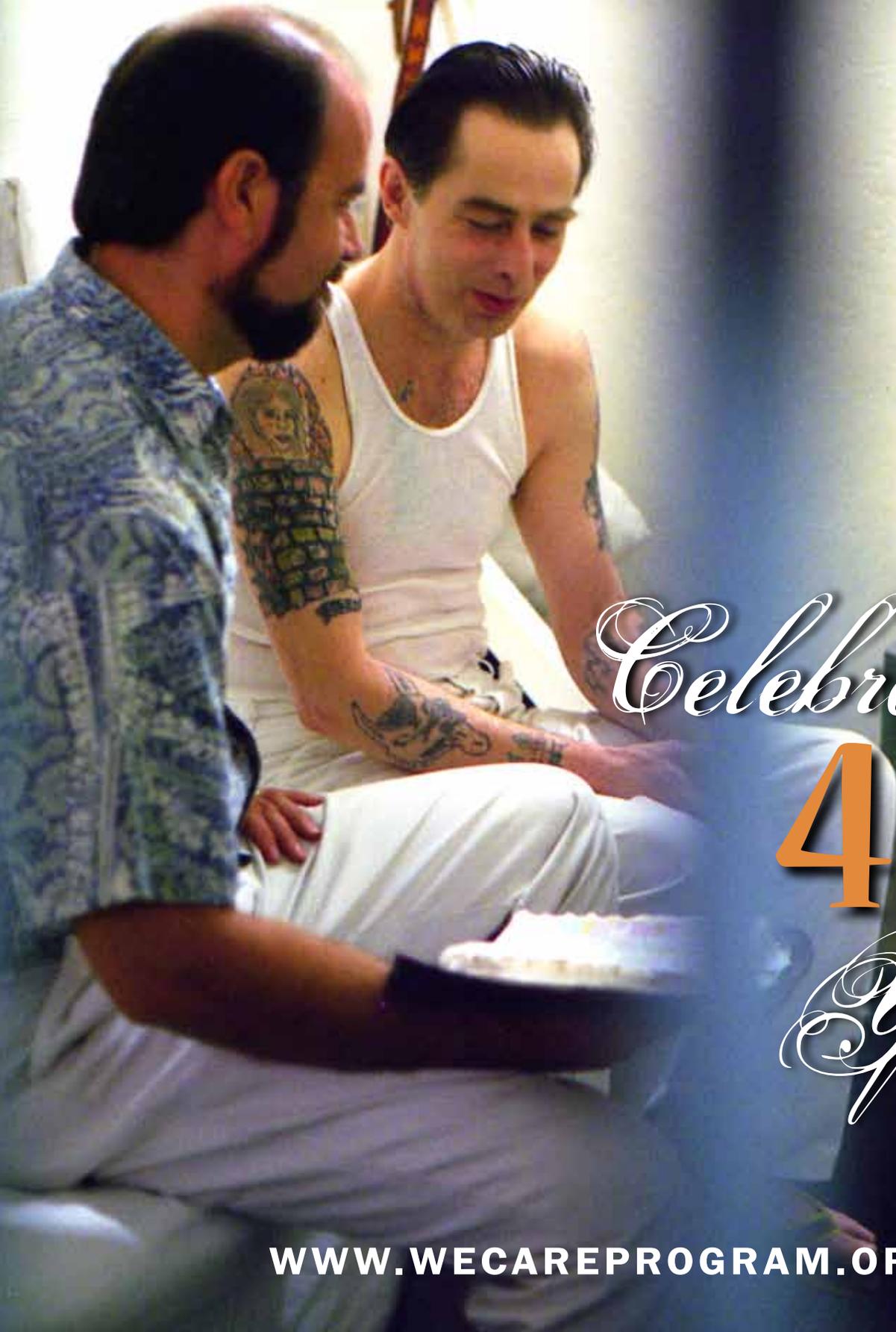




the connection

SEPTEMBER 2010



Celebrating
40
Years

WWW.WECAREPROGRAM.ORG

Volume XLII

Issue 4

Published six times a year, The Connection provides news and views to friends of We Care Program, a non-profit, interdenominational organization consisting of Christian men and women who share a burden for and commitment to "Proclaiming Christ and Discipling Inmates." We are accomplishing our purpose by placing and training missionary chaplains, fostering relationships with inmates, encouraging Christian inmates to live in community, teaching Biblical studies, mentoring, providing outreach opportunities, and collaborating with those who support our purpose.

