

THE Connection

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

May 2009

Young Adult Internship -SPECIAL REPORT-



Beginning on October 7, 2008, four young men began a seven-month term of service with We Care's Young Adult Internship. This program makes it possible for young men to grow in their Christian walk by assisting our long-term prison chaplaincy staff persons with various ministry assignments, as well as providing an opportunity for intensive spiritual formation through service, learning, and teamwork. Following are their responses to questions that will help you to more fully understand the nature of their assignment. (Pictured above: Kendall Nissley, Parkesburg, PA, shares with an inmate.)

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Proclaiming Christ & Discipling Inmates



www.wecareprogram.org

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

Hans: I spent a lot of time building friendships with the guys in a one-on-one setting and seeking to disciple some of the young and unstable Christians. I also taught some discipleship classes.

Kendall: Building friendships, being a mentor, and just having a good time with the inmates.

Phil: Most of what I did would probably be described as friendship evangelism. I usually made an effort to talk to guys who were by themselves or new to the prison they were in and just let them know that somebody cared. I also got the opportunity to prepare and deliver a couple of sermons for some evening services.



Justin Beitzel, Grantsville, MD, pauses with a friend.

Describe any spiritual growth or learning experiences you had during the term.

Kendall: I taught a class on discipleship that really spoke to me, possibly more than to the inmates. Do I know what it is to be a disciple and lay everything down to follow Jesus?

Justin: I have come to a deeper understanding of how I am no different than those in prison and have also realized how great the grace of God is.

Phil: I have learned that in whatever state I'm in to be content. I have learned that my comfort is second to the work God wants to do in me and others. I have also learned that it's OK to take a compliment as long as God gets the glory intended for Him.

What was your most memorable moment of the term?

Justin: One of my most memorable moments was when I started eating prison food with the inmates. They couldn't figure out why I would want to eat the same food they had to eat... and honestly I couldn't either. They did seem to respect me more after that though.

Hans: Seeing the guy that God had used me to minister to become a Christian and be baptized.

Phil: It's hard to pick just one, but during the communion service at the Atmore Work Center, it hit me that this is a tiny taste of Heaven—folks in white singing their hearts out for the Lord and how what we do here on earth will echo in eternity.

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

Kendall: Going out and meeting new guys. It was easy to get comfortable with men I knew pretty well. But to make it a point to branch out and meet new guys every day was tough.

Justin: The hardest part for me was when I felt like I wasn't really making a difference in any one's life. God has taught me patience though and has shown me that He is working even when it doesn't feel like He is.

Hans: Watching Christians slide back into making bad choices, and moving conversations from building friendships to a spiritual aspect.

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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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Hans Stutzman, Hilliard, OH, patiently listens to an inmate.

How has your view of discipleship been influenced by prison ministry?

Phil: I've come to realize how much we as Christians need each other. We need other people to pray with and do battle with against the forces of darkness. When we refuse to allow others to care about us, we allow our pride to take control.

Hans: I have come to understand that true discipleship is a process of laying down everything that we are and possess to be devoted to following after Jesus to become like Him. I found a lot of Christians in prison, but I came to understand that what was missing were disciples.

Kendall: Prison ministry has opened my eyes to how broad the church of God is. It is not reserved for "certain" people. Anybody can be a disciple of Christ.

What would you say to someone who is considering an internship with We Care Program?

Hans: It is not a glamorous mission trip like going overseas, but it is beautiful when you see God's love changing inmates, and you will be challenged in your walk with God, in trust, in prayer, and in love for His people. I have never done anything more rewarding, and I will never be the same.

Kendall: Definitely do it! You will never forget or regret it! God will use you in ways you couldn't have thought of. You will grow spiritually.

Justin: This is something you will never forget. It will help you see the world from a different perspective. You will learn to interact with people who are completely different from you... different cultures, different backgrounds, different races, different beliefs, and different attitudes. You will get the opportunity to show God's love and grace to men who society thinks deserve neither.

Phil: If their main reason for coming is an easy stateside mission, marriage, or something other than serving God wholeheartedly, I would tell them to consider looking elsewhere. If they love God and feel a call to reach people that society has thrown out, I would challenge them to take the step and start moving in this direction. God can direct our steps better when we are moving.

Summarize your internship experience in one sentence or less.

Kendall: Tough, rewarding, worthwhile, lots of growth, fulfilling.

Hans: Seven months of watching God's love change people and seven months of being challenged and changed in what I believe, the power of prayer, humility, and discipleship.

Justin: A challenging yet rewarding experience that has given me a new outlook on life and has stretched and strengthened my daily walk with God.



