

THE CONNECTION

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

OCTOBER 2009

Why Alabama?

by: David Landis

Why Alabama? I can still see the puzzled look in people's eyes and the surprised expression on their faces when they found out we were moving from Pennsylvania to Alabama. It's a response many others have also felt as they made similar plans to serve with We Care Program. (Approximately 75% of our administrative and prison ministry staff persons serving in Alabama come from other states.)

And the question begs a response. Why Alabama? Why not something closer to "home"? And of all things, "Why *prison ministry* in Alabama?" Why not an altogether different type of ministry that would not require such a drastic upheaval of family and occupation? What about family, church, and business? Again, these are all valid questions and concerns, but the fact remains that since 1970, hundreds have followed God's leading to Alabama. Why?

I cannot fully understand the ways and workings of God, but as I have participated over the last 10 years with Him and the work that He has been doing through We Care Program, I can offer some observations that may help to answer some of the "Why?" questions.

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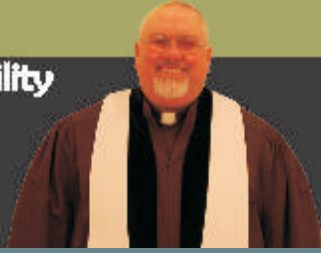
PROCLAIMING CHRIST & DISCIPLINING INMATES



WWW.WECAREPROGRAM.ORG

st. clair
correctional facility

Area: Birmingham
Inmates: 1,545



Jeff Lyles, State Chaplain

We Care Focus:

- Teach life skills, educational classes, and Bible studies
- Meaningful and deep conversations about spiritual life in Christ
- Encourage men to make/take opportunities to enhance their lives



John Kurtz, Asst. Chaplain

camden
work release center

Camden, AL
Inmates: 186



Sid Chapman, We Care Chaplain

We Care Focus:

- Weekly worship services
- One-on-one conversation before and after services
- Provide Bible study resources

tutwiler
prison for women

Area: Montgomery
Inmates: 993



Alicia Smallwood-Brown, State Chaplain

We Care Focus:

- Teach Faith Dorm classes
- Spiritual guidance
- Visitation in Segregation Unit
- Teach Bible studies/chapel services



Anna Miller, Asst. Chaplain

atmore
work center

Area: Atmore
Inmates: 245



Ed Ranck, We Care Chaplain

We Care Focus:

- Bible studies about real life issues
- One-on-one guidance and encouragement
- Greet men as they return from work assignments
- Dorm visitation and evangelism



Dean Miller, Asst. Chaplain

1. The Gospel Mandate - The great story of the Bible narrows down to one very basic concept. *Jesus came to save sinners.* This is the Gospel, or Good News. Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, black and white, free or imprisoned – God’s love has no boundaries. He sent His Son from heaven to earth, and then back to heaven, to complete the plan of redemption. Once the reality of the Gospel hits home and our lives are forever “wrecked” by God’s marvelous grace, then its message is one that we are willing to take to the farthest ends of the earth, if God so wills.

2. Divine Calling - The story is told of founder Martin Weber’s wrestling with God over whether to leave his Lancaster, PA, farm behind and join in a church planting movement in Alabama, then, once having moved to Atmore, to pursue the burden he felt for the men in the nearby prisons. His obedience to that divine nudging was the beginning of what was to become We Care Program. Many others have felt that same call, burden, calling, or whatever you want to name it. The fact is, throughout the history of God’s story, He has always pricked the hearts of certain men or women to engage in activities that, although outside of the norm of their daily lives and experiences, would ultimately bring much glory to His name. Called, crazy, or a little bit of both, but when a person senses the Divine Calling, it is hard to “kick against the goads.” (Acts 26:14)

3. Open Doors - One cannot reflect on the history of We Care Program in Alabama and not be impressed with the amount of openness that has been demonstrated by the Department of Corrections in allowing We Care staff persons the privilege of serving within their correctional facilities. Much credit should be given to Martin Weber and those early pioneers who built the reputation of servanthood and trust that this ministry has earned in the state. What is even more amazing is the history of the We Care Crusades in Alabama (we are currently preparing for our 32nd

annual event) and the freedom given to hundreds of volunteers every January to canvass multiple facilities (18 institutions in 2009) for four days of ministry “within the walls.” There is no question that God has provided a way for all of this to happen. We remain grateful for the trust that has been granted to us and seek to maintain a good working relationship with the Alabama Department of Corrections for many years to come.

