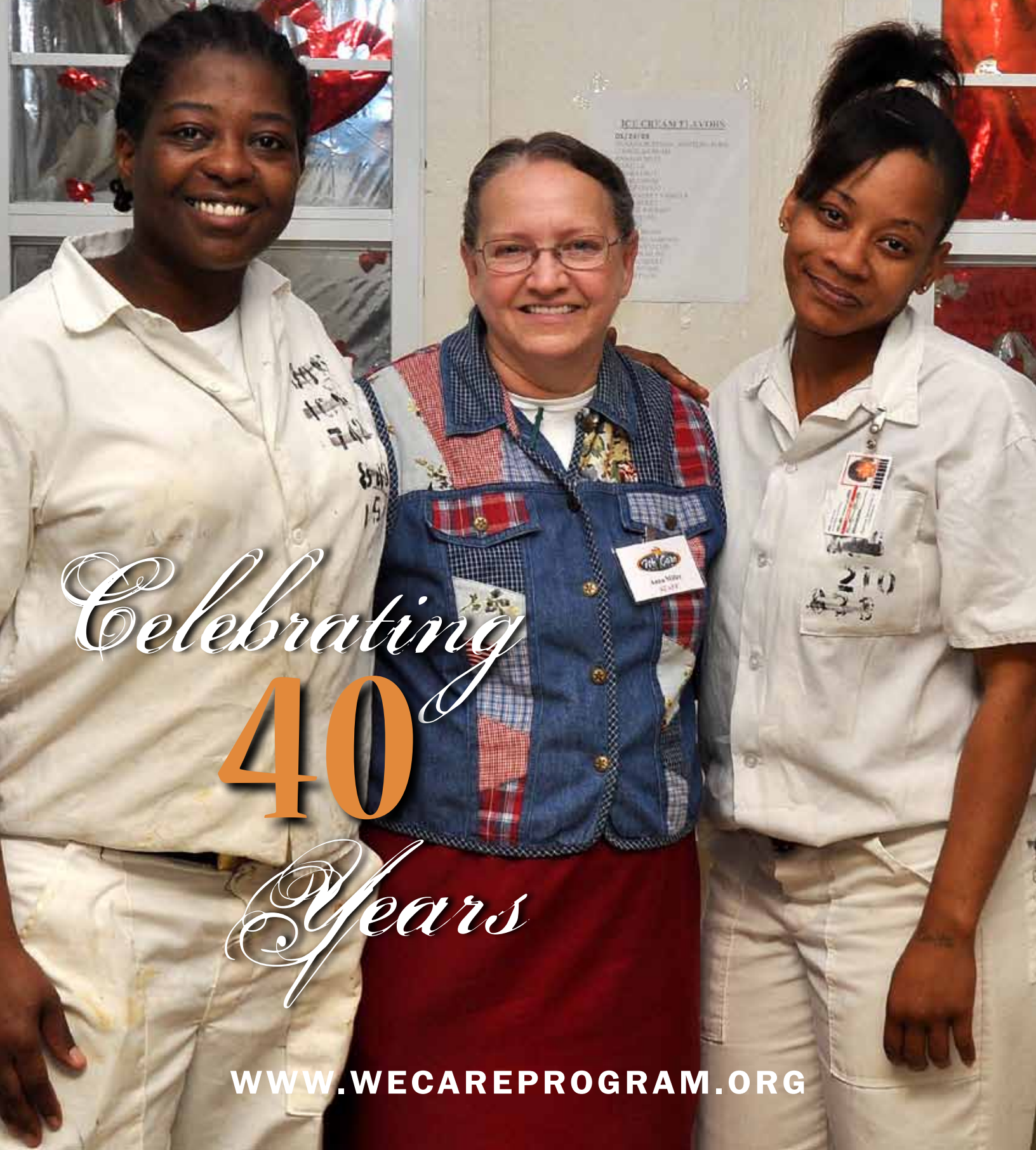




the connection

NOVEMBER 2010



Celebrating
40
Years

WWW.WECAREPROGRAM.ORG

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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.

