

# PASTOR

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his drinking, Al was expelled from seminary. He recalled that the events also caused him to "kick my faith to the curb." He enlisted in the Army and was stationed in Germany as a legal clerk and was quickly promoted to sergeant.

"I was in the Army when I started experimenting with hashish and hallucinogens," he said. "I couldn't afford my drug habit, and being an enterprising young man, I started selling drugs to fellow soldiers."

Upon his honorable discharge from the Army, Al smuggled approximately 40 pounds of hash when he returned to the U.S., he said.

"I started associating with bike gangs and other people who shared my passion for sin," he said. "When I was 25, I met a young woman, Teresa, who seemed like an angel to me. She was only 15 but her parents didn't object when we moved in together two weeks after we met."

Teresa shared Al's background. Her parents had introduced her to drugs at an early age, and she and Al sought comfort in one another and in the drugs that dominated their lives.

In 1974, Al experienced his first prison stay after smuggling a pound of heroin across the Mexican border.

"He went to Chino State Prison in California," Teresa said. "I was only 16 at the time and I waited faithfully for him to return home."

Al said good behavior and lying his way through a pre-sentence investigation bought him release in 1976.

"Teresa and I were married in August 1976," he said. "We started using the drug that had landed me in prison. It wasn't long before we were heroin addicts. At that time, whatever drug I was trafficking, that's what I was injecting."

At that point, the Christian

element of his life seemed a distant memory to Al. For the next 15 years, he continued to deal drugs.

In December 1988, his life changed dramatically when he was arrested for running what he said was then the largest methamphetamine drug ring in South Dakota.

"They gave me a three- and a seven-year prison term at the South Dakota State Penitentiary," he remembered. "After I was in prison for about a year, I was arraigned on new federal charges related to racketeering and conspiracy. I was facing another five to 40 years."

Al was fully aware that the charges he was facing could include a charge of being a habitual offender, which meant he would spend the rest of his life behind bars. At one point, he was facing as much as 160 years. He agreed to plead guilty to yet another felony in order to reduce his sentence, but he had no idea how many years he would spend behind bars.

"It was the night before my sentencing, when I finally realized where my actions had taken me, that I started asking God for help," Al said. "I was debilitated from liver disease and beat physically, morally, psychologically and spiritually. God finally had my attention."

In his jail cell, Al said, he got on his knees and wept as he asked God for forgiveness, help and strength.

"When you ask God with all your heart, God will answer your prayer," he said. "I promised that night that I would serve Him, no deals on my part. I was determined to serve God no matter how my sentencing turned out."

For the first time in years, Al had a strong sense of peace. When he went before a judge with a reputation for "hating drug dealers from California," he knew he was at God's mercy.

"Usually, when you go before a judge, you say everything you think they want to hear," Al says. "I was honest when I answered his questions, and he was very skeptical of my new-found direction in life. In the end, he gave me five years, making it clear

that if I ever came back before him, I'd never see the outside again. I've never looked back."

"Bottom line, that promise I made that night was a prayer to ask God to show me how to help other people, who like me, had fallen into drug addiction, a life of crime and found themselves in prison," he added. "That's the reason I wanted to come to Yankton. For me, it was fulfilling a promise I made that night."

For the past 20 years, Al, who was ordained by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1997, and Teresa have worked through their organization, Set Free Ministries, to reach out to inmates and their families across South Dakota and in the surrounding region. They hold a weekly Saturday evening worship service and offer numerous other regular ministry opportunities through their church. They also work for the Sioux Falls chapter of Volunteers of America.

"We approach our ministry with the idea that, as the Scripture says, faith without works is dead," Teresa noted. "If you're not doing something with the faith God has given you, it's probably not very meaningful. If God's urging you to step out in faith, follow His leading. You can't go wrong with that."

Al worked at Hutchinson Technology from 1992-2007. He also worked at Keystone Treatment Center in Sioux Falls and Canton from 1993-2009, retiring as its senior spiritual advisor. He currently works at Volunteers of America as a community service coordinator and the VOA Dakotas Chaplain. He coordinates and disciplines more than a dozen ministers within VOA while overseeing community outreach projects and church services.

Teresa serves as an alcohol and drug counselor for a Sioux Falls facility and is actively involved in the ministries offered through their church. The couple has two children, Allen Jr. and Skylar.

Al pointed to Matthew 25:39 as affirmation that Christians are called to minister to those who are in prison.

"That Scripture asks, 'When did we see you naked or hungry

or in prison?' Jesus's answer is that when you came to those in prison, you came to me," Al said. "Inmates need to know Jesus loves them. Paul talks in his epistles about being in prison. He was the prosecutor turned inmate. What better way for him to witness about the salvation we find in Jesus?"

More information about the Peratts, their church and ministry is available at [www.set-freesodak.com](http://www.set-freesodak.com).

# JOBS

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Unemployment rates for Omaha and Lincoln are not seasonally adjusted and cannot be compared with the state unemployment rate.

Here are the preliminary labor market rates for March, fol-

lowed by the revised February rates:

- Beatrice: 6.0,6.1
- Columbus: 4.6,4.5
- Fremont: 5.6,5.6
- Grand Island: 5.3,5.3
- Hastings: 5.4,5.5
- Kearney: 4.2,4.1
- Lexington: 5.6,5.5
- Norfolk: 5.0,5.1
- North Platte: 4.6,4.5
- Red Willow: 4.4,4.5
- Scotts Bluff: 6.1,6.1

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## Digital Photos Sought For 2011 Calendar

The Yankton and Dakota Territory Sesquicentennial Committee is sponsoring a digital photography contest for people of all ages with winning entries becoming a part of a 2011 calendar.

"Yankton Landmarks" is the theme of the calendar. All interested individuals are being asked to submit digital photos of what you consider Yankton's landmarks to be. Twelve digitals will be chosen to include in the calendar and photographers will be credited for their work.

This contest opens immediately and will close at 5 p.m. Sunday, April 25. Image size for the submissions needs to be 12 inches wide x 9 inches tall (300 dpi) or 6 inches wide x 4 inches tall (600 dpi). Digitals must be submitted on a device that will not be returned to you. All entries should be submitted to Kathy Jacobs at the Yankton Community Library, 515 Walnut.

For further information, call the library at 668-5275 or e-mail [kjacobs@sdln.net](mailto:kjacobs@sdln.net).

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