

Why Kairos Volunteers Shouldn't Advocate

It is very important that every Kairos volunteer understands the guidelines related to advocacy and the wisdom behind them.

What is advocacy? Advocacy means writing a support letter, writing or attending the Parole Board/hearing, going to any court or judicial hearing to show support, giving an inmate money (directly or indirectly), or even doing a favor for an inmate - to name a few things. Please know that when someone advocates for an inmate by representing them (verbally, written, or by presence), that by its very nature involves becoming an advocate opposed to the Department of Corrections (DOC) or the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). We serve at the invitation of the DOC/DJJ and nothing we do should put our ministry in jeopardy. The Kairos Inside Manual (page 113 #29), the Kairos Outside Manual (page 7 #9) and the Kairos Torch Manual (page 6 #6) all say that we should always be only advocates for Christ. The Kairos Inside Manual states that we serve under the Warden and their rules (page 10 #9).

Kairos guidelines on advocacy are the result of accumulated wisdom gained from over 40 years of experience. In many cases, this wisdom comes from volunteers who found themselves in uncomfortable or perhaps even dangerous positions, created by innocently choosing a path that seemed acceptable at the time. Volunteers often find themselves becoming very close to those to whom they minister. But such closeness often leads to inappropriate requests and can take the volunteer down the wrong path. The wisdom of Kairos tells volunteers to avoid such situations by never choosing this path in the first place. The DOC/DJJ knows that too much familiarity or favoritism causes problems for them and prison security. They also recognize this behavior and so volunteer documents and/or training that was completed to be a DOC/DJJ volunteer often says something along the lines of "maintain a professional relationship" and includes some training about acceptable Inmate/Volunteer relationships. By becoming a DOC/DJJ volunteer, you agree to follow their rules or your volunteer privileges will be removed. If you are on someone's visitor list, be sure you know the rules for volunteering in another facility.

Kairos wisdom concerning not advocating for an inmate can be found in many places, including the Code of Conduct (page 8): "No volunteer or group of volunteers may sign petitions, join demonstrations, challenge the federal, state or local laws, take political positions, or advocate for a person(s) or the incarcerated using the name of Kairos or on behalf of Kairos."

There are also specific references to avoid advocacy for the incarcerated in the Kairos Manuals. A Kairos Ministry Riverbank (page 6 #7 of the Kairos Inside Manual) states that volunteers are advocates for Christ and that volunteers are not to 'lose your focus and become an advocate for prisoners' which is exactly what is happening if a parole letter is written; at that point you are no longer an advocate for Christ, but for an inmate. Even if Institutions allow certain activities, Kairos Inside Riverbanks on page 10 says to avoid such things.

There is a DO NOT list on Page 114 of the Kairos Inside Manual and #31 prohibits a Kairos Volunteer from being an "Advocate for a resident at trials, parole hearings, or write letters in support of a resident."

Kairos Inside, Kairos Outside and Kairos Torch volunteers should never advocate for any loved one or friend of a participant/guest at a trial, parole hearing, or by writing a letter of support for them. In the case of Kairos Outside, you may know the person asking, but your only knowledge of their family members, loved ones or friends is based solely on what they have told you. Even if this was permissible, which it is not, you don't have the knowledge to advocate for them. Don't advocate.

What happens if you do advocate for an inmate? The DOC/DJJ can remove the volunteer from serving in the prison. The DOC/DJJ may not allow Kairos to operate in the facility (or facilities or the State). All will lead to permanent dismissal of the volunteer by Kairos.