



History of Kairos in Australia

The Beginnings of Kairos

Kairos Prison Ministry (Kairos) is a Christian faith-based ministry that addresses the spiritual needs of incarcerated men, women, youth, and their families. By sharing the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, Kairos changes hearts, transforms lives and impacts the world.

The first Kairos Course presented in Australia was in June 1995. However, the beginnings of Kairos can be traced back to Mallorca an island off the west coast of Spain. In 1943 Eduardo Bonnin Aguilo participated in a course called Cursillo (Spanish for "short course") for Advanced Pilgrim Leaders. This was sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church in Spain. Eduardo felt that this course could be the basis of a course that was designed to be attended by members of churches to gain a different perspective of Christianity and be the basis for them becoming more involved in the church. This updated version included forming reunion groups which met on a regularly to support each other and learn more about the Christian ethos. The course became known as "Cursillo in Christianity." The first of such courses was presented in Mallorca in August 1944. The Cursillo movement was born.

After presentations in 1946 and 1947 the Cursillo course was modified and in 1948 it evolved into the basic course that is still presented today.

The seed of Cursillo spread throughout the world.

In 1957 the first Cursillo course in the United States of America was at Waco, Texas. It quickly spread to other States in the US. However, until 1961 Cursillo was only presented in Spanish. After 1961 an English version was created. This hastened the spread. The Cursillo Movement in the United States was organised on a national basis in 1965 and the National Secretariat was formed and the National Cursillo Office (currently in Jarrell, Texas) was established.

In 1975 Tom Johnson attended a Cursillo gathering in Atlanta, Georgia. Tom had a vision of holding a Cursillo course in prisons. At the Atlanta gathering he learnt that that some of the delegates were planning a prison Cursillo course in Iowa. He attended that course as an observer. He returned to Miami, Florida determined to begin Cursillo courses in Florida prisons. The first course was presented at Union Correctional Centre at Raiford, Florida in late 1976.

By 1978, at least six states were presenting a Cursillo 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.

As a result of the directive from the Cursillo National Secretariate a group of nine men (today affectionately referred to as the “Nine Old Men”) who had been involved with the Cursillo in Prison courses in Florida, developed a prison-appropriate version of the Cursillo program. They adopted the name “Kairos,” and the ministry became an independent, nonprofit, ecumenical Christian organization based in Florida. “Kairos” is a New Testament Greek term that means “God’s Special Time,” or “in the fullness of time.” The original Kairos program is now Kairos Inside. Following that first Kairos weekend in 1979, the Cursillo office directed other “Cursillo in Prison” programs to join Kairos and to stop using the Cursillo name.

Kairos Prison Ministry International, Inc. (“KPMI” or the “Ministry”) was established in 1979 as a not-for-profit Florida corporation.

Kairos has now spread to thirteen countries operating in over six hundred locations.

Other Christian denominations established similar conceptually movements. These are generally grouped under what is called a 4th Day Movement and includes, Walk to Emmaus, Tres Dias and other Cursillo movements established by other Christian denominations. The 4th Day is the rest of your life after completing the 3-day course. It was from these courses that Kairos drew its volunteers as the participants in the 3-day programs had experienced the love of God that is a main theme for Kairos.

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Charles “Chuck” Colson, former White House counsel to U.S. President Richard Nixon, pled guilty to obstruction of justice and served seven months in a federal prison camp for his Watergate-related offense. While incarcerated in 1974 he became convinced the real solution to crime is found through spiritual renewal. When released he formed Prison Fellowship. Under Prison Fellowship volunteers went into prisons to bring the word of God to the inmates. This was primarily done through one-to-one meetings or small groups. Inmates were provided with Bibles and encouraged to read them. The volunteers explained the Bible to the inmates.

Prison Fellowship thrived in the US and soon was established in other countries. It has now become the world’s largest network of prison ministries.

in 1981 Prison Fellowship was established in Australia.

In March 1987 Colin Bradford met Lindsay Urquhart who was the then current Chair of Prison Fellowship Australia. Then in April 1987 Colin attended a seminar at which Lindsay Urquhart spoke about Prison Fellowship. Colin then decided to support Prison Fellowship.

With the success of Catholic Cursillo in the US the Walk to Emmaus was developed in the 1960s. This was initially under the control of Cursillo. In 1978 Walk to Emmaus became independent of Cursillo and was modified as a Protestant version.

In August 1984, the first Walk to Emmaus programs for men and women were presented at Otford in NSW. Cliff Powell was instrumental in introducing Emmaus to Australia. It grew rapidly and by 2004 there were 24 Emmaus communities nationwide including at least one in every state and territory.

In late 1987 Colin Bradford attended a Walk to Emmaus. At this time Kairos was operating in the US and prisoners who had attended a Kairos program, sent letters and banners to the Emmaus Walk that Colin Bradford completed. Colin was deeply affected by the letters and banners and became more involved with Prison Fellowship as a volunteer.

In 1988 Colin Bradford, Cliff Powell, and John Fry (who was then the Chair of Prison Fellowship Australia), Neil Hodgkiss (Chaplain at Long Bay CC) and Brian Bell (who was with Catholic Cursillo), had a conversation about the possibility of bringing Kairos to Australia. They decided to form an ad hoc committee to assess the possibility of bringing Kairos to Australia. John Fry became the chair of the ad hoc committee.

After discussions with the US, it was decided that John Fry, Colin Bradford, and Neil Hodgkiss would visit the US in 1990 to witness Kairos #13 at Union Correctional Centre in Raiford Florida.

A great many discussions with Corrective Services and the Governor at Parramatta Correctional Centre was undertaken with the ad hoc committee. The Chaplain at Parramatta was Rev James Thompson who had completed a Walk to Emmaus and was fully supportive of Kairos. There was a change in Governor at Parramatta whereby the Governor at Long Bay was transferred to Parramatta. Neil Hodgkiss knew the new Governor who was incredibly supportive of Kairos. Arrangements were quickly made to hold a pilot Kairos program at Parramatta in July 1995.

A number of people from Kairos Florida came to Sydney to provide advice and training for the team on Parramatta #1. The advising Leader on that course was Ike Griffen from Kairos USA and the Leader was Colin Bradford.

The pilot program had the support of Prison Fellowship and Prison Fellowship assisted in providing the funds to present the course.

Soon after that first course Corrective Services announced that Parramatta Correctional Centre would be closed and so no further Kairos programs were able to be presented.

After the success of the pilot program at Parramatta it took further negotiations with chaplains, Governors, and Corrective Services for Kairos to become an acceptable course for NSW prisons. The result was that the first program in Long Bay Industrial Complex was in October 1996, Goulburn Correctional Centre later in 1996 and Cessnock Correctional Centre in October 1997.

A complication was that during late 1997 Prison Fellowship wished to withdraw financial support for Kairos. This placed John Fry in a difficult position in that he was the Chair of Kairos but also of Prison Fellowship. Further Peter Baker who became a member of the Ad Hoc Committee was also the Secretary of Prison Fellowship. The result was that John Fry left his position at Prison Fellowship and became Chair of the first Board of Kairos Prison Ministry Australia (KPMA) when it was incorporated on 3 February 1998.

Those on the first Board of KPMA were Arulkumar Niles, Brian Bell, Clifford Powell, Colin Bradford, Deanne Chapman, George Novak, George Drew, James Thompson, John Dominish, John Fry (Chair), Kevin Silvester, Paul Napier, and Peter Barker.