Phil Rogers, Manheim, PA, shares a laugh with a friend.

Applications now being accepted for the '09-'10 team. Please visit www.wecareprogram.org for more information.

Profile

Steve Stoltzfus



Assignment: Missionary Chaplain, Frank Lee Work Release, Montgomery, AL

A Typical Day: What's that? It seems as though the script I plan rarely holds out. Usually, I pray for wisdom and discernment en route to the prison. When I get there, mail needs to be picked up, inmates want to talk to me, and administrative issues are screaming for attention. I facilitate one or two Bible studies per week. Taking time to talk to the residents is my number one calling, so I try to keep that in perspective.

Rewards: To see a person move from a selfish individual to someone who sees a way out of his situation by giving his life to a higher cause.

Challenges: To be understanding and not judgmental, but at the same time not being gullible. As a mentor of mine has often said, "To be harmless as a dove, but wise as a serpent."

Just for fun: Photography. Designing the landscape on our property. Enjoying a walk in nature. Reading a good book. Exploring the country side on motorcycle with my wife. Restoring old things that other people have given up on. Maybe that is what draws me to prison ministry.

Summer Read-A-Thon is just around the corner!

July is coming up quickly...and that means Read-a-Thon! We Care's sixth annual Read-a-Thon gives you an opportunity to help support our chaplaincy staff as they share the love of Christ with inmates.

Anyone of any age can read. Ask friends, family, and business acquaintances to sponsor you. Prizes are awarded (in three age brackets) to participants who raise the most funds.

Visit our website (www.wecareprogram.org) for more information and to download needed forms. Forms and information may also be requested by calling 251-368-8818.

With your help, together we can impact inmates for eternity.

News of Note

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Atmore, Alabama

May 2009



Bob Depew shares his experience serving at Holman Corr. Facility.

Spring Banquets

Approximately 950 persons attended We Care's spring ministry banquets in Pennsylvania and Kansas. Pennsylvania banquets were held in Franconia (March 5) and in New Holland (March 6) with music provided by the

Yoder Family from Farmville, VA. Also featured were former inmates Michael Fields and Tavis Jenkins, who thanked We Care supporters for being faithful to God's call to visit those in prison. Both shared of the encouragement they received through We Care's chaplaincy staff during their incarceration.

Simple Grace, from Martell, NE, blessed

attendees with their musical talents at our first-ever ministry banquet in Hutchinson, KS, on Friday, April 3. Also present to share "Stories from Holman" was We Care chaplain Bob Depew, a native of the Hutchinson community.

We extend a special thanks to the banquet committee members and the many volunteers who made each of the events a memorable evening.

New Laborers Answer God's Call

We are excited to see how God is answering our prayers for missionary laborers. In recent years as we have seen an increase in available opportunities, God is also calling individuals to respond to the open doors that are before us.

In the fall of 2008, Richard and Marj Heatwole, from Harrisonburg, VA, moved to Clayton, AL, to begin a missionary assignment at Ventress Correctional Facility, a first-time placement for We Care Program. In January of this year, two additional

families joined our team to begin service assignments. Stan and Ruth Schrock and sons Austin and Denver came to us from Sevierville, TN. Stan is serving at Century Correctional Institution, Century, FL, just across the state line from Atmore. Jesse Fox began serving as an assistant chaplain at Staton Correctional Facility in Elmore, AL. He and his wife Christina, along with their two sons Luke and Joel, are from Terre Hill, PA.

The newest addition to our staff is Pat Weber. In February, Pat began serving in a part-time

chaplaincy position at J. O. Davis Correctional Facility, Atmore, AL, where he joins We Care chaplain Irvin Martin. Pat, his wife Rachel, and two sons Joshua and Samuel live in Bay Minette, AL, and attend Church of His Presence, Daphne.



Pat Weber family

In addition, We Care Program is currently in communication with a number of additional persons who are sensing God's call to full-time service. Please pray with

them and us that God will grant us wisdom and peace as we move forward in faith, and that we will be able to clearly discern God's place and timing in each of these situations.

Board Chairman Elected

We Care Board members elected Aaron Martin, Ephrata, PA, as Chairman at their April 14 meeting. Aaron has served We Care Program in a number of capacities over the years, initially as a volunteer chaplain,

then later to start the Atmore Economy Shop, and most recently has served several terms totaling twelve years as a Director. Sherwin Wenger, Lancaster, PA, was elected Vice-Chairman, and J.D. Landis, Mobile, AL, was appointed as Secretary. A special thanks to LaVerne Eash for his years of service as Chairman.