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NEWS

NEW STAFF MEMBERS!

A big welcome to Joseph Kolb and Hannah Roberson! Joe, who recently joined us as a part-time volunteer at Timothy House, comes to us with previous experience in prison chaplaincy, pastoring, and sales and is a very welcome addition to our mentoring team. Joe and his wife Lorraine attend Way of Life Community Church, Mobile, Alabama, and have three grown children. Hannah Roberson, who recently re-located to Atmore from Pryor, Oklahoma, has joined our administrative support staff as bookkeeper. Hannah attends Mennonite Christian Fellowship in Atmore. We praise God for answering our prayers and providing personnel in these two positions.



SOFTBALL OUTREACH

Thanks to 30 players who participated in our June Softball Outreach! Between three teams, 155 innings of softball were played in seven Alabama prisons in two (very hot!) days.



Post-Game Prayer
←

The Edenville (PA) Team
→



Money Talk

Are you looking for a way to actively support prison ministry but don't feel called to be a chaplain? If so, then volunteering at the We Care Economy Stores may be right for you. We Care is partially supported by profit from our three thrift stores. We are actively looking for persons who are interested in volunteering to work at the stores. No matter where you are from, across country or across town, we can work out the details to get you involved in supporting prison ministry today. Contact Gary Mast at gary@wecareprogram.org for more information.

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF MINISTRY

The Strengthening Years: 1990-1999

by: Mike Strehlow

The decade of the 1990s was a time of strengthening the foundations of We Care Program. After pioneering prison ministry in Alabama in the '60s, organizing and bringing in volunteers in the '70s, and forming We Care Program pretty much as it is today in the '80s, Martin Weber stepped down as Vice President of We Care after a 20-year involvement with the organization. That could have been a dangerous time for We Care. Often when the founder of an organization retires, the founder's vision is lost in the shuffle of keeping the organization going. But that did not happen to We Care Program. When Phil Weber succeeded his father as president of We Care Program in 1987, he rigorously focused on We Care's core strengths.

We Care's main strength as a ministry always was (and is) its prison chaplaincy. While other ministries conduct services, hold revivals, offer correspondence options, and generally do good work mostly from the outside, Phil understood that We Care's strength was that its chaplains go into prisons and stay inside, month after month, year after year, assisting the state chaplains, teaching classes, mentoring and building relationships with inmates.

Another growing strength during the '90s was the yearly crusades, sending hundreds of volunteers, evangelists, and music groups to prisons all over the state for one week every January. Due in part to Phil's organizational skills, the crusade event doubled in scope during this decade, expanding from its original base in Atmore, and by 1999 was being held in 16 different prisons located in four different regions across the state.

A third great strength of We Care has always been the character and quality of its volunteers. This ten-year time frame included several persons whose terms of service covered many of these years. Beginning in 1989, Dennis Nolt spanned the 1990s as chaplain at Red Eagle Work Release. After having previously served as a teacher, editor, and chaplain with We Care, Arlin Schrock returned in 1990 and went on to complete 19 years of service with the ministry. Homer and Sharon Wengerd served for most of the '90s, first as directors for We Care's newly established Hope Haven, a home for formerly incarcerated men. Later Homer served as Vice President and Finance Director and Sharon provided leadership for the Atmore Economy Shop for several years. In 1992, Ruth Ann Swartzentruber started as a chaplain's assistant at Tutwiler. After her marriage to Steve Hays, they together assumed leadership



Phil Weber served as President of We Care Program from 1987 to 2001.

at Hope Haven (changing its focus to women) and served there until 2003. There is not enough space here to name every outstanding chaplain, volunteer, and supporter We Care (and by extension, Alabama's prison inmates) was blessed with during the '90s, but there were many.

