

The Connection

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

APRIL 2005

Special Report: Young Adult Internship



Beginning in October, 2004, six young adults began a six-month prison chaplaincy internship program with We Care Program. Teams of two served in various capacities in prisons in Atmore and Montgomery, Alabama. Internship activities included training, prison visitation, community service, social activities, and an emphasis on growing in spiritual disciplines. Following are reflections from their experiences. (Ed. Note: A seventh young adult, Shane Beiler, from Sarasota, FL, joined the interns for the second half of the term. His thoughts are included as well.)

1. How would you describe your time of service (what you actually did) in the prison during the term?

Albert - Challenging. I spent a lot of time visiting one on one in the dorms, talking to both non-Christians and Christians. I also taught a few classes.

Ashleigh - In the beginning, I helped with the mail and with the computer work. Later, I led a Bible study on the Fruit of the Spirit and helped with the sound system. *(Continued on page 2)*

Winter '05 interns are pictured clockwise from bottom left: Ashleigh Baillargeon, Lewiston, ME; Tony Nisly, Partridge, KS; Ernie Glick, Gap, PA; Glendon Yoder, St. Thomas, PA; Albert Mast, Leon, IA; and Laura Hursh, Atmore, AL.

A vital part of the internship experience was building one-on-one friendships with prisoners. Here Tony is shown with two of his inmate friends.



Fulfilling the Great Commission in America's Prisons

www.wecareprogram.org



Interns were paired in teams of two for their in-prison ministry. The Tutwiler team is just ready to leave for their weekly two-hour trip to Montgomery.

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Published eight times a year, *The Connection* provides news and views to friends of We Care Program. We Care Program is a non-profit, interdenominational organization consisting of Christian men and women who share a burden for and commitment to helping incarcerated men and women. We are accomplishing our mission by recruiting, funding, training, placing, and administering missionary chaplains and chaplain's assistants in prisons to provide friendship evangelism, teaching, peer counseling, and encouragement.

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Inmate names changed

Young Adults (continued)

Ernie - A lot of one-on-one visitation, counseling, and mentoring. Also some teaching. Occasionally some basketball or weightlifting.

Glendon - I spent a lot of time just being a friend to the guys. I would hang out with them, and after I felt that they were somewhat comfortable with me, I would come around with the spiritual side of the conversation. I also spent a good bit of time with the Christians encouraging them in their walk.

Laura - Mentored, prayed with, and taught Bible classes to inmates. Sorted mail, worked in the chapel library, and did computer work.

Tony - We spent most of our time in the Honor Dorm. Sometimes when the chaplain wasn't there, we kept the office open and answered the phone.

2. Describe your spiritual growth and any learning experiences you have had during the term.

Albert - I learned a lot from the many people that I met. I had to look at a lot of different issues and really dig to see where I come out on them. I learned to be okay with others' opinions if they don't line up with mine. I used this time to really dig into the Word of God. In prison ministry you are forced to come up with an answer right at the snap of a finger. It caused me to cry out to the Lord for the filling of the Holy Spirit. It humbled me to the place that I realize all the more that I am nothing in wisdom. It forced me to my knees, crying, "God, I can't do anything unless it comes from You."

Ashleigh - I have grown in my personal relationship with Christ. I have learned to spend more time in His word and alone with Him. I realized that I don't always have to have something going every minute and that if I take the time to stop and listen to the sounds of God's creation I can learn a lot.

Ernie - This time has given me more of a hunger for God and a desire to go deeper. It's also opened my eyes to the many hurting people around me.

Glendon - This has been such a valuable time for me in my Christian walk. I have learned so much about depending on God to give me wisdom and guidance through the day, and also Him supplying my needs from day to day.

Laura - I've learned to be more open-minded and discerning, and I'm learning to not put myself above the inmates or other people who have come from a different background than me. It has also taught me that I need Jesus just as much as the lady who has murdered and done pot all her life.