From the Field

Staton Correctional Facility Montgomery, AL



Jesse Fox

Do you ever get tired of hyper-spiritualization? Let me explain what I mean. One of the men at Staton once told me he needed a blessing, I thought he was setting me up to ask for a bar of soap or something. “What do you need a blessing for?” I asked.

“I need a blessing to protect me from all these demons,” he responded.

I looked at him hard, trying to figure out if he was possessed. He looked normal, and I didn't get any weird vibes from him. “What are the demons doing to you?” I asked cautiously.

“I'm just feeling depressed,” he answered.

Further dialogue revealed that he was depressed because he hadn't heard from his wife in a while and he didn't know why. Conversations such as this have opened my eyes to the way people can use spiritual language to keep others at a distance. One of my biggest challenges is getting the men to let me into their inner thoughts. When I ask how they are doing, they almost always respond that they are “blessed” or “highly favored.” Sometimes I stop them, make them look at me, and then ask, “Really?” Phrases like “spiritual attack” and “demonic activity” are used to mask problems of anger and depression over tangible issues. Part of the problem is my having the position of chaplain. Many of the men feel as if they need to spiritualize things to talk with me.

I've learned that conversations often continue in the tone in which they were started. I've tried to unlearn or rephrase many of the clichés we use as Christians. When they are said to me, I ask the speaker what he means. It takes more time than a passing remark, but is well worth it. Jesus often used a similar method when dealing with people. He had an amazing ability to get to the point by asking a question.

The challenge to me and you is to not be content with surface talk. If you ask someone how he is doing, you should be ready to find out; otherwise why did you ask? If you have a need, be specific. Let the people who care about you know the truth. If we are to encourage each other in Christ, maybe it would do us some good to quit spiritualizing and use honest words like “I'm depressed.”

Atmore Work Center Atmore, AL



Dean Miller

If I were incarcerated, I believe the most difficult thing for me would be the loss of freedom—particularly the freedom to do something or go somewhere whenever I please.

According to Romans 6:16, we are slaves to someone or something whether we believe it or not, “Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or obedience, which leads to righteousness?” We yield ourselves to many things that become habits or addictions. When we yield ourselves to sin, we have chosen a cruel task master, and the end result is death. Trying to improve ourselves or quit a habit or addiction usually ends in failure. Until we acknowledge this and call sin what it is, we are at its mercy and cannot escape its death grip. The only way to break this dominating power and find freedom from the grip of sin is to repent and yield ourselves to Jesus Christ. In Christ alone there is freedom—not freedom to sin—but freedom to live with reckless abandon, led by His Spirit. Now we are slaves to Christ when we willingly yield ourselves to Him. Yet He is not a cruel task master; in Him we find life in abundance.

I was once a slave to sin and now I am experiencing the joy of being a slave to Christ. Going into the prisons and seeing many who are enslaved to sin should break my heart. I have been asking God for a burden for these men. This burden should compel me to enter this world of steel and wire and preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, release those who are oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Fountain Correctional Facility Atmore, AL

“I love you” were the words I heard him say as I walked out of the prison. My mind went grid-locked as I processed the words I just heard. Fear crept in. Why is an inmate telling he loves me? What do I say? Before I knew it, I awkwardly muttered, “I love you, too.” I twisted then shook

as I thought about the words I had uttered. Did I just tell a grown man in prison that I love him? I quickly added, “You know, in a Christian brother sort of way.” I continued to walk, my thoughts racing. Why is it so awkward to hear my Christian brother, a good friend in fact, tell me that he loves me? I know he means it in a godly way. Didn't Jesus say that He loved each one of us? Didn't He also say we should love others? This thought process went through my mind for weeks. I had to ask myself, “Do I really love people? Do I let others know that I love them through my words and actions?” Even though it sounds strange to hear a man say that he loves me, I've learned to respond with all sincerity, “I love you, too.”



Blaine Copenhaver

Century Correctional Institution Century, FL



Marvin Bender

The Kairos Retreat in March was a special weekend for about 42 inmates at Century. Selected inmates were exclusively allowed to come to the chapel on those days. There were speeches, testimonies, singing, and round table discussions. Many “free world” people shared and showed the love of Jesus to these inmates. Activities and fun were interspersed with times to reflect on what Jesus wanted to do in each man’s life. There were cookies on the tables all the time, more cookies than these men could eat—and that was a lot of cookies!

At the closing service about fifteen men raised their hands in response to my question of who had made first-time commitments or had rededicated their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Kairos weekend is not limited to those who profess Christianity. A Muslim said at the closing service that he was still a Muslim but now he understands a lot better why Christians believe what they do. He also felt the love of Jesus through the volunteers.

