

An Inmate Speaks

BY LARRY DUNHAM

A METAL DOOR slammed shut, two locks were tightly bolted, a roughly painted inscription on the door stated *HELL*—so began my life in prison. Frustration and hurt cried out from within. Hell can be anywhere.

The closed, double-locked door symbolized the loneliness, the self-contained anguish, the fearful closed-in-ness that was hell on earth.

I arrived in chains that shackled my arms and legs, holding me in physical bondage. Still other chains, stronger and harsher, gripped my mind and spirit, locking them in fear and loneliness—invisible chains shackling me from within.

My having endured the rigors of prison life for six long years suggests something of human durability in the face of life's brokenness. What grounds people in hope when everything seems to be breaking apart? Whether we recognize it or not, the enduring ground of our being is our God and his Son Jesus Christ, in whom all things hold together.

Larry Dunham is an inmate at the Federal Corrections Institute in Milan, Michigan.



I again began to ask myself questions to which I have never been able to find answers. How am I living my life now? What am I living for? What is really important in my life? As I pondered these questions, my heart and spirit filled with wonder.

Prison life has brought so many changes in my life. I have suffered so many losses, witnessed so many cruel and inhumane acts—from beatings to violent homosexual rapes to murder. I wonder at those times where God is and why he allows those things to happen. The hurt and pain often become unbearable.

I have spent many restless nights alone in my cell crying myself to sleep. My past haunts me every waking moment. I try to make sense out of what is happening in my life. My biggest enemy is loneliness. Not one day goes by that I don't suffer from the rejection of my family. Those empty feelings are bitter pills to swallow. The three years of hard time I did were filled with despair and disappoint-

ments. My hopes of reconciliation with my first wife were totally destroyed to the point that my own son does not recognize me as his father. It was more than I could handle. I became bitter and full of hatred.

On top of this I was transferred against my wishes to two other Federal Correctional Institutions (FCI), first to one in El Reno, Oklahoma, and then to one in Milan, Michigan, arriving here some fourteen months later.

I was desperately searching for a life of freedom and dignity that was so abruptly taken from me. I became involved in the chapel program and participated in a three-day spiritual retreat. Seeing God's love at work in the community volunteers at this retreat was the turning point in my life. Since then I have also become involved with a beautiful Christian family who is supporting me spiritually and who has committed itself to being a part of my future.

I hold myself responsible for being in prison, but now, through my faith in Jesus Christ and the love of my adopted Christian family and the chaplains who minister here at Milan, I believe I will come out of prison a better person.