Shane - I mostly learned about myself and how to interact with people. I became a lot more open and able to express myself much more freely and to be bold and confident. I also learned a lot more about the Word, making sure I can explain why I believe what I do.

Tony - I have grown a lot in knowledge and discernment, but the biggest thing has been learning to rely on God to give me wisdom to say the right thing

or talk to the right person. Occasionally after talking to someone, I thought about what I said and realized that God was speaking through me because I couldn't have come up with that on my own.



Community service projects were an important part of the term... Above: Giving assistance on one of numerous roofing jobs as a result of Hurricane Ivan. Bottom: Free hamburger and hot dog lunch-time handout in downtown Atmore.



3. What was your most memorable moment of the term?

Albert - The campout at Cheaha State Park, a great unity builder. The staff days. Thursday mornings (staff chapel and team sessions) were great.

Ashleigh - When we grilled and gave away food to people, then went to different businesses and gas stations and volunteered to clean their restrooms.

Ernie - The crusade. It was such an encouragement to see the volunteers from all around come here to support the work of We Care.

4. What was the most challenging aspect of prison ministry for you?

Ashleigh - Leading twelve women in a Bible study.

Ernie - Just to stick with it week after week even when it seems like nothing's happening.

Shane - To discern who is sincere and not to be condemning to the ones who aren't.

Tony - Probably just the whole thing of going into prison and listening to guys all day long and not feeling like you really accomplished anything.

5. How much of a factor was it to be a part of a team rather than serving individually?

Albert - I am one to like to call my own schedule and do stuff individually, but I like the team for moral support. I would rather go in by myself but have a team to fall back on for encouragement.

Ernie - It was a blessing to have people close to my age that I could identify with.

Glendon - It would be very hard to go in on your own every day and not have a partner in there that you can run things by and share with about what's going on.

Laura - There was a lot of support, and other people could understand and relate to what you were going through and challenge and encourage you.

Shane - Being a part of a team is important. You have a covering. You have accountability. Sometimes it's easier to work together. We all are gifted in certain areas. It makes us more complete.

Tony - The team aspect was very important for me since
(Continued on page 4)

Young Adults (continued)

I would much, much rather be with people than be alone. It also gave me someone whom I could share some frustrations and encouraging times with. It was also a growing experience living with three other guys.

6. What would you say to someone who is considering a 6-month internship term with We Care Program?

Albert - Go for it; it will make you a different person.

Ashleigh - You definitely need to be willing to be stretched and used in ways beyond what you think you are capable of. God moves in powerful ways!

Ernie - Sincerely seek the Lord's will. If you are called to a term of service with We Care, you will never regret the time spent here.

Glendon - This is the most fulfilling thing I have done in my life. Why wouldn't you come? It is only six months of your life, and it will change you.

Laura - Absolutely go for it! It's a great organization and gives you insight to see if it is something you'd want to do long term.

Shane - Do it. You will either love it or hate it, but you will grow and you will be challenged.

Tony - If you are looking for a ministry opportunity that will definitely stretch you and challenge you, this is it. You also can't help but be strengthened in your faith.

7. Summarize your internship experience in one sentence or less.

Albert - Tough, a boot camp for the Christian.

Ashleigh - Stretching...but definitely worth it.

Ernie - A very worthwhile, stretching, and life-changing experience.

Glendon - An incredible time of seeing God move in my life, as well as in the people around me.

Laura - Fulfilling, challenging, awesome!

Shane - It definitely got me out of a rut and opened a lot of doors for me.

Tony - Probably the most challenging six months and also the most growing six months that I've ever experienced.

The '04-'05 internship program ended on March 31. We are currently accepting applications for the new term beginning this fall. See ad below.