A weekend like this can be an emotional “high,” but pray that what was learned will be lived out in the lives of the men who made commitments. Pray for me as I have opportunity to follow-up and disciple more Christian brothers behind the prison fences.

Frank Lee Work Release Montgomery, AL



Steve Stoltzfus

“What is that in your hand?” God directed the question to Moses when Moses asked what he could do to convince people that God sent him. This account in Exodus 3 & 4 reminds me of a friend of mine.

I met Hank about two years ago when his health was just beginning to decline. Hank loves meeting needs and would often show up with the right things at the right time. As his health deteriorates, he is frustrated that he can’t do the things he used to do, but he does what he can. Instead of constantly complaining about his lot in life, he still always has an encouraging word to share.

Hank is now under hospice care, constantly attached to an oxygen bottle. He rides a motorized wheel chair. According to the world’s way of thinking, Hank is not the man he once was, but he is still a giant for the Lord!

Recently friends moved to a new house. Hank would have loved to help with the work, but was physically unable. So what did Hank do? He and his wife Linda showed up with a gourmet coffee shop on the back of their truck. It was a welcome sight for those fifty-something’s who were trying to convince themselves that they were twenty years younger.

The items in Hank’s hand have changed, but his willingness to serve the Lord with whatever it is hasn’t changed. Thank you, Hank. Your dedication to your Lord and your willingness to serve Him have been a challenge to me.

What is that in YOUR hand? It may seem insignificant as I am sure the rod in Moses’ hand seemed insignificant to him. What good was a shepherd’s rod in delivering a nation from bondage? But God used it in a powerful way. What is in your hand? Don’t say it is just a _____. (You fill in the blank.) Give it to God and watch Him do wonders with it.



Donna Wyatt

Tutwiler Prison for Women Montgomery, AL

The more time I spend with the ladies in prison the more I see the ill effects of having never received a blessing (validation of worth). The overwhelming majority of these women experienced great difficulties while growing up. Rather than receiving a blessing, it was much more common for them to suffer abuse and neglect. Limitations were often put on the expression of their true feelings, ignoring obvious hurts and discounting the severity of their pain. Those who live in such an environment for many years often believe they are no good or that their feelings don’t matter, thus they themselves have no worth.

Unfortunately, time does not heal the pain of such wounds and may even compound it if left untreated. These individuals need the touch of the Great Physician. Only Jesus can reach back into the past and bring healing and wholeness to the pain and brokenness buried there.

A new Faith/Character Dorm at Tutwiler houses 50 ladies who have committed to live up to a higher standard than the regulations that govern the other dorms. They are required to attend classes designed specifically for them and are paired with a chaplain who provides accountability and helps them stay on track with their spiritual and emotional growth. Through the combination of Bible-based classes, counseling and prayer, we have begun to see results in the ladies who show a willingness to honestly face their pain and begin to receive healing. It is exciting for me to see real growth in the lives of those who have become dear to me and who have always been precious in the sight of God. My prayer is that He will continue to use me as a vessel to show His love and share His truth.

PERSPECTIVES

with David R. Landis
President

I am driving with my family through some serious Alabama “country” on our way to spend a day with new staff persons in a remote region of the state, and I am thinking “Wow...depending on where you might be coming from...a person could be in for some serious culture shock...”

We eat lunch together with the state chaplain, who for the first time has a “We Care” assistant to ease his load in a prison with 1600 inmates. His words and expressions communicate thankfulness and significant relief. I spend time in the prison with our new staff person and marvel at the way that God is using yet another faithful laborer to bring the light of Christ into what can be a very dark and discouraging environment. Later, my family and I enjoy a meal with this couple and swap stories and memories of loved ones and friends in places left behind.

One aspect of my position that gives me great fulfillment is being a part of the process of individuals being called by God into various forms of mission service. In each step—from initial contacts to the questions, struggles, hard decisions, and confirmations that follow; to

the application and acceptance process; to watching God provide the means; to (in most cases) the uprooting from one community to another; to the anxious, exciting, and challenging first days and months of service; to a time of stabilization and greater realization of one's God-given gifts and talents—I have experienced and witnessed the hand of God at work in so many wonderful and powerful ways throughout this process.

Recently I had a conversation with someone who is considering an assignment with We Care Program. He spoke of the impact a verse had made on him and his wife as they were sharing devotions together, and it so beautifully summarizes what I see happening these days. ***“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”*** (Matthew 19:29) 🌟



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