4. Great Needs - Those who have been a part of prison ministry now or in the past can attest to the fact that needs are great within any prison system. What makes the needs so compelling in Alabama is the amount of opportunity afforded to prison ministry volunteers to help address those needs. One could dwell on the physical, educational, mental, and emotional needs that are glaringly evident as one crosses over the threshold of prison gates and enters into the compounds of Alabama’s prisons. But for those who have been called to this kind of work, the spiritual needs are what provides the determination to move forward and continue in the work. It is very difficult to find another environment of service where darkness, violence, bitterness, hurt, unforgiveness, anger, and evil forces in general run so rampantly in such a concentrated area – and where the light of Christ shines so brightly when one sinner repents and seeks to follow Him. *And that is where the greatness of the need begins, for once a person chooses Christ, the battle has only begun, and the need for healing, discipling, and teaching ministry is just beginning.*

The Gospel Mandate, Divine Calling, Open Doors, and Great Needs. I have found that these four reasons, when combined in individual life stories, can compel any surrendered heart to action. We Care Program is an organization comprised of those who feel deeply the Gospel Mandate and have heard the Divine Calling. Alabama has proven to be a state with Open Doors and

holman

correctional facility

Area: Atmore
Inmates: 1,010



Chris Summers, State Chaplain



**Bob Depew,
Faith Dorm Director**

We Care Focus:

- Oversee Faith-Based Honor Dorm
- Assist state chaplain
- Spiritual guidance
- Death Row visitation (Dean Miller)




**Lee Hochstetler,
Faith Dorm Mentor**

montgomery

work release center

Area: Montgomery
Inmates: 300



Donna Wyatt, Asst. Chaplain


We Care Focus:

- Teach Pathway to Freedom (re-entry class)
- Provide a Christian library
- Spiritual guidance


donaldson

correctional facility

Area: Birmingham
Inmates: 1,630



Bill Lindsey, State Chaplain



Dave Bucher, Asst. Chaplain

We Care Focus:

- Mentoring, relationship building, witnessing, discipling
- Oversee Faith/Character-Based Dorm
- Teach faith/character session of program for those nearing release


ventress

correctional facility

Area: Troy
Inmates: 1,665



Danny Rieben, State Chaplain




Richard Heatwole, Asst. Chaplain

We Care Focus:


- Visit men on the prison yard
- Teach Fatherhood and Faith/Honor Dorm classes
- Assist state chaplain

staton
correctional facility

Area: Montgomery
Inmates: 1,399



Stephen Smith, State Chaplain



We Care Focus:

- Teach Faith Dorm classes
- Spiritual guidance
- Visitation in Segregation Unit
- Teach Bible studies/chapel services

Jesse Fox, Asst. Chaplain

frank lee
work release center

Area: Montgomery
Inmates: 300



Steve Stoltzfus, We Care Chaplain

We Care Focus:

- Build and cultivate relationships
- Teach classes on Christian growth
- Positive group activities

jo davis
correctional facility

Area: Atmore
Inmates: 400



Irvin Martin, We Care Chaplain



We Care Focus:

- Wednesday evening preaching and prayer service
- Teach Bondage to Freedom (inner healing)
- Teach faith/character session of program for those nearing release
- Evangelism and discipleship

Pat Weber, Asst. Chaplain


Great Needs. Somehow, in the nature of God's economy, a partnership has been formed that has resulted in many lives impacted for eternity. Our prayer is that as we remain faithful to continue in what God has orchestrated through the years, it will become easier and easier for all involved, and those who will someday join us, to say, **"Why not Alabama?"**

Note: We Care Program currently administrates eighteen full- and part-time chaplains who serve 10,934 men and women in twelve of Alabama's 32 correctional facilities. There are a total of 30,017 inmates under the jurisdiction of the Alabama Department of Corrections. (www.doc.state.al.us, July 2009)

Additional We Care staff persons serve in county jails and Florida and Ohio prisons. 🙏

Is God calling you to Alabama?

Various opportunities for service exist in the Birmingham, Montgomery, Troy, and Atmore regions. Take the first step. Begin the conversation by contacting dave@wecareprogram.org.



fountain
correctional facility

Area: Atmore
Inmates: 1,252



Brian Eskelinen, State Chaplain

We Care Focus:

- Disciple new believers
- Shepherd and challenge the prison church towards maturity in Christ
- Assist state chaplain
- Teach Overcoming Substance Abuse through Christ (Pat Weber)
- Leadership of and teaching/mentoring in Faith Dorm
- Administrate Fountain of Life Bible College






Dennis Bilbo, Faith Dorm Director **Lester Huber, Faith Dorm Mentor** **Blaine Copenhaver, Asst. Chaplain** **Mike Strehlow, Bible College Dean**

32nd Annual Multi-Prison *Crusade*

Bringing the Gospel Message to Thousands of Men and Women in Alabama's Prison Systems

January 24-28, 2010

- Begins with a Sunday of orientation and missions rally
- Four days of friendship evangelism in at least 17 different prisons located in the Montgomery, Troy, Birmingham, and Atmore areas
- Daily morning workshop sessions with gifted teachers
- Nightly prison chapel services with special music and evangelists
- Open to mature Christian men and women 20 and older