**YOUNG ADULTS
GUARANTEED*
MINISTRY OPPORTUNITY!**

**6-MONTH INTERNSHIP
Oct. '05 - Mar. '06**

A six-month program designed for a team of young adults who will be placed in various prisons to work alongside our staff prison chaplains. Emphasis will be placed on spiritual growth through the development of inter-personal relationships with those who do not know Christ, discipleship of new believers, and fellowship with the Body of Christ within prison walls. In addition, the team will be assigned to various community service projects and be encouraged to grow in personal spiritual disciplines.

Who: Young Adults ages 20 and older

When: October 05 thru March 06

Where: Alabama

Why: I was in prison, and you came to me. - Jesus

Cost: Will need to raise some program expenses and have health insurance coverage (room, board, and monthly allowance provided)

For more information contact David Landis:
dave@wecareprogram.org or 251-368-8818

www.wecareprogram.org

*** Guaranteed to stretch you beyond your comfort zone, to help you become the friend of sinners, to prepare you for further ministry, to teach you to share your faith with greater effectiveness. Requires your best effort.**

Unconditional Love



I was born on July 15, 1961 in Winter Garden, Florida. Both of my parents were Christians before I turned my life over to Jesus at the age of 13. I have two siblings, a brother and a sister. Neither has ever been in trouble with the law.

My first encounter with the law landed me in juvenile detention for 21 days. My father and the judge decided they were going to leave me there to scare me. It didn't work. It made me hard fast.

I had to survive and be a tough guy to make it.

For the rest of my life, even until this day, I have never been off probation or parole. I would get out of jail or prison and do OK for some time. However, as soon as Satan would tempt me with whatever it may be, I would fall to that temptation and would find myself in trouble again. To make it even worse, once I became a crack addict, I would say, "Oh well, I am already in trouble and going back to jail, so I might as well have fun while I am free." Then I would steal or write bad checks to get more drugs and do them until I got caught. All the while I was getting myself in deeper and deeper.

I have never had any type of violent crime. All my crimes have been property crimes. However, I have had a slew of those. That is how, in 1994, I received a life sentence for theft by deception.

I was paroled in September 2001 and did well. I went right to work for a software company in Pensacola, FL. We built software for Hospitals and Home Health Providers. I am very good at a variety of programming languages. After a while, I started my own ISP (Internet Service Provider).

Right before going into business for myself, I met one of the persons Jesus led into my life to help me see His unconditional love. This person is now my wife.

On December 29, 2002, I was picked up for violating parole by crossing the state line without permission and returned to Kilby Correctional Facility. I will never forget the words from my wife when I got arrested. She said, "I don't care what you have done in your past or how long it takes, I will always be by your side and will always love you." That was it. It was like hearing Jesus speak those exact words. Unconditional Love. I got off the phone that

night and asked Jesus to help me become a man, a husband and father, a man to serve Him.

From there, I came to Fountain Correctional Facility. After being here for about 6 months, I came to work in the chapel for Chaplain Brian Eskelinen. I do not credit Chaplain Eskelinen for my changed life, I credit Jesus. But Jesus definitely led two very important people in my life to help me. Chaplain Eskelinen is my mentor. I have seen God use him so many times. I have seen what it takes to be a man. To never waiver from what is right, no matter how small it seems to you. And to be patient, wait on God, seek His counsel, do not make any fast decisions (still learning that one, it is hard), pray about it and let Jesus tell you what to do and He will direct you and smooth all the rough edges off.

The most important thing God has taught me is accountability. For us prisoners to make it after leaving prison, it is vital to get plugged into a good Bible teaching, body of Christ church. That does not mean just going to Sunday School and Church. That means a body of Christ that welcomes you as a child of God. Get involved in that body and find an accountability partner.

Someone who can look at you and say, "Friend, what's wrong?" And when you say, "Nothing," he looks back and says, "Don't feed me that. What's wrong?" Someone you cannot fool and someone who will show you the love of Christ and not give up on you as long as you are giving it back. It is



Using computer skills in chaplain's office

our responsibility to be honest and sincere with that partner too.

