

## 'The Life of Christ'

### Louisiana State Penitentiary 2013

These are some testimonies written by the men and women who were involved in the play.

“At first it was like, I don't want to be in the play because it was too many offenders and it felt like they was just playing with God. So that's why I really didn't want to be a part of it. But as I tried to get closer to God, I wanted to know who Jesus really was. So now that I'm in the play it's a big eye opener to me. At first I didn't understand what or who Jesus really was. But by me reading my Bible and watching Bobby playing the character of Jesus, it opened up my eyes. And now I really understand who Jesus really is. ....

(All names of the writers have been removed for legal and safety reasons.)

You may find it a lengthy read but, you will be moved by what God has done in and for these people who had no hope.....READ MORE BELOW

## TESTIMONIES - WOMEN

### First woman – DEVIL 2

“At first it was like, I don’t want to be in the play because it was too many offenders and it felt like they was just playing with God. So that’s why I really didn’t want to be a part of it. But as I tried to get closer to God, I wanted to know who Jesus really was. So now that I’m in the play it’s a big eye opener to me. At first I didn’t understand what or who Jesus really was. But by me reading my Bible and watching Bobby playing the character of Jesus, it opened up my eyes. And now I really understand who Jesus really is.

Being in this play I don’t want people to just look at me because of my crime, nor my time. I want people to look at me because of the person I have become and how I am today – as a person, not just a murderer.

Playing the character of one of the devils, I can say today, that I was a demon at some point in my life. I used to love to tempt people to do what I want them to do and how I want them to do it. I used to just sit back and look for my next victims to fall in my traps and of course some of them did. So being the character of a demon – I truly understand.

### Second woman – FEMALE DEVIL

I’ve dealt with my demons. The life of Christ is more than just a play to me, it has become an important part of my life. The cast, directors, producers and Wardens who all came together for this to happen also. I can look back on this and say that was me out there letting God use me to bring someone to Him and to glorify Him. It helped me not to be ashamed of myself and to show my family that I have matured and accomplished something during my time away from them. Letting them and others see there is good and change in me. My character as a female devil has opened my eyes to a lot about myself which I know needed to be worked on before I ever got in this play. I used to let demonic forces take over in my life until I learned a better way to deal with them. I am in my 13<sup>th</sup> year of a 30 year sentence for manslaughter. There is so much to be thankful for and I am thankful to have shared in this production for all. Continued blessings Miss Suzanne.

### Third woman – LEPER

In my short 26 years of life I have been made to endure the most horrible acts at the hands of others. Abuse, neglect, rape, molestation are just some of the acts committed against me since I was an infant. From these my mind lost sanity and I developed depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, and other mental illnesses that controlled and defined me. The only time in my life I ever felt loved was when I had my children. But because of my past and mental issues my mind completely shut down and I committed the crime that got me to serving a 10 year sentence, as well as losing all parental rights and custody of my children. During this incarceration I have went from being completely controlled by guilt and mental illness to being in complete control of my mind and seeking God in all I do. For 10 years suicide was my solution when my mind wouldn’t handle the trials of life. In 2011 I tried to commit my most nearly, fatal suicide attempt here at LCIW. Afterwards I found the relationship that I have searched for all my life. I cried out to the one who could save me cause I didn’t know what else to do. I gave

my guilt, my mental illness, mind and spirit to Christ. Since then I have emerged myself in classes, clubs, programs and events that will keep my mind busy and God focused. And yes, at first that was one of the reasons I wrote to be a part of the Life of Jesus play. But since I have started, I have realised exactly how much I didn't understand the Gospels. But being able to experience them and show them others has been a learning experience, as well as exhilarating. Playing the part of the Leper is my life story. I never felt loved or wanted. I have been shunned, beaten, abused, plagued with mental illness, thrown away and outcast. But in the end I went to my Lord and Savior gave myself to Him and was healed. I am no longer controlled by mental illness but there are still those that try to define me by them. I have accomplished more in 2 years than I have my entire life in that world, and it has been for and to the honor and glory of God. Man once said that I would never be allowed to be a part of this play, but God has the last say so. This play has not only given me the opportunity to grow in know and experience, as well as be a part of something unheard of anywhere, it has also shown those doubters around me that your past can not keep you from accomplishing the things that are of God. I can't say that this play has changed me because it was my change that allowed me this privilege to perform in this play, but this play has taught me and sent me to seek more. It is an experience I will always treasure and pray to be a part of it again.

