



# Juvenile Networking

## Facts You Can Use:

There were 540,382 public school students who dropped out of grades 9–12 in school year 2004–05, nationally.

California, New York, and Texas had the highest number of grade 9–12 dropouts, with more than 43,000 dropouts each.

The public school grade 9–12 event dropout rate was relatively stable between school years 2002–03 and 2004–05, hovering around 4 percent.

More males (289,675) than females (209,818) dropped out of grades 9–12 in public schools in school year 2004–05.

Source Data: U.S. Department of Education NCES 2008-305

*"Christianity isn't a religion. Christianity is a way of life."  
Anonymous*

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## WHERE ARE ALL THE YOUNG LEADERS?

BY DON SMARTO



Don Smarto

I was recently looking at the obituary of Rev. Consuella York from December 1995. Mother York, as she was affectionately called, was a prison ministry leader of compassion who ministered to inmates for 43 years, in Chicago. It was difficult for me to believe she has been gone for thirteen years. Her death created a leadership vacuum. I still miss her encouragement and words of wisdom.

In the past few years, other prison ministry leaders have gone to be with the Lord including Chaplain Ray, Frank Constantino, Jesse Mathes, and Nick Barbetto. I have observed that many of our current prison ministry leaders are grey haired, white haired, or balding (ladies excepted) which is to say growing older.

Do not misunderstand me; I greatly admire leaders like Wayne Benjamin at age 78 and Weldon Fox at age 85, who are going strong. There is no "retirement" in the Bible from Christian service. Although society in general recognizes age 65 as a time for retirement, the AARP card arrives in your mail box at age 50, and some even retire at age 55, many of my friends in prison ministry do not recognize such arbitrary distinctions. Rev. York was 72, visiting prison cells daily when the Lord called her home. She and others "died with their boots on" because to put it plainly, when God calls you to share the Gospel, you keep going

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## Why Did God Create Marijuana?

By Mike Gahan



I often hear youth voice the question, "If God didn't want you to smoke Marijuana, why did he create it? After explaining that the Marijuana plant is hemp and that it was originally used to make rigging (ropes) for sailing ships, I point out some of the serious pitfalls of smoking marijuana, including the affect it has on your mental capacity overtime. Recently I was browsing the web and ran across this excellent article titled, "Why is Marijuana Illegal?, which I am

quoting from at length:

"Marijuana potency has grown steeply over the past decade, with serious implications in particular for young people, who are being placed at not only increased risk for schizophrenia, depression, (see this website <http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k5/MJageSMI/MJageSMI.cfm>) cognitive deficits and respiratory problems, but are further at significantly higher risk for developing dependency on other drugs, such as cocaine and heroin than are non-smokers. While marijuana is the most prevalent controlled substance, with an estimated 15 million users on a monthly basis, researchers agree that if legal disincentives were not in place, the number of users would soar, leading to far greater negative social impact on everything from school performance and roadway and

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# An Open Letter to Young Gang Members in Texas

By: A Juvenile Detention Center Counselor

**Editors Note:** This letter was written by a Family Counselor who worked in a Juvenile Detention Center. She shares her professional and personal insights into the minds of these young offenders coupled with the anguish and frustration she experiences after counseling hundreds of youthful gang members, and for some of these youth, becoming a surrogate mother.

**Dear Morris,** Jack, Frankie, Scott, Rebecca, Johnny, Brian, Chrissy, Fernando, Ruben, Jason, Maurice, Victoria, Christian, and all the children that came before you, and all the children who will come after you: Rest in peace Chrissy, Jack, Jason, and Ruben.

First, let me tell you that I'm sorry. I'm sorry for all your pain, for continued your sorrow, and for your aloneness. I admire your sense of

humor, your ability to continue to find some joy in life, and your never-ending pursuit of peace, no matter what the cost. I admire your ability to laugh at yourself, and the inner strength you must have when you greet each day through sober eyes.

I'm afraid of your anger, and respectful of your rage. You comfort and nurture your anger and rage with drugs and alcohol. Searching and searching and hoping and praying that the right combination will make the pain and aloneness go away. And it does, temporarily, only to return with a vengeance ... demanding to be heard, or silenced, again. You almost always choose to silence it. You desperately attempt to find in your friends what you long for and do not get from your family. You want and need unconditional love

and acceptance from at least one person who will/can nurture and care for your physical and emotional needs. You simply want one person you can count on, just one. That person does not exist in your world.