TO VOLUNTEER: Call We Care Program (251-368-8818) for application or download application online at www.wecareprogram.org. Completed applications **REQUIRED** by December 18, 2009

News of Note

VOL. 41, NO. 5

Atmore, Alabama

October 2009

Read- A-Thon Breaks Records

Previous read-a-thon records fell to this year's efforts. Twenty-six participants read a combined total of 86,850 pages and raised \$16,282.34 for the work of We Care Program. We praise the Lord for this blessing and extend a hearty thank you to each one of our readers and sponsors! The following persons are the winners for most money raised in each of three age groups:

1st - Goldie Huber (AL)

2nd - Celia Landis (PA)

1st - Shauna Yoder (KY)

2nd - David Landis, Jr. (AL)

1st - Joel Gingerich (IL)

2nd - Lyndon Gingerich (IL)



Elijah Jaron Fox

New Arrival

Jesse and Christina Fox welcomed Elijah Jaron on September 7, 2009. Elijah weighed 10 lbs. 11 oz. and was 22 inches long. Luke and Joel are excited over their new baby brother. Jesse is serving as assistant chaplain at Staton Correctional Facility.

Volume XLI, Number 5

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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From the Field

Frank Lee Work Center Montgomery, AL

"Hey, Chap, know why they make the beans like that?" The question was tossed at me as I sat down to enjoy the meal of corn dogs, fries and beans with some inmates. I thought the question sort of strange, but I said, "No, I have no idea." A look of triumph came across the questioner's face, and with a grin that said "I gotcha," he responded, "It sure is good to find a Yankee that doesn't know everything!" I had no choice but to join in the laughter as everybody around me got a good chuckle at the chaplain's expense. Yeah, this transplanted Yankee certainly doesn't know everything, especially when it comes to southern culture.



Steve Stoltzfus

The past two years have been a sharp learning curve for me. Working in a prison environment is definitely a cross cultural experience, and the only way to learn that culture is from those in it. I have learned to listen carefully and watch what is happening around me. The residents are always ready to give insight to why things work the way they do. I can either heed their advice or continue on in my own prideful ignorance and look the fool that I am.

Learning is a lifelong process. Growing up we continually thought that learning would end at certain times in life. We wondered how there could be anything else to learn, only to realize that what we hoped was the end of the road was merely a bend in the road.

I am learning that no matter your position, you can always learn from those around you. When I refuse to learn or think that there is nothing to learn from a person or that I have the final word on a subject, it is usually pride that is standing in the way. God has quite a bit to say about pride and arrogance, and it is not good. He hates it!

It has been humbling to learn from those that are under my authority. Not only have the men taught me much on how prison works, I have also learned many spiritual truths. There are men in the institution that have invested more time than I in studying God's word. Thus I need to learn from them. I thank the Lord for this season in my life and look forward to many more years of learning. I hope that is your desire as well.

Century Correctional Institution Century, FL

"Chaplain! We're grown men! We see worse stuff than this all the time. That scene was almost over, and we'd like to see how God worked in his life." These were some of the protests from several inmates when the chaplain refused to let them finish watching Chuck Colson's testimonial movie. The scene was a prison chow hall where a brawl broke out and turned into a full-fledged fist fight with bloody faces and a mess from overturned food trays. Maybe you've seen the movie. Where do you draw the line of what is appropriate to watch? The problem in the prison was this: the chaplain noticed some of the men were enjoying the scene. It was as if they were "feeding the flesh" rather than the spirit.



Marvin Bender

Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." (NIV) Few of these men have learned to crucify the flesh. Like the story of the man who likened his inner struggle to two dogs fighting inside, when asked which dog wins, he rightly diagnosed that "the dog I feed the most" wins.

I expect to help my children learn proper viewing habits, but it seems awkward to have to tell an adult what to watch and what not to watch. However, many inmates have not learned to control their viewing habits. If nobody teaches them what is inappropriate to watch, they will never know. Why? Because even most Christians don't have a conscience against watching anything, especially if it is associated with a "Christian" film. I have to admit that the things I allow myself to watch do affect my conscience. Compromise leads to a seared conscience. Hollywood seemingly has to add violence to a movie to make it a "hit." Are we Christians not guilty of buying into this worldly philosophy? I'd still like to think that a scene such as I mentioned doesn't compromise my purity. What do you think? How does it affect you?

In a weekly Bible study that I teach at the prison, we just finished going through the book of Colossians. In chapter 3, verses 5-9, we are told to put to death and rid ourselves of whatever belongs to our sinful nature. But we can't stop there; verses 10-17 tell us what to put on and how to live. We encourage purity, virtue, honesty, and thankfulness. It is truly a blessing to encourage Christian inmates to seek God with their whole heart and to observe how Christ changes them.