#### Fourth woman – YOUNG MARY

This play has changed my life as far as obedience, endurance and belief goes. As young Mary was judged for fulfilling God's will, I went through judgement and being chastised by many of the girls. God filled me so deep with His will for me began so did the trials. And as young Mary did, I simply took it blow by blow, because I am his servant and he's my Savior.

#### Fifth woman – OLDER MARY

I think I was first surprised that I had been chosen to participate in this play. When I got to Angola and found out the Director wanted me to play Jesus' mother I didn't know if I could play the part, my own relationship with my daughter has been strained to put it mildly. Being in prison for the past 6 ½ years has not helped. I don't know my 4 year old grandson, never met him. Somehow I am learning how to be a better mother through my faith in God. I recently lost my little brother. Even now I feel the grief and loss of his passing deep inside my soul. I am able to transcend my loss onto the stage. Being in prison it's hard to fully express my grief. This production has given me a change. I can feel myself being able to let go. If you ask me why – it's because now I understand Jesus better. I have faith in Jesus' teachings. A part of me believes that I will see my brother again. I believe that when I get home that I'll be able to show my daughter and grandson that having faith in God has changed me.

The play made me realise that there is goodness in this world. It's helped me to see the man that Jesus was. When Pilate says "see the man" I can do that even knowing that he was only half human. His human-ness, that I understand. A simple man. His divine side makes me feel the awesome power he has. I feel proud of him as my son. I worship him as my Savior. Serving him is all I think about as his mother. Doing anything for him is my mission in life. I understand that he's doing his father's will. In all this I feel the pain and grief of losing my son.

I've had a profound experience in this play. For the rest of my life, I will remember the hardships the cast went through to bring this great story to life. Because his story is alive even now.

#### Sixth woman

I wanted to be a part of this play for the experience, but I got so much more. It gave me a better understanding and visual of everything Jesus went through for me. All the hate, the abuse and he He died for my sins could be forgiven. I pray that when people see this play, that they don't see us but the glory of God shining through us. I thank you for the opportunity to do something that's so much bigger than us.

#### Seventh woman – LAZARUS' SISTER MARY

By being part of the Life of Christ production has brought enlightenment to my heart. During the performance there were great things brought to a head. When God does something, He does it greater. When Jesus died on the cross the enemy was defeated. During the rehearsals I felt frustrated, aggravated and at one point I wanted to quit but I realised it is not about me. So now I keep pressing on through the eyes of Jesus each day.

#### Eighth woman – MARTHA

I relate to my character in so many ways. I also lost my oldest brother which resulted in a life full of depression and drug use. I turned to everything but God to relieve the pain which resulted in me coming to prison. Coming to prison has changed my life and I realized I am not a bad person, I am worth something. Life is full of pain, it is unavoidable. But we have to realize God is there through it all. Being a part of this play is an honor on so many levels for me. I never would have thought being in prison I would be given this opportunity to show a talent I never knew I had. It makes me wonder how much more God has in store for me. I know if I continue to do right in front of God and men and women in authority, God will continue to bless my life. I know now "nothing is impossible with God". Thank you.

#### Ninth woman – OLDER WOMAN

The play was an opportunity for me to change my life and to let go of the heavy burdens I've been carrying around. I came to jail when I was 41 years old, my charge was second degree murder which carries a life sentence without parole. I've been down 13 years now and I'm 54 years old. I have 3 beautiful children who are all grown now, 7 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild. I've never seen any of the grandbabies or great grandchild. My youngest son was 17 years old when I left and he is now 31. I haven't seen him since I came to jail. My oldest is a girl and I haven't seen her either.

My youngest that is 31 years old is out there on drugs and alcohol real bad – living on the streets. I could never forgive myself for taking someone's life. Doing this play brought out so many emotions in me.

This play has helped me come to terms with what I've done and finally forgive myself. There were a lot of struggles along the way in doing this play. But there is some of us who have deepened our walk with God and finally come out of the darkness we've been in for so long.

When we're on the rodeo grounds and actually going through Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, beatings and crucifixion, I can feel how much God loves me and I see and feel the love Jesus has for us and the price he paid for our sins.

My life will never be the same now. I get up every morning, put my hand in Jesus' hand and he walks through the day with me. He is my strength.

I can go home, be a good mother to my children, a good grandmother and know that through all I've experienced in this play, I am now someone who my children and family can be proud of. It's made me search within myself and work on the things that are a hindrance in my life.

Thank you so very much because of you – many lives were changed. I hope to continue in this play till either I go home or till there is no more. Thank you for believing in us and for this wonderful opportunity.

