

THE CONNECTION

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

DECEMBER 2007

chaplain in May. Also noteworthy is the introduction of We Care staff persons to three prisons this past year. Larry Skrant began serving part-time at Belmont Correctional (OH) in April; John Kurtz started his role as assistant chaplain at St. Clair Correctional (AL) in October; and Anna Miller and Donna Wyatt have recently begun ministry at the newly opened Montgomery Women's Center (AL). One disappointment was the absence of interest for this year's seven-month Young Adult Internship.

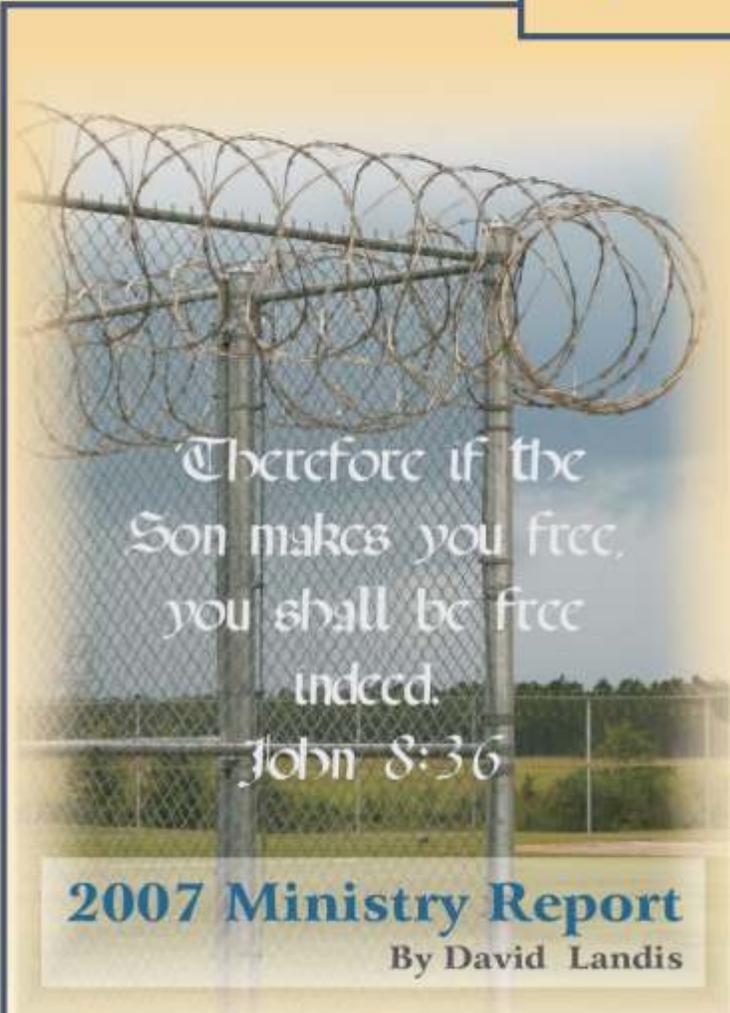
Teaching

In addition to the traditional duties of chaplains – visitation, crisis counseling, encouragement, prayer, discipleship ministry, clerical work, and relating to correctional officers – our staff persons were also busy teaching a variety of discipleship classes. Along with numerous regular Bible studies and chapel services, subjects taught in 2007 included Long Distance Dads, Sexual Idolatry, Alcoholics for Christ, Abundant Living, Old and New Testament Survey, Christian Basics, God's Way of Handling Money, Foundations of our Faith, 40 Days of Purpose, New Believers, Laubach Reading Program, Wild at Heart, Bondage to Freedom, Inner Healing, Leadership, Biblical Authority, Alpha, Relationships, Preparing for Life After Prison and re-entry related teaching.

Several staff persons are involved in more specialized ministry. David Bucher (Donaldson), Bob Depew (Holman), and Dennis Bilbo (Fountain) are each directly involved in giving leadership to Faith Dorm Programs. Their responsibilities include working with the various inmate leadership teams and solving problems that arise within these structured living environments. Also at Fountain, Mike Strehlow leads the Fountain of Life Bible College and a very successful GED program.

