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4300 Marsh Ridge Road • Suite 114 • Carrollton, TX 75010
972.267.1111 • 972.267.3535 (fax) • www.alarryross.com

FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT:

[A. Larry Ross Communications](#)

Steve Yount 972.267.1111

steve@alarryross.com

Monica Sales 972.267.1111

monica@alarryross.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Prison Fellowship International Transforms Lives of the Disgraced and Forgotten:

Leaders from World's Largest Prison Ministry Meet in Toronto June 28-July 2

WASHINGTON, June 1, 2011 – Representatives from more than 100 member countries, who work with people who have been forgotten or shunned by most of society, will meet in Toronto June 28 through July 2 at Prison Fellowship International's World Convocation.

[Prison Fellowship International](#) (PFI), the world's largest prison ministry with 119 member countries, works to improve the moral, social, physical and spiritual well-being of prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families and victims of crime.

"The task of prison ministry is daunting," said Ron Nikkel, PFI's president and CEO. "World Convocation provides a place where those of us working in prison ministries can come together and motivate each other. It is focused on how we can work more effectively, but also on the stories we have to tell."

As prison populations around the world continue to grow rapidly, extreme overcrowding, poor ventilation, food shortages, substandard sanitation and outbreaks of violence are the norm:

- In Benin, cells overflow with filth and so many prisoners that they seem like a tangle of limbs to visitors;
- In Ecuador, prisoners may wait eight years before meeting with a judge;
- In Papua New Guinea, women are reportedly gang-raped;
- In Rwanda, at the horribly overcrowded Gitarama Prison, roughly one in eight of inmates dies from disease or violence;
- In Venezuela, officials estimate that more than 360 prisoners are killed each year; and
- In Zimbabwe, bodies are stacked in the hallways due to overcrowding in the morgue.

PFI volunteers, more than 50,000 in all, in each member country visit places like these, where other people fear to go, to work with prisoners.

“Most people involved in prison work find themselves on the margins of ministry,” Nikkel said. “They often lack the support systems – whether spiritual or material – that we take for granted in North America and Europe.”

The speakers at this year’s convocation include Pierre Allard, prison chaplain and former president of the International Prison Chaplains’ Association; John Rucyahana, retired Anglican bishop and president of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in Rwanda; Theary C. Seng, human rights activist, lawyer and founder of the Cambodian Centre for Justice and Reconciliation; and Philip Yancey, author, journalist, and Editor at Large for Christianity Today magazine.

Former prisoners, chaplains, volunteers, politicians and prison officials from more than 130 countries are expected to attend the [World Convocation](#), which is held every four years.

One of the key emphases at the convocation will be restorative justice, which seeks to repair the harm done by crime. PFI emphasizes repentance and forgiveness with prisoners and their victims. In Rwanda, victims and perpetrators are brought together to live in “reconciliation villages.”

The convocation also will display dozens of paintings, sketches and sculptures in an international prisoners’ artwork exhibition and competition.

“There’s a lot of hidden creativity in these prisons that doesn’t get a chance to get out,” Nikkel said. “The art competition encourages creative expression and gives a voice to the prisoners who can’t come to a conference like this.”

The most extensive international criminal justice ministry, Prison Fellowship International is active in every region of the world. More information is available at <http://www.pfi.org>.

Note to Editors: For more information about Prison Fellowship International or to arrange an interview with Prison Fellowship representatives, please contact Steve Yount at 972.267.1111 or steve@alarryross.com.