Direct all correspondence to:
We Care Program
3493 Hwy 21
Atmore, AL 36502

TELEPHONE: 251-368-8818
FAX: 251-368-0932
E-MAIL: wecare@wecareprogram.org
WEBSITE: www.wecareprogram.org

BOARD CHAIRMAN: Aaron Martin
PRESIDENT: David R. Landis
VICE PRES./BUSINESS MGR.: Don Metzler
EDITOR: David R. Landis
ASST. EDITOR: Noreen Horst
LAYOUT & DESIGN: Sheila Copenhaver
CIRCULATION MANAGER: Noreen Horst

Trailer Donation Needed

We Care Program is in need of a new or gently used trailer. The 1995 model we are currently using has seen its better days. This trailer is used primarily for hauling merchandise between our three thrift stores. We are looking for something that is similar to the one pictured in this background. Please contact Don Metzler (don@wecareprogram.org) for more information.

NEWS

WELCOME

We extend a big welcome to this year's Discover team! Ben Cline and Sheldon Histan are both from Harrisonburg, VA, while Jonathan Zook comes to us from Sarasota, FL. (Note: Jonathan is a 2nd generation staffer. His dad, Donovan, served as a chaplain at Fountain and Century from '88-'95.)



Haskell Dunn has recently joined our "family" as an associate. Haskell serves as a mentor at Fountain Correctional, is on the Timothy House Advisory Team, and also has a desire to promote We Care's work through his music ministry. Haskell and his wife Faye are members of First Baptist Church in Atmore.



READ-A-THON NEWS

Participants in this year's read-a-thon sent in \$13,086.23 to support prison ministry. Eighteen readers, ages 8 – 69 and scattered over six states, read a combined total of 57,748 pages. Prizes were awarded in three age brackets for most money raised: 1st - Goldie Huber (AL), 2nd - Celia Landis (PA), 1st - Lyndon Gingerich (IL), 2nd - Twila Bender (AL), 1st - LaRonda Bender (AL), 2nd - Rachel Bender (AL). We are grateful to God for each reader and for each sponsor who contributed in this fundraising effort!

HOST COUPLE

After serving since December 2008 as an assistant chaplain at Ventress Correctional, Clayton, AL, Richard and Marj Heatwole recently transitioned to Host Couple at the headquarters. Along with their role as "parents" to the Discover team, Richard will also serve as chaplain at Atmore Work Center. The Heatwoles were welcomed to Atmore with new "host couple" uniforms!



CRUSADE

Looking for a way to partner with us in a short-term missions experience? Join us January 23-27, 2011, for our 33rd annual Prison Crusade. Information and application available at www.wecareprogram.org. Application deadline is December 24, 2010.

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF MINISTRY

The Developing Years: 2000-2010

by: Mike Strehlow

Though the rest of the world greeted the year 2000 with a bad case of nerves (remember “Y2K”?), We Care Program entered the new millennium with stability. Ten chaplains were working in seven Alabama state prisons, and 18 additional staff persons were serving in support ministry and the Economy Shops; organizational debts were well on the way to being paid off; and the yearly crusade (2000) broke records again with 269 volunteers attending. After thirteen years of Phil Weber’s guidance, We Care Program was on solid ground.

Because of his successful leadership, what happened next may have surprised some people. After admirably serving We Care Program for so long, Phil Weber decided to move on to a position at Rosedale Bible College, and the board appointed David Landis to take his place. A chaplain with We Care since 1999, Landis stepped into the role of President on December 1, 2001.

For the first time in thirty years, the organization did not have someone named Weber presiding over it. Still, the board saw clearly when it selected David Landis as President; he had been a successful businessman before God called him into full-time ministry, he had chaplaincy experience, and his vision for We Care was true to the Weber legacy. Another transition ensued a year and a half later when Homer Wengerd, Vice President for seven years, stepped aside and Don Metzler was appointed to fill that position.

