

## **PRISON FELLOWSHIP: GROWING IN STYLE**

By William Nicoson

The Wall Street Journal earlier this month published a major article entitled "Prison Ministry Becomes A Sophisticated Business." Most of the article was devoted to the success of a program called "Starting Line" which boosts charismatic Christianity among prison populations by bringing high-velocity entertainment into the big house. Celebrity guitarists, comedians and war heroes catch the attention of inmates, and glossy videos point the way to Jesus. The article attributed the birth of Starting Line to Prison Fellowship Ministries of "Washington, D.C." Of course we all know that the headquarters of Prison Fellowship (PF) is in the heart of Reston.

Prison ministries have become a U.S. growth industry in part because prison population has risen about 40% over the last six years to close to 2 million. That's a big captive audience (a pun I couldn't resist), and PF's impresarial services have more than kept pace.

Its astounding programmatic growth has led PF to plan for physical growth at its headquarters complex located on the former Bowman estate. Existing office space will more than double, as will underground parking. PF's architects, Tobey & Davis, have drafted a plan which combines the natural elegance of the site with 3-story structures of comparable elegance. A new office building along the Stratford House boundary to the west will be demarcated into four cubes stepped down in height and size from south to north, matching the diminishing area of the site as eastern and western boundaries converge to the north. The north face features a dramatic 3-story semicircular curtain-wall bay.

A courtyard will be landscaped between the new office building and the carefully preserved 19<sup>th</sup> century Bowman manor (now called DeMoss House) with a newly constructed training center to the north. A glaze-shielded walkway will unite the manor house with the new buildings and provide weather-proof contemplation of the courtyard, as from a cloister. Through this significant detail, the architectural design recognizes the spiritual mission of PF.

All new structures will use the blue-gray standing seam metal roof of the manor house with walls of white running bond brick. All faces of the two existing rose-brick office buildings will be lifted to a conforming white. The existing open space and Dr. Wiehle's gazebo on the site's southern boundary along the W.&O.D. trail will be retained intact.

The plan has been embraced unanimously by Reston Citizens Association's Planning & Zoning Committee and Fairfax County's Planning Commission. The Board of Supervisors will consider the plan at its September 27<sup>th</sup> meeting. Tom D'Alesandro, eastern regional manager of Reston's developer, Terrabrook, has been the lone voice of dissent in the chorus of praise for PF's plan for expansion. He feels that the plan's western elevation turns its back to Town Center and fails to meet his criteria for "360-degree architecture."

Even as 270-degree architecture facing its access source, the soon-to-be-widened Old Reston Avenue, PF's plan for expansion is one of those rare projects which masterfully improves an existing site by increasing the intensity of land use while enhancing open space. It sets a standard for redevelopment in Reston. Congratulations to PF and its architects.

*William Nicoson is a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.*