It took me three long years to get to know you. And, I can still be surprised. I continue to ask and probe and question in an attempt to learn how you got to be in the place you are in. . Many of you are weary of "the system" and spit out only the answers you believe to be in your own best interest - a survival skill you've perfected, I might add . . .

Note: Go to [www.jjmnt.org](http://www.jjmnt.org) to read or reprint the rest of this insightful letter.

## Why Did God Create Marijuana? continued

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workplace accidents, to the prevalence of serious mental illness and rising emergency room episodes.

Marijuana use is currently the leading cause of treatment need for those abusing or dependent on illegal drugs, is the second leading reason for drug-induced emergency room episodes, and for young people, has surpassed alcohol in addictive risk and impact on dependency requiring treatment.

The reason that marijuana is, and should remain, illegal is that the drug itself is harmful to the individual and to the community. That is the assessment of the medical and the law enforcement community. Increasingly, that is the assessment of a growing number of young people, as well, since marijuana use has plummeted by 25 percent over the past five years. They apparently agree with Australian researchers, who recently characterized marijuana, based on their comparative studies of youth who used and those who did not, as "the drug for

life's losers." Removing legal penalties would only make this drug more accessible, its use more prevalent, its damage more widespread, and would swell the number of those at risk for becoming 'life's losers.'"

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"leading to far greater negative social impact on everything from school performance and roadway and workplace accidents, to the prevalence of serious mental illness and rising emergency room episodes."

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**The fact that it is illegal** should be enough of a deterrent for youth, especially Christian youth, read Romans Chapter 13. But another serious consequence of smoking Marijuana of vital concern to the faith based community and society as a whole, is the negative impact that it has on morality. When a youth begins smoking marijuana it is often accompanied by a progressive decline in Christian morals. This reveals itself in dishonest behavior in all

its forms and often coupled with sexual promiscuity.

The U.S. Army has a saying, "Be All You Can Be". I have observed over the years in working with youth who smoke Marijuana that they cannot "be all they can be" but they are more likely to grow up to be something that they never wanted to be . . . unless they break the chain of that destructive lifestyle.

Jesus said, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:32

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." John 8:34

## Where Are the Young Leaders? Continued from page 1

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until He tells you otherwise.

I am inspired by my friends in prison ministry who shun a rocking chair for weekly, even daily preaching of the Word to prisoners. There are roles for men and women in their 60's, 70's, and even 80's in prison ministry. Arthritic knees may prevent walking into a jail but not being an active pen pal. A fixed income may prevent traveling hundreds of miles to prisons but not sharing one on one at a local juvenile detention facility. Pain may prevent sitting across from an inmate on a hard bolted metal chair, but not grading a Bible correspondence course in a comfortable chair at home. Many beyond retirement write curriculum, write newsletter articles, speak to others about prison ministry, train and teach.

But the question must be asked: *where are the younger leaders coming from?* I do not often see volunteers in their twenties. Few college students join the ranks of consistent volunteers mentoring young prisoners and leading Bible studies. Young pastors are not exposed to prison ministry in most seminaries. Christian colleges will take students to

Africa to dig a well and build a chapel but not take them to a juvenile facility ten miles away from campus. Large churches will organize young adults to go on mission trips on the Mexican border or upstate New York traveling hundreds of miles in multiple vans but not share with young prisoners in their own city, from nearby neighborhoods.

There is a popular notion that "real" ministry must be far away. For some, ministry must have adventure, danger, and aimed at "unreached peoples". Actually, prison ministry often includes these factors. Ministry begins in our own backyard (Jerusalem). We must render visible the homeless, the hungry, the orphan, the drug addict, the dy-

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*"We must all work harder to influence seminaries to include prison ministry in their courses. We must recruit young volunteers in order to mentor them for future leadership."*

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ing AIDS victim, and the prisoner. It is clear from Matthew 25 that Jesus identifies with those many overlook.