Things do not happen overnight. They take time. We did not get to be the sinners we were overnight and Christ is not going to change us overnight. But day by day, prayer by prayer, obedience by obedience, Jesus is making a new man, a man He can use to share His love and His word throughout the world. We never know what God is going to do with us. But you can be assured of this: He wants to use you and He will if you yield your life to Him.

I'm Not Good Enough!



"Ms. Jones" sat with her Christian friend in the class I was teaching. Somehow she didn't look like the type to be interested in a Bible class. She had the older, hardened look of someone who's been through a lot and has learned to depend on herself for survival. Though she came faithfully, was attentive, and read the chapters daily, I wondered how much was "soaking in."

At our last session, I was again explaining how Jesus' death not only saved us from our sins but also saved us from ourselves, from the putrid depravity within us that we don't like to admit is even there. *Plus*, by faith He put His righteousness within us so that it's no longer *us* having to be good enough to meet God's requirements; it's *His* righteousness *within us* that fully and completely meets those requirements. (I Cor. 1:30, Rom. 8:1-4) And it's simply because of His love and His mercy and His grace. An awed, hushed, reverent "Can you believe it!" burst from her lips. At the end of the session I offered to meet one-on-one with anyone who wanted to explore this further. She wanted to.

I arranged to meet with her but she didn't come. Puzzled, I tried again later; this time she came. "I just don't think I'll ever be good enough to be a Christian!" I joyfully told her that God *knew* we would never be good enough to be Christians. Jesus is the only One who ever was good enough. That is why He comes to live within us when He *takes* our sins and *gives* us His righteousness. If we had our own righteousness, we wouldn't need His! If we trust the "good" things we do (doing the "do's" and not doing the "don'ts") to earn His approval, we need to be able to keep all of the rules perfectly and we have nullified His grace; He died in vain. (Gal. 2:21, Gal. 5:1-5)

And if we believe that when we sin—as we will—He'll throw us out of His Kingdom, we need to remember we never had a right to be in His Kingdom anyway. We have already been judged and we don't qualify. That's why Jesus came! It is only because of Jesus that we have any hope.

So relax, Ms. Jones, you are not, and never will be, good enough to be a Christian. But He is! And when He is in your heart, God says you have all the righteousness you need, but this knowledge doesn't help us unless we accept it by faith. (Eph. 2:8)

So since the pressure on performance is off, may we keep on sinning? If we have truly tasted freedom in Christ, there is less and less pleasure in sinning willfully. God didn't wait until we were perfect to save us, so we're all full of sin patterns when He gives us a new heart. Guilt is not God pushing us away; it's God drawing us closer. The closer we get to Him the more we see our unworthiness, the more we glory in the wonder of His forgiveness, and the more holy we want to be. *We joy in pleasing Him.* But if our focus turns to *doing* good so we'll *be* good, we've forgotten that it's not about us; it's about Him. And He's already proved we were all worth dying for, worthy to be offered the gift of forgiveness and righteousness. (John 3:16)

And so we glory in what He has done and is doing in us. He purifies us. It is only because He is in us that it is well with our souls.

Two days after my meeting with Ms. Jones, her friend told me, "Last week Ms. Jones yelled at me in front of everybody, 'You're nothing but a big liar!' But guess what! Last night she apologized to me. She's never done that before!" Phil. 1:6 NIV "... *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*"

Wilma Mullet serves as an assistant chaplain three days a week sharing the love of God with the women at the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, OH.

News of Note

Banquet Blessings

On March 4, a record crowd of 660 attended the annual We Care *spring banquet* at Yoder's Restaurant in New Holland, PA. Blessed by the music ministry of Simple Grace, the Jim Hitch family from Martell, NE, and encouraged and challenged by the ministry updates from We Care Program staff persons, attendees responded with a generous offering. With the costs of the meal being covered by various business sponsors in the area, the evening's net proceeds amounted to slightly under \$39,000. Of that amount, just over \$13,000 was designated for the Atmore Work Center Chapel fund, which was introduced for the first time at the banquet. We praise the Lord and thank our PA friends for this outpouring of support.