Prison Crusade

For the 29th January, We Care held its prison crusade involving 346 volunteers from 23 states/provinces reaching out to incarcerated men and women in 17
(continued on following pages)



Therefore if the
Son makes you free,
you shall be free
indeed.
John 8:36

2007 Ministry Report

By David Landis

Chaplaincy Staff

This past year was a year of growth for our chaplaincy staff. Six new persons were added to our team, bringing the total number of full and part time prison workers to 19. These dedicated individuals are taking the Light of the Gospel into 15 different jails or correctional facilities in Alabama, Florida, and Ohio. Over 14,500 men and women are housed inside the walls and fences of these 15 facilities. After the absence of a We Care Chaplain at Frank Lee in Montgomery, AL, for several years, Steve Stoltzfus began as a full-time

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FULFILLING THE GREAT COMMISSION IN AMERICA'S PRISONS



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different correctional facilities. In addition to the 43 new and 244 recorded re-commitments made, the crusade also had an impact on the volunteers who participated. As a result of the crusade experience, many have been stirred to various forms of prison or other ministry opportunities in their home communities. We look forward with anticipation to our 30th Annual Crusade on January 27-31.

Atmore Work Center

Nearing completion, the Atmore Work Center Chapel Project has been a highlight of 2007. Having raised a majority of the finances needed for the project in 2005, it took another two years for the final approval to be granted by the Department of Corrections. In the meantime, God brought Dean Miller to us, initially to help with the headquarters construction, and later consenting to oversee the chapel project. Dean and a group of inmate workers under his supervision have built the chapel, and all of us are anticipating its official opening to occur by year's end. Dean plans to continue his time with We Care as assistant chaplain at Atmore Work Center and also give assistance to the future re-entry ministry. We praise God for His timing and faithfulness.

Re-Entry Ministry

Of significance in 2007 was the sense of God's leading and formation of ideas that will translate into the re-establishment of a re-entry ministry within We Care Program. Our goal is to provide a place of transition for Christian men who are seriously dedicating themselves to personal and spiritual growth while in prison and are seeking a brand new start in a Christian discipleship-type environment once released. We are currently putting a leadership team in place and look forward to the inception of the program in early 2008.

Prayer Intercessors

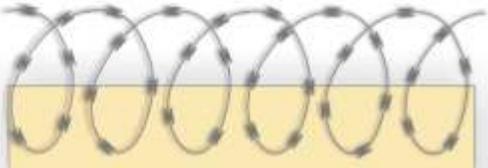
A significant part of our ministry at We Care Program is the group of approximately 125 people who receive our monthly Prayer Intercessors Bulletin and pray for the specific current needs of the ministry. We are extremely grateful for these prayer warriors and would covet the prayers of others who feel led to support us in this way. (To receive the monthly bulletin by email or fax, contact our office or email noreen@wecareprogram.org.)

Staff Development

A priority at We Care is the continuing development of our staff and families. As has been our tradition for many years, staff persons meet each Wednesday morning for fellowship, devotions, singing, and prayer. Remote staffers join our Atmore team by conference call. Periodically, specific growth subjects are addressed during these

In a Bible study on forgiveness, I challenged each of [the women] to do their part to forgive the one(s) that have offended or hurt them. One sister took it to heart and wrote home asking for forgiveness. About one month ago she heard from her brother. This was the first time she had heard from her family since she had been incarcerated. He also asked her for forgiveness for the hurts that he caused her. The last of October she got her second letter. We cried [together] as she realized that by setting her offenders free she could also be free. The next day she was moved to Birmingham Work Release, one step closer to being physically free, but free indeed on the inside!" -Anna Miller

Seeing the Lord convict a homosexual (to the point where he renounced his lifestyle) was a highlight for me. I shared about homosexuality being a sin, but I did not pressure this man to repent. The Holy Spirit convicted him, and that is exciting." -Marvin Bender



Volume XXXIX, Number 6

Published six times a year, *The Connection* provides news and views of 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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weekly meetings. Currently, we are working through a book titled "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality," by Peter Scazzero.

Ministry staff personnel and families also come together for fellowship about every other month. These times also include training and growth opportunities, as well as time for sharing individual praises and concerns, worship, and healthy doses of fun and humor. A highlight of 2007 was a family retreat at Camp Sumatanga (Gallant, AL), where we were blessed with a number of sessions on I John taught by Willard Mayer (OH).

Headquarters

As has been documented in the newsletter throughout this past year, the construction and completion of our new headquarters building was certainly a major occurrence for this ministry. Of significance was the number of volunteers from around the country who helped in the construction process. We are deeply indebted to this group and are now enjoying the benefits that resulted from their hard work.

Besides providing office and living space, the new facility has also already been used for a meeting place for staff days, a Chamber of Commerce "open house," a Pastors' Luncheon, ministry training and seminar events, overnight accommodations for remote staff persons and other prison ministry volunteers, and various other purposes and functions.