Tenth woman – INNKEEPER

The production has had a great impact on my life and how I view the entirety of life – my past, present and future. Everyone has a story, a past, things they wish they could change but we all know we can't. My story isn't pleasant, I've lived a hard life, one of turmoil, brokenness, devastation, violence and crime. Living life on the streets and becoming a drug addicted alcoholic and the love for one man destroyed my life. I have lived it and saw all the streets have to offer and learned much.

Having been raised in a broken home by a single mom who had struggles of her own taught me a lot as it had its' advantages and disadvantages. I was taught most everything except about God. But I had a devout praying Christian grandmother who stayed on her knees and raised me up knowing of God but I didn't really understand till years later. Then I was crowned a star of the Missionettes and began following God but soon got off track. Marrying at aged 13 I began raising my own children aged 15 and that sent me through undescrivable challenges. However I accomplished much at such an early age but lost focus on the prize – God, finding myself in prison for a total of 26 years throughout my life.

In 2010 I rededicated my life after being incarcerated for the past 15 years with the exception of a few months. It was in 2011 the first mention of this play came about. To my surprise I was amongst the original 10 women chosen to participate in the play. Coming into it I had no idea what to expect but only knew God had a plan for my life. Participating in this play has given me clarity and revelation. It's taught me to never give up. I always thought my life was horrific till the play brought me into the life of Christ. All the times I attempted to end my own life, God was saving me life. I should have been dead so many years ago but God saved me. The play brought it all home to me – it allowed me to remove the blunders and truly see my life is His. I'd been the harlot, the thief, that possessed human, the Samaritan woman, the innkeeper, the leper, Sanhedrin officials – my entire life had been a stage ad me the leading actress in my own life story. I was ungrateful, unclean, judgmental, lost, hateful – the list is never ending. The play revealed to me the roles I portrayed and what torture Jesus suffered because of my sinful nature. To see how horribly he was beaten and abused hurt me to my heart and changed my entire process of thought and action. It grabbed me, drew me in and changed me. It caused me to search the scriptures, dig

within, reconnect to life and family but ultimately brought this prodigal daughter home. The sight of his broken body broke me down but rebuild be as I was intended to be – God’s precious daughter.

Playing the part of the innkeeper truly made me realize what my attitude was like then. I turned people away from me and spoke harshly to everyone and hurt those who loved me most as well as others. But most importantly, I realised it was God I rejected the most in my life. I ran him out of my life and shut that door, hurting Him deepest. Yet God never gave up on me, he came and searched for me, that one lost lamb and place me in this play so I could realize how precious I am to Him but more so realising the one thing in life I can never live without is God’s mercy. And the one man I can never live without is God and his abundance of love just for me – his prodigal daughter.

#### Eleventh woman – CROWD

Being in the play has inspired me to become closer to God. I didn’t realize the sacrifice that Christ made for me until the cast re-enacted the walk to the Cross. The things that Christ endured because of his love for us was so great. The jeers, the hate filled crowd, shouting for his blood, spitting, people hitting and mocking him. How much he loved us! I feel that if this play touches one person besides myself I have made a difference. I’m thankful that I was one of the ladies who was chosen to be a part of something so wonderful.

#### Twelfth woman – SAMARITAN WOMAN

When I began this performance I wasn’t sure what to expect. All my life I’ve heard stories about God, Jesus and sin. Everyone would say their perspectives on living right, but no-one was actually living up to the things they preached about. I’ve come to realize that regardless to their insight, nothing compares to the personal relationship that I have now. In asking our Father to reveal the Cross to me, I never expected the true reality of this play. I take it personally that he carried the cross form, was beaten for me, was wounded for me, hung for me, died for me and finally was resurrected for me. I thank you Father. He even made a way in this play in this revelation for me to include a personal part of my history – he allowed me to play the role of the Samaritan woman. He is so awesome! It is this very revelation that verifies that “I” have been with Jesus!

#### Thirteenth woman – VOICE 2

For me, it was simple, it was an opportunity to get away from the prison! I didn’t care where we were going or who we were going to see. Then something happened, I suddenly became interested in the story of the Bible. Keep in mind that I was never deprived from religion, it certainly was made available to me, my mom pretty much reminded us each and every day literally that Jesus would be returning soon. All the years of going to church the only thing I learned was how to pray the “Our Father” prayer. Although I am not a bible scholar, now I am able to engaged in conversations relating to the Bible. I can totally act like I know exactly what I’m talking about. Last but not least the play has made me understand what servanthood is truly about.