Movin' On

What a joy and blessing it was to have *Sherwin and Carol Wenger* and sons as a part of the We Care family for the past three and a half years. During their term, Sherwin served as an assistant chaplain at Fountain Correctional Facility and together they served as the headquarters host couple. As of April 1, the Wenger family has returned to PA where Sherwin will be starting his own construction business. Thanks, Sherwin and Carol, for all you did on behalf of We Care, and may God bless you richly as you walk with Him in the path He has now called you to.

New Board Chairman

In the March meeting of the board of directors, *LaVerne Eash* was elected chairman of the board. Having previously served as an assistant chaplain and also for three terms on the board of directors, LaVerne is well acquainted with the mission and purpose of We Care. In addition, he has been a crusade volunteer for 18 years. LaVerne and his wife Sara have three children and live in Gambier, Ohio. They are active members of Mt. Zion House of Prayer.

From the Field

Atmore, AL

Fountain Correctional Facility

After months of prayer and preparation, on Tuesday, February 8, the Bible College at Fountain Correctional Facility in Atmore, AL, held its first college classes. Fountain of Life Bible College, an extension of Liberty Theological Seminary International, is offering nine classes, including three that can be taken for college degree credit, in its Spring 2005 semester. Over thirty inmates enrolled as students of the new school.

The college has received encouraging support from Fountain's prison ministry volunteers. Twelve men, including local volunteers, We Care Program staff, and Fountain Correctional's chaplain, are teaching the first semester's courses.

The first college courses offered by the new school are [Old Testament Survey](#), [Study and Research Methods](#), and [Bible Interpretation](#). Preparatory courses include [Christian Basics](#), [Rapha](#) (a course on breaking addictions), [Living Victoriously in Christ](#) (sexual issues), [Spiritual Manhood](#), [Principles of Prayer](#), and [Cleansing Stream](#) (a course on spiritual authority). All classes are taught at the chapel.

Money for tuition and course materials has been raised entirely through donations to We Care Program; inmates are not charged for attending the school. "Our students can pay for these courses by working hard to excel at them," said Academic Dean Mike Strehlow.

The new school was launched by a special evening service in the Fountain chapel, officiated by Fountain Chaplain Brian Eskelinen. Chaplain Eskelinen shared his heart at Tuesday's well-attended meeting, urging the inmates to help each other while in the school and to keep striving to improve. "Whatever you do, don't quit," he admonished.

We Care Program President Dave Landis took the platform to praise prison

officials and We Care volunteers alike for helping make the school a reality. Pastor Jim Britnell, himself a Liberty alumnus, also praised the school and encouraged the students, as did Strehlow.

Blessed by God with solid support from donations, ample volunteer help, and official approval, Fountain of Life Bible College is off to a strong start.

-Mike Strehlow

Holman Correctional Facility

I've been going into Holman prison for 11 winters. My calling is mentoring one on one, bringing and sharing the love of Jesus to the inmates. The first two years of my going to Holman, I could go in with other We Care workers. After that We Care was not allowed in, so I was there in the name of Jesus. Now God has

opened the door for a team of We Care staff persons to be ministering at Holman again, with one in the Faith Honor Dorm.

One of the more exciting things took place when the

Faith Honor Dorm was established. I had the opportunity to help with the construction of the interior to get it ready. Even more exciting is that most of the inmates I was mentoring are part of the Faith Honor Dorm today.

Five years ago I was called in to open and orchestrate the death row inmate church. On the first Sunday morning there were seven inmates present. I saw it grow week after week to twenty-nine inmates. Now the church had to divide into two groups, and it is still growing. Praise the Lord!

I have received blessings innumerable by answering the call to minister in Holman prison.