Finances

A ministry like ours could not function without the financial support that comes from a variety of sources. We are thankful for the individuals, churches, and businesses who support our General Fund on a regular basis. We are also extremely grateful for the revenue that is generated through the efforts of those who work at and support with donations our two Economy Shops in Atmore and Monroeville, AL.

Banquets in Franconia and New Holland, PA, a Summer Read-A-Thon, and a portion of the proceeds from the Support for Prison Ministries auction in Farmersville, PA, were

a tremendous blessing as well. Another large group of supporters we appreciate are those who give money designated specifically for our missionary prison chaplains. Be assured that our ministry could not operate in the capacity that it does without each one of these revenue sources. While God has been faithful in meeting our financial needs, we continue to rely on the generosity of God's servants to meet our ongoing expenses.

Challenges

As we come to the close of 2007, it is with a sense of acknowledgment that God has been with us, has orchestrated events that resulted in growth in different areas, has allowed us to be agents of reconciliation in a multitude of arenas, and has provided for our needs both in prayer and financial support.

However, we also realize that there is much work yet to be done. Open doors are before us. Challenges confront us. For what is yet to come in the future, we ask you to pray for us as we seek to cultivate existing relationships while meeting new people, develop ministry strategies in new fields of harvest, prepare for new assignments, renew our focus and purpose, adjust to changes in ministry environments, and most of all, that we will grow in our relationship with the One who gives us reason for our hope, Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of all!

The Bondage to Freedom Seminar that I teach continues to be the overall bent of my ministry focus here. After a class session, many conversations have taken place in my office, where men have poured out their hurts and failures of the past. Words often spoken are "I've never shared this with anyone." I believe that the point of healing begins when things are finally brought out in the open, men dealing with the pain of their past."
- Irvin Martin



News of Note

VOL. 39, NO. 6

Atmore, Alabama

December 2007

Welcome!

We welcome to our team John and Shirley Kurtz, along with their children Savannah and Hadden. John is serving as an assistant chaplain at St. Clair Correctional Facility, near Springville, AL. The Kurtz family come with the support and blessing of their home church, Middle Creek Church of the Brethren, Lititz, PA.



Two weeks ago a guard made this statement to me: "I don't know why you bother with all this stuff; these men are never going to change!" Later that day when I was leaving the prison, I was approached by a young man who asked me if I remembered him. When I said "No," he said he had been "wearing blue" (prison colors in Ohio) the last time I saw him. He went on to say he had taken my "Walk of Repentance" class there at Belmont and that he was now teaching that class (as a religious volunteer) at the county jail. What a blessing!"
- Larry Skrant



2007 Staff Directory



Board Members

L-R: Lester Huber, *Atmore, AL*; Lee Hochstetler, *Blackduck, MN*; Eli Yoder, *Hutchinson, KS*; Harvey Fox, *Lititz, PA*; Alvin Mast, *Millersburg, OH*; LaVerne Eash, *Gambier, OH*; Dennis Nolt, *Ephrata, PA*; John Bender, *Ephrata, PA*; Aaron Martin, *Ephrata, PA*. Not pictured: Loyd Gingerich, *Arcola, IL*; J.D. Landis, *Mobile, AL*.



Wilma Mullet
Missionary Chaplain

Ohio Reformatory for Women

OHIO

Belmont CI



Larry Skrant
Staff Associate



Delmar Yoder
Staff Associate



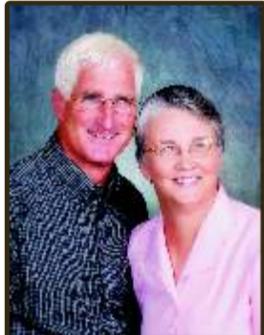
David & Veola Bucher
Cheney, Ethan
Missionary Chaplain