During my years teaching Criminal Justice courses at Wheaton College, my students went into prisons and juvenile facilities with me as part of

their learning. I am pleased that several former students like Christian Henderson in California and Peter Bailey in New York are doing great work in prison ministry, today. They are both in their thirties, near the age I was when I was their professor.

We must all work harder to influence seminaries to include prison ministry in their courses. We must recruit young volunteers in order to mentor them for future leadership. Pastors should be encouraged to lead mission trips to their own backyards. God will raise future leaders but we must do our part to educate, encourage, and train young adults for a future in prison ministry.

Wayne Benjamin, Weldon Fox, and the late Consuella York all share something in common. They not only heard God's call to minister to prisoners, they responded! None of them used age as an excuse to sit on a rocking chair and let others go into the jails. They are true servants of God and shining examples for all of us. I am richer for knowing them.

*Don Smarto is President of Youth Direct and Chairman Executive Committee, Juvenile Justice Ministries Network of Texas.*  
[www.youthdirect.org](http://www.youthdirect.org)

## Video Resources for Juvenile Justice Ministry

### Short Videos—Evangelism

**Outside the Paint**—Get up close with Dwight Howard of the Orlando Magic. Howard was the #1 overall pick in the 2004 NBA draft, becoming only the third prep player in history to be the top pick. Also the winner of the 2004 Naismith Award, signifying the nation's top high school player, Howard talks about his faith and challenges viewers to be bold when it comes to standing out for Christ. [www.breakawayoutreach.com](http://www.breakawayoutreach.com)

**No More Excuses** - A father gunned down on the streets... A mother whose drug habits kept her enslaved to the criminal justice system... A frequent face in juvenile detention centers... All of these are part of Todd Williams' story as he went from a homeless teen to being

a star football player at Florida State University, then being drafted by the NFL Tennessee Titans.

[www.breakawayoutreach.com](http://www.breakawayoutreach.com)

### Movies—Evangelism

**The Hope**—Created in cooperation with motion picture producers and distributors around the world, The HOPE is an 80 minute dramatic presentation of God's epic story. The Internet ministry of The HOPE is an extremely effective way to share God's redemptive story in today's world. People around the world are discovering how to have a personal relationship with God

[www.thehopewebsite.com](http://www.thehopewebsite.com)

**Gospel of John**—An epic in the spirit of The Passion of the Christ, this widely acclaimed motion picture is a meticulous recreation of the turbulent era of Jesus and the events that changed the course of history! Narrated by Golden Globe nominee Christopher Plummer (Best Supporting Actor, American Tragedy, 2000), it's the bold and powerful story of Jesus as told by his disciple John.

Great for illustrating a Bible lesson. 36 DVD tracts that depict events recorded by John.

[www.gospelofjohnthefilm.com](http://www.gospelofjohnthefilm.com)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1

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## Upcoming Juvenile Justice Ministry Events!

**October 1-4 – Chicago, Illinois** Youth Direct will present programs in 4 Chicago area juvenile facilities in downtown Chicago (IYC Chicago), Illinois Youth Center in Warrenville (all girls), IYC Joliet, and IYC St. Charles. Visit [www.youthdirect.org](http://www.youthdirect.org)

**November 1 – Crockett, Texas** Jacob Hope (J-DOG), Brilliant Drummer and Melvin Adams, Internationally famous basketball handler and humorist will highlight a program for the youth at the Crockett TYC facility. Visit [www.youthdirect.org](http://www.youthdirect.org) for volunteer information.

**December 5<sup>th</sup> – San Antonio, Texas** Annual Fund Raiser for Bexar County Detention Ministries to help support Juvenile Ministries - Play/Silent Auction "A Christmas Carol" at the San Pedro Playhouse Visit [www.bcdm.org](http://www.bcdm.org) for more information.

**June 5-7, 2009 – Plano, Texas** 25th Annual TYC Statewide Volunteer Conference of the Texas Youth Commission at the Marriott Dallas/Plano at Legacy Town Center: Visit TYC Website at [www.tyc.state.tx.us/](http://www.tyc.state.tx.us/) for more information.

For past issues of the newsletter or information about how to become a member of the Juvenile Justice Ministries Network of Texas visit our website at [www.jjmnt.org](http://www.jjmnt.org)



Juvenile Justice Ministries Network of Texas

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*"Many Ministries—One Mission"*