All of We Care's work until this point would not have been possible without a very loyal base of financial and prayer supporters, both local and from around the United States, many of whom were drawn to the stability that Phil Weber demonstrated in his leadership. But equally important was the growing contribution of We Care's Economy Shops to the financial support of We Care's mission. In 1996, gross sales at the Atmore Economy Shop reached \$100K for the first time. Two years later, We Care purchased a building in Monroeville, AL, for an additional Economy Shop.

Prison ministry itself changed markedly in 1999, with the formation of honor dorms in every state prison big enough to hold one. Phil saw a window of opportunity for We Care in this new venture and rallied together funds for We Care to play an instrumental part in opening "faith" dorms at Fountain and Holman. In addition, he initiated various levels of involvement for We Care chaplains within these dorms throughout the state that would continue for years to come.

As We Care narrowed its focus to prison chaplaincy, aftercare, and multi-prison crusades, its family of dedicated staff persons and the individuals, churches, and businesses who prayed for and supported them helped the organization to enter a new decade firmly rooted as a prison ministry. 🙏

A History of 1990-

Rosedale Bible Institute and We Care held a one-time experiment in a cooperative venture for Rosedale's third term, providing a prison ministry practicum through We Care for RBI students. Escambia Correctional Facility inmates who took a Bible class received RBI credit.

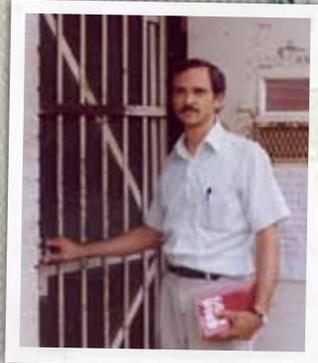


Gross sales at the Atmore Economy Shop reached \$100K for the first time. September 29, 1999, was the 10th anniversary of the Atmore Economy Shop with sales averaging \$10K+ per month.

1990

February 1990

Arlin Schrock returned to We Care after having previously served as a teacher, editor, and chaplain from 1974-1987. Arlin went on to complete 19 years of service with We Care in 1996.



Aug 14-25 1996

A team from We Care traveled through seven states on the "Grace Tour" to inform and encourage.

1996

Apr 6 1997

We Care chaplains Tim Miller and Cecil Montgomery broke ground for a new chapel at J. O. Davis. Dedication of the completed building was on September 7, 1997.

January 1990

For the first time, a base was set up in Montgomery to host crusade volunteers in that area. After orientation in Atmore, one hundred volunteers drove to Montgomery for five days of visitation in six Montgomery area prisons. Fifty-four volunteers remained in the Atmore area.

1990

1992

An aftercare facility, Hope Haven, was opened in Mobile, AL. Homer and Sharon Wengerd served as directors. Hope Haven was later closed to men, due to lack of staff, and reopened to women in June 1995 under the leadership of Steve and Ruth Ann Hays. The home was closed in 2002.



Martin Weber stepped down as Vice President of We Care after a 20-year involvement with the organization.



1970 -

-1999 We Care Program



1998

The We Care newsletter changed its name to We Care Connection with the March issue. In August 2003, the name changed again to The Connection.



1999

The honor program at Donaldson was so successful that Commissioner Haley ordered "faith-based honors dorms" be set up at all state prisons by Oct. 1, 1999. The honor dorm at Fountain Correctional began with 68 men under the leadership of We Care chaplain Glenn Weber.



Feb 26 1998

We Care purchased a building in Monroeville, AL, for an additional Economy Shop. Grand opening was held on March 14, 1998.

January 1999

Two hundred sixty volunteers entered 16 prisons in the Atmore, Montgomery, Troy, and Birmingham areas for the 21st annual We Care Crusade.

July 1999

David Landis joined the We Care staff as assistant chaplain at J. O. Davis.



Dennis Nolt spanned the 1990s as chaplain at Red Eagle Work Release. Beginning in 1989, Dennis went on to serve until 2001, the longest consecutive term completed by a We Care chaplain at one facility.



Next issue: 2000-2010

LANCASTER PA 176

Mail It Back

365



Richard Heatwole
Ventress Corr. Facility
Clayton, AL

I have had many conversations with a Muslim friend. That has been his religion for nineteen years, but he is in turmoil. He is not satisfied and remains troubled in spirit. Several months ago he even renounced his faith as a Muslim and began to follow Christianity. When God began testing him, he was overwhelmed. He experienced more trouble after becoming a follower of Jesus than before. The devil thrashed him, and he became discouraged and lost faith.