John & Shirley Kurtz
Savannah, Hadden
Missionary Chaplain



Jeanna Fox
Bookkeeper



Ed & Doris Ranck
Missionary Chaplain &
Host Couple



Dean Miller
Missionary Chaplain

St. Clair CF

Donaldson CF
Birmingham

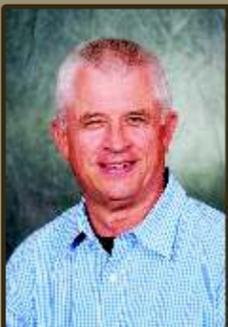
ALABAMA



Steve & Carol Stoltzfus
Missionary Chaplain



Noreen Horst
Administrative Assistant



Sid Chapman
Staff Associate



Dorsey McDonald
Staff Associate

Frank Lee
Youth Center

Tutwiler CF

Montgomery WF
Montgomery



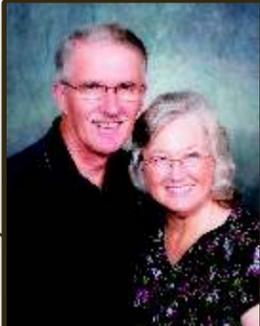
Anna Miller
Missionary Chaplain



Sheila Schrock
Graphic Design



Dennis Bilbo
Staff Associate



Lester & Goldie Huber
Staff Associate

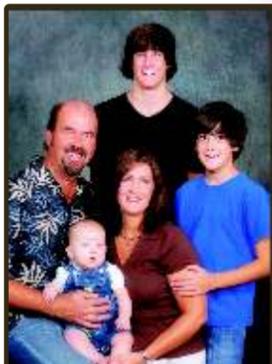
Camden CBF

Monroe Co. Jail

Atmore WC
Fountain/JO Davis CF
Holman CF
Atmore; We Care Program Headquarters

Century CI

FLORIDA



Irvin & Kathy Martin
Justin, Durrell, Kaden
Missionary Chaplain



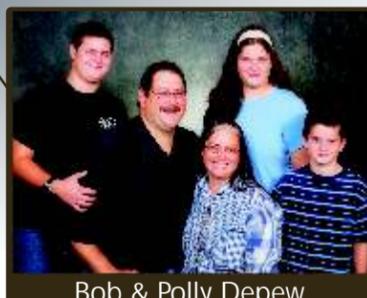
Mike & Patty Strehlow
Missionary Chaplain



Blaine Copenhaver
Missionary Chaplain



Lee Hochstetler
Staff Associate



Bob & Polly Depew
Chad, Cassie, Kevin
Missionary Chaplain



Marvin & Elaine Bender
Jonathan, Kenton, Twila, LaRonda, Rachel
Missionary Chaplain



Marvin & Emma Bender
Volunteer Support Staff



Gary & Rosanna Mast
Micah, Sydney
Economy Shop Director

CBF: Community-Based Facility
CF: Correctional Facility
CI: Correctional Institute
WC: Work Center
WF: Women's Facility



Dave & Debbie Landis
Diana, David, Darren, Darla
President



Don & Phyllis Metzler
Brandon, Perry, Lauren
Vice President & Business Manager



Monroeville Economy Shop
L-R: LaShandra Fountain, Brooke Wiggins, Vonda Wiggins (Supervisor), Becky Frye, Arletta Salter



Atmore Economy Shop
L-R: Mary Salter, Lori Steele (Supervisor), Angie Montgomery, Diane Bennett, Beverly Richardson, Lounette Baker, Ruby Thomas, Willernese Coleman, Trevor Lambert, Peggy Lambert. Not pictured: Celestine Leslie, Barbara McMurray, Mary Thomas.

From the field

Camden, AL

Camden Comm.-Based Facility

I've been thinking about conversations, especially the ones I've had the privilege to share with the inmates and officers at Camden Community Based Facility (CBF). I have caught just a glimpse of why God keeps "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8). These prayers are our conversations with Him, which are of eternal value to Him!

God gives us conversations to reveal just a glimpse of who a man is, his heart, his life, which are meant to be shared. I offer an inmate a hand of fellowship, he takes it, but I still have my hand. I offer a smile to an officer, he smiles back, but I still have my smile. I offer encouragement and respect, they receive it, but I still have my courage and respect for them. God has given me the opportunity to offer these men the only One who can bring them real fellowship, a reason to smile, true courage and respect. Even when that offer is accepted, I still have my Jesus. He is of eternal value to these men!

Talking with the inmates and officers at Camden CBF has given me just a glimpse of who I am, a man just like them, and when we "come and reason together," He joins us together as brothers in Christ! These men and God's Word are the only books I need to read. They are truly "Conversations of Life" and are of eternal value to me!

- Sid Chapman

Wetumpka, AL

Life Tech for Women

Recently I had the pleasure of working with 14 other women to minister at a one-day event called "Joy Retreat" held at Life Tech for Women. This facility is for women who are

incarcerated but nearing the time of their release. They are involved in several classes learning how to handle the outside world in anticipation of their release from prison.