Thank you for supporting us, whether through finances or prayer. We admonish, rebuke, preach, teach and train. We pray, face fatigue, disappointment and mild persecution. We also rejoice, give thanks, and praise God for the things He does. Lives are being changed through the power of the Holy Spirit and the written Word of God! May God bless you abundantly for caring and partnering with us.

Tutwiler Prison for Women Montgomery, AL

Recently some of the ladies here have had some breakthroughs in their walk with God. One of them, after a fight with another inmate, knew she was wrong and it deeply grieved her. This was the first time she has ever realized that she hurt her Father God. She prayed that He would show her a scripture and it was granted, James 4:7-10. Verses 9-10 state, "Be afflicted and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He shall lift you up." She knew she needed to ask forgiveness. Some of her fellow inmates discouraged her from doing so, saying that the other lady was a hard person. However, she felt that she had made a mistake and wanted to make it right in front of others who had seen the fight, so she publicly asked for forgiveness from the lady she had fought. To this day the other lady has a friendly "Hi" when they meet.

Another lady read several books on Christian growth and had been attending some of the Faith Dorm classes. God had revealed to several of us that her past was a stronghold in her life that she was unable to move beyond. Not long ago while meeting with her, she shared that she feels like she has let her past hold her back and block her progress in growing in the Lord. I was able to tell her that we had been praying for this moment.

It is a great privilege to be a part of seeing the heavens open and God's light shine on a sister in Christ! He is drawing people to Himself as He gets His Bride ready.



Anna Miller

Fountain Corr. Facility Atmore, AL

When I pulled my car into the prison compound, the parking lot was full. As I walked into the prison, it was unusually quiet.

The normal noise of the hustle and bustle of prison did not fill the air. There were no inmates shuffling through the usually crowded hallways. No, this time something was different; not a soul in sight except the officer that let me in. It was only after seeing a man in handcuffs being escorted by another officer that I realized we were on a prison-wide shake down.

A shake down can be a daily event in prison. At any given time an officer in doing his job will shake down an inmate by looking through his belongings to make sure he does not possess any contraband (things not allowed), such as knives, cell phones, drugs, highlighters, etc. Men in prison know that at anytime an officer could pull them aside. A prison-wide shake down is a lot more extreme. Units of trained officers march through the prison, scouring the area looking for things that do not belong. Not a chair or bed is left unsearched. The guilty shake in their boots, wondering if they will be found out, but the innocent sit patiently waiting for the whole ordeal to finish.

The prison-wide shake down reminds me of how it will be when Christ returns. Every day we are warned by Christ's messengers to clean up our life and get rid of the contraband. Someday without warning, God will do a world-wide shake down. "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back." (Mk. 13:35) Let's plan on being ready.



Blaine Copenhaver

Atmore Work Center Atmore, AL

During a recent softball game against the inmates at the Work Center, I stood in right field, our team being short one man. Strict honesty will not permit me to label it playing, but the inmates were impressed that I, at the advanced age of fifty-six, went out and gave it a try.

"I saw you out there playing, Chap!"

"I don't know that you could really call it playing," was my reply.

"Yes, but at our age we are lucky to be alive, let alone be able to play ball."

This comment struck me as rather amusing, but on further reflection I realized that it was indeed a serious statement. As I have visited with inmates I am impressed by the high percentage of them that had close friends or family who have died at a young age, either by careless living, violence, or some type of substance abuse. I became more aware that the power of this good news I am privileged to share has not only eternal consequences but also the power to break the chains of sin that bind these men and to provide a healthier lifestyle in the here and now.



Ed Ranck

PERSPECTIVES

with David R. Landis
President

Considering the staggering fact that 1 in 31 Americans is behind bars or on probation or parole, one could tend to say “Forget it, the situation is hopeless!” Statistics can have a way of disabling our “getting involved” switch, sometimes going right over our heads.

But when I am having a conversation with someone in white, everything changes. A “statistic” becomes personal. Here is a mother’s son, a child’s dad, a brother or sister. Here is one of the “least of these” who is being pursued with passion by a loving Creator. God is not passively observing His creation as it wrestles with Satanic forces that seek to kill and destroy. Instead, He is using me as an extension of His holy hand to be a father to the fatherless, bring healing to the broken-hearted, and pursue the outcasts of society.

Cliff, Brad, Curtis, and Bruce. These are just some of the names that come to my mind. They may be included in statistical reports, but they are not just numbers. God has written chapters for their lives that are yet to be read, and I, along with all of us at We Care Program, am privileged to be a part of their stories of hope and redemption.

You and I may not be able to find the solution to America’s prison problem, but we can make deposits in individual lives that will effect great change now and in the future. We serve a God who keeps “his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.” (Deut. 7:9b) 🔥



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