the public trust. In particular, the trust of a child who was afraid for his life.

I had another choice to make that would, again, have far reaching effects so beyond me they remain incalculable. I obeyed, not knowing what would come of it. I prayed for the words and typed a letter explaining exactly what God had said, pouring my heart out to a stranger, yet a kindred spirit I had never been able to let go. I sent it to the prison where the seventeen year old had grown into a forty five year old man. A few days later I received a response so filled with graciousness that as I read it walking back from the mailbox, I could barely see his writing past the flood of tears from my eyes while fighting to remain upright because my legs wanted to give way to the overwhelming emotion. The breathtaking healing that comes from forgiveness.

God gave him a moment. A choice. To forgive, or not. To respond, or not. His choice to reach back with grace in abundance was such a gift, and the friendship that has developed as a result is a bridge that Jesus built defying the deep seated adversarial chasm of our system of justice. My personal story of the need for redemption from a man condemned to die in prison for taking the life of another, is part of what defines my immense gratitude for the opportunity to lead an organization that has the potential to completely change the landscape of our system, as well as the construct of the church at large, by way of grace.

Last year, as a result of a series of United States Supreme Court decisions around juveniles convicted as adults and sentenced to life in prison, I was able to testify as an advocate of this now forty seven year old brother in Christ. My passionate plea for his release, as both the arresting officer and a witness to his crime, carried significant weight. This past summer he walked out of the gate to freedom. God’s redemptive power is unstoppable. And it is made available through choices that come moment by moment.

God is giving PCA a moment, and with that will come opportunities to advance into the destiny God has purposed for this extraordinary organization. I am humbled beyond words to join with you all in this moment and through the leading of the Holy Spirit, to champion the choices we must make to seize this moment for the sake of all of those who are counting on us to choose boldly on their behalf.

## PCA Seeks to be "Greener"

Would you prefer to get this newsletter via email? Please let us know at [mary@prisoncongregations.org](mailto:mary@prisoncongregations.org).

### PCA and Social Media

If you look at: [www.PrisonCongregations.org](http://www.PrisonCongregations.org), you'll find:

- Updated news!
- Our blog!
- Links to Facebook and Twitter



**AND PLEASE  
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## Thrivent Choice

Thrivent Choice PCA receives generous donations from Thrivent Financial members through Thrivent Choice Dollars. Please consider joining others in this easy way to invest in the work of PCA. Either: (1) Log in to [Thrivent.com/thriventchoice](http://Thrivent.com/thriventchoice) and select "Get Started." (2) Contact a representative from the Member Connection Center at 800-847-4836 and, when prompted, say "Thrivent Choice." When next prompted, say "Choice Dollars."



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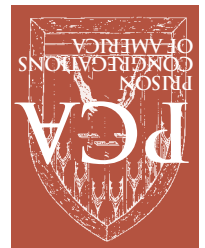
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