There were approximately 150 inmate ladies who participated in the Retreat. Each of the 15 volunteers were placed with a group of about 10 of the ladies. The day was filled with singing, teaching, testimonies, free world food, panel discussion, and prayer. After each speaker, we had the opportunity to answer questions, expound on the topic which was just taught, and pray with the ladies. As the day progressed, the relationship in the groups grew to a level of real closeness, and the ladies were able to open their hearts to receive the love we were there to give.

There were many tears of healing, restoration and joy that day. A few of those inmates have probably been released already, but most are still looking forward to the day when they will be a part of society once again. I hope some of you will join me in praying for Kristan, Sharon, Krissy, Jessy, Jennifer, Tammy, Savannah and Heather to lead godly and faith-filled lives as they are soon released from prison.

- Donna Wyatt

Atmore, AL

Fountain Correctional Facility

Between running a Bible college and overseeing the chapel's GED program, I spend a lot of time at Fountain Correctional Facility. But that doesn't mean I know everything about prison life. After 8:30 p.m. all volunteers are asked to leave the prison, and what goes on in the dorms at night, especially in the general population dorms, I have only second-hand accounts of. Thank God.

Still, an uplifting story comes out every now and again. One of my best students recently told me about a night he had "down the hall."

"It's not easy being a Christian down the hall, Mr. Strehlow," he said. "A lot of the guys, they'll make fun of you for being a Christian. They do it to look tough to the other guys. Well, the other night I was sound asleep at 2:00

in the morning, when someone shook me awake. I opened my eyes, and it was one of the worst guys for making fun of Christians!

"When I asked him what he was waking me up for, he said, 'I got a problem, man.' I asked him why he came to me, and he said, 'Cause you're the only good guy in here!'"

Be Christian to the people around you. They may not seem to respond, but don't be fooled. They do see you. If your faith is real, it comes through all the skepticism the world puts in its way. Don't be discouraged if things don't go the way you think they should; God is working even when you seem to be failing. Imitate Jesus. Be Christian.

-Mike Strehlow

J.O. Davis Correctional Facility

Who are the broken hearted? And why are they so heart broken? Truly, they are those who have been through the extreme hardships of life and maybe have tried every avenue that seemed to offer hope, but found none, then have become disillusioned, and are basically just dragging miserably through life. Many, because of past hurts and failures have despaired of even trying anymore. And maybe they have lost a sense of trust in anyone, even those who actually care enough to offer them genuine hope.

Upon hearing some of their stories, I shudder and humbly realize that I, a mere man, can but lead them to Jesus and together with them, seek His face for peace, healing and forgiveness. Following are just a few of the hurts that men in prison shared with me recently through tears of regret and sorrow.

"My father died of a sudden heart attack when I was thirteen. He was going to take me fishing that day. We used to go to church before he died. Now my mother and I are alcoholics. Yes, I was angry at God many years."

"When I was eight years old, I was sexually assaulted."

From a young man when asked about his father: "I will never talk to the 'blank, blank' again!"

"Five years ago my wife shot and killed herself in front of my twelve-year-old son and me." This young man, filled with insecurity and guilt,

blames himself and cannot forgive his wife for doing this to herself, his son, and him.

All these came and shared with me after going through the "Bondage to Freedom" class. Please pray for the ongoing class and these hurting lives that are seeking hope and healing.

Not long ago a man burst into uncontrolled weeping and shaking when he was informed that his mother had passed away. He cried, "Why, why did she have to pass when I am in prison? Chaplain, I have hurt her so bad by being here in prison, and now she's gone!"

All I could do was cry with him.
- Irvin Martin

Holman Correctional Facility

One morning recently as I was on my way to work at the prison, the thought came to me once again, what a blessing it is to be able to do what I love. Recent weeks have been a real challenge with needing to remove a few inmates from the Faith Dorm for various reasons. Those times are never fun, as conflict is something that challenges me more than I care to be challenged. However, as I ask God for wisdom and guidance, He is teaching me so much about myself. We, as Christ followers, are to be ready to speak the truth in love when needed. We will never be effective in our relationships unless we are willing to confront others. The Bible speaks of iron sharpening iron, so are we to do the same. Only when we are honest and willing to confront others in love, when God asks us to, will God be glorified. Hebrews 10:24 says, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (NIV) The King James Version reads, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." Ouch!

Who is God bringing to your mind? In whose life will you make a difference?
- Bob Depew



BIRMINGHAM, AL

Donaldson Correctional Facility

Sabbaticals are nice. I know, because my family and I just returned to normal, daily ministry life after taking a two-month sabbatical which was recommended and granted to us by We Care and its directors.