#### Fourteenth woman – ANTONIA

This play was something of an eye opener, not only of how the world truly views us but of how I seen myself. I met some amazing people followed by people who are just set in their ways. But through all of the criticism it showed me just how much I want to prove them wrong. I want the world to know that just because we made bad choices and mistakes, it still don't change who we are at the end of the day.

#### Fifteenth woman – PETER'S WIFE

When I began doing the play it was a chance to get out of LCIW and do something new. As the weeks progressed, I realized that the play is so much bigger than me. It has forced me to step out of my comfort zone. I have formed life long friendships with so many new people and that's a big deal for me as I don't trust people. I look forward to getting a chance to participate in the play again and to continue to push myself to try new things.

#### Sixteenth woman – CROWD

For starters I pretty much just wanted to get out of LCIW for a while. There were some rough times along the way. I made it, then it became something more. It was no longer about me. I suddenly had this sense of peace that only came from God. I am very grateful for this opportunity and experience.

## TESTIMONIES – MEN

### First man – JOSEPH

As a drama club member, I of course was just as eager to get onboard for “The Life of Jesus” production as I would any other. I entered, as always, without any expectations, other than to have fun while being involved in something positive. As time and my involvement progressed, I found my niche in the character of Joseph. Rehearsals were at times exciting, fun, boring and even sometimes frustrating. I stayed the course, not only because I made a commitment, but because I’ve learned that nothing worth having comes without hard work and dedication. It wasn’t until the day of the performance last time that I was rewarded and still days later that I realised the nature of my reward and how I would always carry it with me. Onstage, in front of all those people, I was able to totally and fully transport myself into the person of Joseph and experience the complete realness of the presence of Christ. So I began to ask myself – “how would I conduct myself if Christ were in my presence and I in his at all times?” The realisation struck. The fact is, he’s been present all along. I just couldn’t “see” him! I failed for many years to be fully conscious and aware of his presence in my life. Now I strive to be consistent in holding myself accountable to Him in my daily walk. It seems this is the unexpected reward God has bestowed upon me for seizing the opportunity to help tell the story and recreate the life of His son.

### Second man – ROMAN SOLDIER 2

I was convicted of 1<sup>st</sup> degree murder. I saw the first play, I loved it so much I had asked Gary to allow me to be a part of it. In turn I joined the Drama Club. I’ve been in Angola for about 15 years and I’ve fought for a long time – not because I had problems because I know nothing else but a life of violence. I lacked the social skills that it took to work with people. I was the one that couldn’t work well with others. I hated crowds. I can go on a bit but I believe that you get the picture.

I joined the Drama Club mainly to be a part of “The Life of Jesus” play thinking that this would help me crack my hard shell and really help me with my people skills.

So, in a nutshell, this play has helped me in a lot of ways that I don’t have enough paper or time to count. So thank you Miss Suzanne and all that you represent for having faith in us – the lost, the forgotten – now we have a voice!

### Third man - JOHN

It has penetrated my spirit to the point of creating a heartfelt desire to integrate godly principles and witnessing the Good News. My faith has increased tremendously based upon hearing the incredible words of Jesus daily at each rehearsal and especially on today 16<sup>th</sup> November when we get the chance to be led by the spiritual words of God and used to touch others with his love.

I am most grateful and excited about the Life of Jesus play. As cast members we all support his life and have become dedicated disciples for his purpose. Thank you.

Fourth man – crowd member

It [the play] has given me a more realistic perspective on the life of Christ. I do not have a speaking part in the play, I am merely a “fill-in” in the crowd.

I throw stones at Jesus on his way to the crucifixion, while it is not something that I relish, I understand it’s a necessary part to arouse the audience to sympathy for Jesus and it’s shown me that while some in the audience may ridicule and judge me for my cruelty and mercilessness, they have to look in the mirror at themselves and realise their own lost state.

My role has changed and now I help Jesus bear his cross. I like that part a lot and really sympathise with his plight. I enjoy this play and it’s helped the Bible become more real in my life.

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to participate in this production.

[Paul used to be an active member of the Drama Club but has spent 13 years in lockup and has lost a lot of confidence and ability after that. This was the first time he’s been out and acting again]

Fifth man – PILATE

I have been in love with acting and performing ever since I was a young child. I have always thought of it as a way of escaping the real world for a moment and transforming myself into someone else. Since I started performing with the Life of Christ production, this play has brought me closer to God in a way that I never thought possible. It gives me that small sense of release for the three hours we perform. It has also brought me closer to a great group of people who I get to share my life with . I may not be able to see my family as much as I would like, but this production has given me an extended family of brothers and sisters who I thank God for every day, for bringing them into my life. Even though I’m locked up, I feel that I have a purpose in life again to do something positive that will affect many people’s lives. For that, I am extremely grateful

NOTE: His dad was able to watch the play on the live-stream and told his colleagues how proud he was of his son – am sure that meant a lot to Him.

