

SIMIODE Prison Mathematics Project Testimonial

Tim Pennings February 11, 2022

1. 2017: Read “Buried Alive: Stories from Inside Solitary Confinement” in GQ magazine. Mentioned that on any given day in the U.S., 90,000 are in solitary confinement. Some for as long as 20-24 years. The article is easily found on the internet.
2. Attended a conference at Hope College (where I had taught for 25 years). They now have a degree program in local prison.
3. Checked into organizations that would allow me to tutor/mentor prisoners. One was “Prison Fellowship” begun by Chuck Colson (Watergate).
4. Problem: All required signing a Christian belief statement to join.
5. Gave up.
6. In 2020 read article in Popular Mechanics about Christopher Havens and PMP.
7. Wrote to volunteer and Christopher replied the next day.
8. Christopher and I have become friends - - correspond via email and phone.
9. He set me up with others in PMP and I was given a list of inmates from which to choose.
10. Chose Jesse at Fort Leavenworth. His letter sounded like something I would have written – he was interested in math, but also seemed passionate about teaching others at his prison.
11. We write back and forth about monthly. He’s reading a couple books that I have written – finding errors, and giving me suggestions for edits. We’re also exchanging our life stories via the letters.
12. Been good to get to know him. Want to help him as I can after he is released as well.
13. I make a yearly financial contribution to PMP as well.
14. Ironically, it was my mentorship of Jesse that led to this talk and my other SIMIODE talks. Brian Winkel was reminded of me via learning about Jesse from a common friend. So, instead of me helping Jesse make contacts with the math community, Jesse was the link for me.