Prison ministry can become drudgery, and we sometimes lose the joy we had at previous times. It often seems like not much is happening, and doubts can arise as to whether we are in the right position or place of ministry. These things have happened to me in various shapes and forms over the past 4½ years. But as God has kept us faithful in this ministry calling, a sabbatical was offered to us and we took it. We are deeply obliged to our overseers for allowing it and thankful to God for what He taught us during this leave from ministry work.

I pray God will continue to teach me the things He wants me to learn about ongoing Sabbath rest. I am learning more and more to find God's rest in my daily ministry activities. As you read this, I encourage you to find the rest of God even in your busy everyday life.

I've been back in the prison six full weeks now. God has shown me I am still where He wants me and us to be. There have been some exhilarating times of seeing God move and bring souls to Himself. One inmate whom I have worked with and have had a deep burden for, gave his life to Christ in the last month at an evangelistic event. I have been overjoyed to see him take this step with God and to see his desire to grow.

A good friend of mine in PA, when hearing of our sabbatical, asked me jokingly, "Wow Dave, eight weeks paid vacation. That's pretty nice, isn't it?" Yes, it was. We Care will grant one of these to anyone who answers

God's call to come and serve in His work in the prisons for years of their life. The door is open and the opportunities are endless. Will you come?
- David Bucher

CENTURY, FL

Century Correctional Institution

Teaching a Transition Class is a new aspect of ministry that I've been involved in over the past several weeks. This particular transition class is unique because it is overtly Christian. Even though the state offers a secular class, the warden asked the chaplain if we could teach a "faith-based" class. The inmates who signed up for the class are "assigned" to it as their daily job. That means they are required to be there and can expect disciplinary action if they don't attend. Most of the men in the class don't profess to be following Jesus, and sometimes I get the impression that they wish there wouldn't be so much biblical input. However, at the beginning of the class I made it very clear that I would be teaching it based on the Bible.

The purpose of this class is to help inmates prepare to re-enter society. Lessons include biblical topics such as spiritual warfare, submission, putting Christ at the center of all we do, and getting involved in a church. We also cover such subjects as writing a resume, preparing for job interviews, expecting disappointment due to being an ex-inmate, and being a productive employee. From time to time, guest speakers have addressed specific issues.

Class sessions are two hours in the forenoon and 1½ hours in the afternoon, four days a week. Additional time is spent in preparation. Teaching this class is a special privilege and responsibility. As I pour a lot of time and energy into these 15 men during this eight-week class, I am hoping to influence them to follow Christ. Pray that they will respond to the gospel and become productive citizens.
- Marvin Bender

PERSPECTIVES

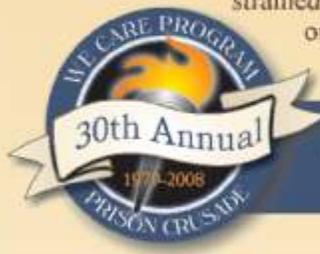
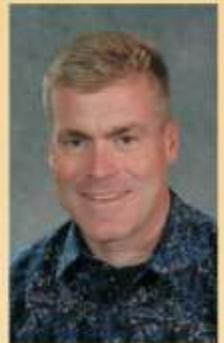
with David R. Landis
President

How does one measure success in ministry? On one hand, compiling a ministry report like this issue contains does offer a glimpse of the amount of "work" being accomplished. That feels good to my productivity-oriented mind set. On the other hand, I am realizing that busyness does not always equal effectiveness.

This fact became apparent to me recently in relation to an aspect of prison programming that I am personally involved with. Although the number of men included in our programming had increased, I had a growing sense that greater numbers were not translating into greater effectiveness. In the process of "bigger and better," close relationships were being strained, integrity was being questioned, and our overall goal of real discipleship was being replaced by the amount of time

it took to keep the "program" alive. I had to take a hard look at my motives and calling and make some difficult adjustments in order to be obedient to what I sensed God was saying to me.

I share all of this to remind you that it is not our goal with this ministry report to impress you with numbers, although we like to see growth such as we have seen this year. Rather, we hope that you will have a better sense of who we are by reading about what God is doing through the ministry of We Care Program. Most importantly, though, pray with us that we will continue to move in the direction that God wants us to go, growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ, and as a result of our walk with Him, effectively ministering to those who need Him the most. 



Crusade applications due December 21, 2007!

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