Not long ago we were talking again. He was still struggling. I told him, "Tom, you need to decide who Jesus is. Is He who the Bible says He is, or is He who the Koran says He is? Is Jesus God and did He give His life to make atonement for our sins? Is He the Messiah of God?"

He looked at me and said, "I just cannot believe that God would become human and pee and poop like us. (Those were his words.) The God I believe in just could not do that!" I told him he was almost quoting scripture and showed him Philippians 2:5-11. His eyes got big and then he began to laugh. "You got me, Chap!" he said. "I cannot believe it says that. I sure will have to think on that one. Where was that again?"

"The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12, NIV). What a mighty God! What a powerful Word!



David Bucher
Donaldson Corr. Facility
Birmingham, AL

What does holiness look like [if you're an inmate]? What does it mean [if you're in prison]? How is holy living carried out [when it seems everyone around you is living and doing the opposite]? Is it possible to obey our Heavenly Father's command in I Peter 1:16, "Be ye holy; for I am holy"?

"Chaplain Dave, I use a cell phone sometimes. It is so easy to call my family that way!"

"It's too expensive to use the institutional phones!"

"Dave, it is no sin to use a cell phone! You have one!"

"Yes, I do," I say, "but in the position you're in, it is a major violation of security rules, and God cannot bless your life when you know you are living in violation of the

authorities over you."

A pervading mindset exists among the men. Non-Christians embrace it; professing Christians struggle with it. If I can get away with something that makes serving my time easier, why not do it? It is worth the risk, even though getting caught will result in disciplinary action and could lengthen my stay in prison and even though it creates a barrier between me and the Lord.

"It's just food! I know the guy I bought it from probably stole it out of the kitchen. You know how they feed us! You can't blame a guy for wanting to eat a little better."

"Gambling on football games doesn't hurt anybody. It makes the time go faster, and I can make some money doing it!"

"Chaplain Dave, I haven't been with my wife in years! It can't hurt for me to look at these pictures; I can at least imagine being with her."

May the Lord use me as an example as I walk among the men holding up the banner of Holiness.



James Smoker
Donaldson Corr. Facility
Birmingham, AL

From the

"Chap, when I get out of here, you can ride with me to the clubs and we can find ourselves some women. I want a bunch of wives. In the Bible, Solomon had many wives."

Quite a few men have asked questions or made statements to try me out and see how they can get me to respond. It reminds me of those religious people who tried to trap Jesus into saying the wrong thing. I can get all worked up and judgmental toward them or I can share my experience and let them know how the Bible teaches us to live. At that point they can take it or leave it.

I have been blessed to be working at Donaldson for six months now. In that time I have seen what these men deal with and the negative environment in which they live. God has been telling me to focus on the positive and encourage the good in them.

In replying to the young man about having many wives, I had an opportunity to speak truth to him and share what the scriptures teach. As our conversation came to an end, he said, "Chap you might be able to teach me some things."

We Care
3493

Attmore, AL 36502



Steve Stoltzfus
**Frank Lee Work Release
Montgomery, AL**

“It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” These are the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 9:12 and 13 (NIV). God impressed this verse on my mind as I was contemplating some issues in the chapel. Both in and out of prison, we can get all wrapped up in doing church and having all the offices filled and everything organized and yet fail to see the sick around us.

The setting for these verses has Jesus associating with questionable characters. People misunderstood Jesus’ mission. Sometimes we still misunderstand Jesus’ mission. Author and teacher John Bevere has stated it this way, “Jesus could mingle with the sinners because He remained in control.” He did not get involved because He simply wanted to see what was going on, nor was He curious about that way of life. These people were not a project to boost His ego. He became involved because He cared about them. He did not give them pat easy answers. He asked them questions, not to render them speechless or to find a way out of answering a tough question. He asked questions to provoke more conversation.

It is easy and convenient to allow programs and procedure to crowd out people. The challenge is to follow Jesus’ example and to always put people first. After all, Jesus died to save people, not programs!