- Lee Hochstetler



Lee with inmate friend

Birmingham, AL

Donaldson Correctional Facility

What an important a ministry tool it is for me to really try to feel the emotions of the inmates I minister to. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." (Romans 12:15) This verse mentions joy and sorrow, but there are many other emotions as well.

First and foremost, it is exciting to rejoice with an inmate when he makes a decision to follow Jesus, and I want to do all I can to cheer him on in the Master's footsteps! I like to congratulate inmates when they complete a class in the educational department, in trade school, or in the Honor Dorm. Many of these folks have never before completed anything they started. It is great to cheer a guy on and give him words of blessing when he is nearing release, whether on parole or at his end of sentence.

It means a lot to inmates when I feel their sorrow, weep with them, pray for them, and offer comfort when they suffer the loss of a loved one in the free world. This is often a worst nightmare come true when their mother, father, grandparent, child, spouse, or sibling pass from this life. I've heard so many stories of a child committing suicide and the incarcerated father wondering how it could have been different if he had been out there with his children. Or how about a younger brother or a son being shot and killed while running the streets. Or an aged mother or father passing while their son is still in prison. This is cause for great sorrow, and we are called to share it.

Then there is the time when a Christian brother fails in his walk with Christ and is sorrowful and repentant. I need to feel his spiritual pain and lift him up, restoring him in the name of Jesus.

Inmates also feel fear, anxiety, and dashed hopes. Please pray for us as missionaries, as we share these emotional times with the inmates, that they will be brought closer to Jesus in every instance as He works through us. *- David Bucher*

Perspectives



David R. Landis
President

Sitting towards the back of the room, I couldn't help but think of the mostly unknown impact one life had made on so many of the men who were incarcerated at this particular correctional facility over the course of the last several years. One by one, prisoners whose lives are being transformed by the power of the Gospel testified to the value of having someone they could go to day after day for counsel, accountability, and encouragement while being confined to this prison with 1200 fellow inmates. They spoke of the God-like qualities that were present in this out-going assistant chaplain, and together we laughed about some of his bloopers along the way.

It was a night of celebrating what God had allowed to be accomplished through the life of one man who had heard the call, taken some radical steps of obedience, and pursued his God-given assignment with all diligence. Answering the call meant that his vocational pathway would be put on hold, savings would not accumulate as quickly (or most likely would have to be drawn from) and family relationships would be strained by distance.

But as I pondered the scene before me, I sensed that the realization of sacrifices made was far from the mind of the one moving on. Instead, I think everyone present realized that his time of Kingdom service was like an investment that had been deposited into eternity's account, and although the testimonies delivered on this night were quite encouraging, the full appreciated value of that investment would not be known until the end of time.

As I left the prison that night, I couldn't help but think of the obvious vacancy this out-going staff person will leave in this facility. I thought too of the many invitations We Care has received for chaplaincy assistance in facilities throughout Alabama that we have been unable to answer. Opportunities for service far outnumber available staff persons. I believe God will provide the personnel, along with the necessary resources, and I can't help but believe that some of you reading this have already been or are now being summoned by God to make a lateral move into one of these open prison chaplaincy missionary assignments. For some reason, you have not answered that call. Consider this another knock on your heart's door.

Will you consider making an investment with your life that pays dividends that are out of this world? Will you answer the Commission Jesus gave us to "Go...make disciples...baptize...and teach..."? (Matthew 28:19-20)

I'd love to hear from you.
Contact me at
dave@wecareprogram.org

The Bottom Line

With income exceeding budgeted projections and expenses remaining under budget, we find ourselves blessed with a positive net figure after the first eight months of our fiscal year. Thanks so much to each of you who have helped us to remain in good financial health. Your continuing support is greatly appreciated as we pursue additional pathways of service.

8 months ending February 28

	Budget \$380,000
	Expenses \$367,872
	Income \$391,885

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