Sixth man – JESUS

Being incarcerated for over 21 years hasn’t been the greatest challenge of my life. Living a God centred life and loving others as myself and portraying Christ has been the most challenging and rewarding aspect of my life.

Seventh man – THIEF 2

“The whole universe is not big enough to contain the human heart. But the heart is big enough to contain the whole universe”

Involvement with this play was a life changing experience in several ways: I’ve accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior; being ever aware of his central teaching that; God is our Father who put a divine spark of love/light in our hearts, so we may conduct ourselves as sisters and brothers in a universal family because we are his children.

Initially I auditioned for the part of the thief as a challenge because I had no prior acting experience. After a cold reading of the lines, with only a few minor adjustments to delivery, the role was secured and a copy of the entire script was given.

Each week we would rehearse two or three times. Because the Director may call for any scene to be acted on the spot, we all had to be prepared. Nobody knew if their scene would be called or when. Most of the play was committed to memory after sitting on the side watching the others rehearse their scenes.

As time progressed, the life of Jesus uncovered a love and made me reflect on the parallel of our lives. We were both convicted of crimes we didn't commit, find joy in helping others and know how it feels to have the very people we've helped turn their backs on us when their assistance was needed. We both were poor and uneducated and ultimately betrayed by friends.

Jesus provided the perfect example. He took all these things intended to be negatives and turned them all into positives. The ray of hope illuminated His teachings. It also provided the foundation of my release.

Jesus provided an example and inspiration to study. This also provided a path to repentance of my sins. Like him, I'm still very much opposed to injustice. But now it is finally being realized that love, not bitterness, anger or hate has the power to save. So now I want to graduate from the seminary school at Angola and one day have a ministry. Never would this have been considered had it not been for this play and the influence of the life and teachings of Jesus.

Eighth man - JUDAS [one of the Muslims in the play]

I have never thought my feelings would differ being I've been a part of this since we started in 2012. Each time we worked harder and harder, had more fun, made new friends. Supper grew largely each time. But this time, I was mindful to stay "God conscious". After 2012 show, I lost conscious and that had me to make one bad decision that I'm still finding myself cleaning up today [he was locked up for drugs after 2012 production]. This show gives me the chance to show the world that "the closer you get to God, the bigger target you become for Satan". When we stay God conscious, the devil has no entrance into your life. All the good happens during the show or leading up to it, all being done for the glorification of God. Afterwards the devil will come, we have to be mindful to stay God conscious and never lose focus on God, pray, study and be a God fearing, God conscious warrior. Know that you are going to go through some things, that you are going to be tested. Stand firm, be accountable and know that you are being held accountable.

Ninth man – SOLDIER 1

I decided to join the play because I wanted to make a difference in my life as well as the life of others. As the play began to take shape, I realised the magnitude in which we can make a difference. Being Roman Soldier 1 gave me an up close encounter of the sacrifice Christ made for me. To suffer a shameless, brutal and humiliating death was tragic. What I noticed is that Christ was still winning. All that he physically went through was just stepping stones for what he was accomplishing. He stood brave and he saved the world of our sins. So thank you so much for helping me be a part of something so special.

Tenth man – ROMAN SOLDIER

Being a part of this play has shown me that different people can work together, no matter their station, location or belief, in order to see a project to success.

Eleventh man – SIMEON

This man has written almost a book with each chapter talking about each scene and what that has meant to him. I include only the opening chapter here]

I am an actor in the Life of Jesus play. Playing the part of Simeon and the old couple. I'm going to share on how did this play effect me, and I hope it will be a blessing to those whoever may read it. I would like to thank our Warden for believing in us that we can do it. Also I would like to thank Miss Suzanne for her wisdom and kindness in coming to help us perform this play. Thanks to the governor and his colleagues who put hard work with us to get us prepare. This play really gave me an opportunity to examine every scene that was perform by men and women who are incarcerated, giving us a chance to prove that we deserve a chance to be back in society. I thank all of the Wardens who stuck with us, all security who watch us and believe in us that we can do this play. Thanks to all the men who built everything we needed – and made the customs for us. Thanks to all who came out to see us perform this play, that they had a bless time. Thanks to God for helping us become the first ever inmates to do this play. Yes, we made history.

Suzanne has not requested any appeal; this is my own suggestion,

If you are moved to assist in this ongoing work, these are the contact details:-

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