Michael was murdered in prison in 2009. A violent act claimed the life of another young man whom God created. Ever since Cain killed Abel, jealousy, envy, revenge, and greed have been the catalysts for ending life with premature death.

A few weeks earlier, God was birthing a vision among several inmates at St. Clair Correctional Facility. The comments of one gave thought to another, and God brought them to a good work. Destry built on the realization that a violent act ultimately



John Kurtz
**St. Clair Corr. Facility
Springville, AL**

points to the choice of an individual. After Michael’s murder, Destry brought a group of leaders together to ask each man to not act in violence. And the campaign began. With the warden’s approval and my supervision, Destry orchestrated the creation of unique video messages that are broadcast weekly over the institutional television channel. The video clips incorporate music, narration, and heart-felt pleas for men to turn from those things that cause violence. They point out the truths from the giver of truth, Jesus Christ. The Self Accountability & Violence Elimination Directive (S.A.V.E.D.) was formed.

Seeds were planted, and God moved in the hearts of some. In the following quarter the statistics for violence showed a decline to a level lower than any in the previous two years. As a means to celebrate, we began to plan an S.A.V.E.D Day which would include a “free-world” meal and other festivities.

The S.A.V.E.D. Day took place on June 7, and God enabled us to provide the meal to every man in the prison who would receive it. We also shared Jesus’ call to love one’s enemies. God gave us victory through Christ that day in many ways. The battle continues.

David came into my office. “I am going before the parole board today.”

“Really!” I exclaimed. “When do you do that?”

“Today at 2 o’clock,” he answered. “I am excited but also nervous.”

David has already served a lot of time and has been an example of how to live the Christian life since he got saved several years ago. When I started working at the prison, I understood that he had a life sentence. Now to hear that he maybe had a chance to get out was really exciting!

“Keep me in your prayers,” he said. “A lot of guys are praying for me, too.”

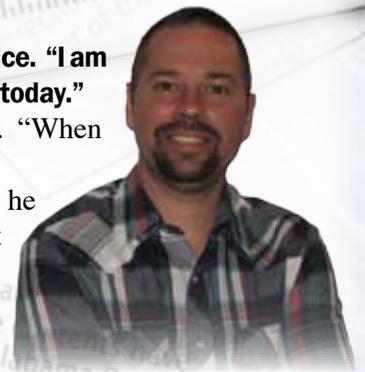
“I want to pray with you right now,” I responded. “I don’t want to wait until later.”

It is hard to know how to pray at times like this. I want him to be able to serve God in freedom, but I do not know God’s plan for him. It was difficult for me to say, “God, I want what You want in David’s life.”

Later in the afternoon I met David as I was coming back from the dorm. I commented on his smile and asked how the meeting went.

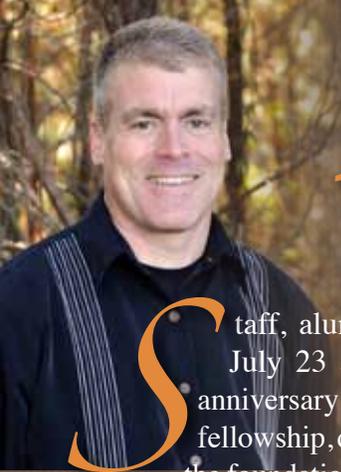
“I won’t hear anything else until 2033,” he answered.

I was stunned. David is already in his 50’s. I hope and trust David can find God’s will and approval even now.



Stan Schrock
**Century Corr. Institution
Century, FL**

Field



40th Anniversary Highlights

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT

Staff, alumni, and friends came together on July 23 and 24, 2010, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of We Care. A spirit of warm family fellowship, deep appreciation for workers who laid the foundations of ministry in years past, and a call to persevere were the overriding themes throughout the event. Presenters included former staff members Alvin Yoder, Steve Longenecker, Phil Weber, and Arlin Schrock.

The Saturday afternoon program culminated with a panel of six former inmates (with 73 combined

years of prison time served) who shared how God used We Care Program to impact their lives while in prison. (A video recording of the final gathering is available for viewing at www.wecareprogram.org.) A new historical display was also unveiled at We Care's headquarters highlighting God's faithfulness over the last 40 years of ministry.



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