We Care’s chaplains have always offered Bible-based teaching in their various ministry locations, but in January 2005, under the leadership of Mike Strehlow, We Care began offering a program of Bible college courses at Fountain. A year later, with Strehlow as facilitator, a G.E.D. program was begun in the Fountain chapel to assist inmates in earning their high school equivalencies. Dozens of inmates have earned diplomas as a result of these efforts.

As good as the yearly crusades are at allowing We Care’s supporters to take an active part in prison ministry (351 participants in 2005 alone, reaching 17 prisons), there was a need for a more intensive short-term opportunity. Accordingly, in October 2004, six young adults entered a six-month internship program, now an annual opportunity known as Discover.

With the grounds surrounding We Care’s old headquarters about to be developed into a casino and entertainment complex, it was time to move elsewhere. The building was sold November 8, 2005, and vacated by April 1, 2006. Headquarters were moved to a temporary location while a new facility was constructed with the help of volunteers and local inmates. Open house and dedication



David R. Landis currently serves as President of We Care Program.

of the new building was held July 29, 2007.

Different methods of fund raising were utilized. The first annual Read-A-Thon was held in July 2004, raising over \$9,000. In October 2008, a third Economy Shop was opened in Flomaton, AL. Adding to the annual banquet in New Holland, PA, were locations in Franconia, PA, Wilmot, OH, and Hutchinson, KS.

Taking a step of faith in July 2008, the Board of Directors gave approval for We Care to again establish a men’s re-entry program (Timothy House). Marvin Bender, a seasoned chaplain with We Care, was chosen as director. Timothy House currently serves two men in transition while others wait on parole hearings to determine their acceptance.

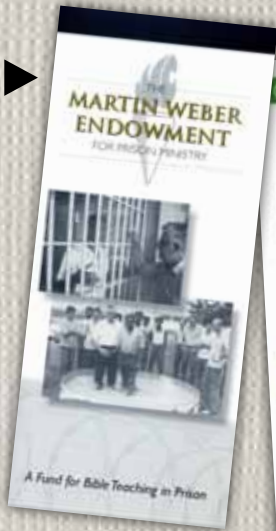
A softball tournament in July 2008 opened the door for a different type of short-term involvement in prison ministry. The tournament is now a much anticipated annual event offering the opportunity to share God’s love while playing ball.

We Care Program has continued to grow. At the time of this writing, the organization has 25 full- and part-time chaplains working in 15 prisons, reaching beyond Alabama to include two prisons in Ohio and one in Florida. A total of 53 employees and volunteers serve in three Economy Shops, a halfway house, headquarters, and prisons. Inmates are being disciplined like never before. And in 2010, for the first time, the number of crusade participants exceeded 400.

The period from 2000 to 2010 was a time of many milestones for We Care Program, and certainly the most poignant milestone was passed when Martin Weber, founder of We Care, died on April 18, 2009. That We Care Program goes on shows the validity of Martin’s initial vision, that of a ministry which places chaplains in prisons to minister on a continuous basis. May we all remain true to it! 🕊

A History of 2000-

The Martin Weber Endowment Fund was announced January 6, 2001. The fund, started with an initial \$25,000, was established to provide for the perpetual support of Bible teaching in prisons.



The We Care headquarters building was sold November 8, 2005, and vacated by April 1, 2006. Headquarters were moved to temporary facilities until erection of a new building was completed. Inmates from Atmore Work Center helped with the construction. Open house and dedication of the new building was held July 29, 2007.



2001

January 2003

327 volunteers participated in the 25th annual prison crusade reaching 14 prisons.

2004

The first annual Read-A-Thon was held in July, 2004, with over \$9,000 raised. The idea was inspired by Emma Bender, who conducted her own personal read-a-thon for We Care the previous year.

2006

July 2001

The Board of Directors appointed David R. Landis as President effective December 1. Then President Phil Weber had joined the staff of Rosedale Bible Institute.

October 2004

2005

We Care began offering a program of Bible College courses to men at Fountain in January 2005, under the leadership of Mike Strehlow. The first graduation was held in October 2009.



June 27 2007



Groundbreaking took place for the new chapel at the Atmore Work Center. Dedication was January 2008. Much of the work was done by inmates.



Six young adults began a six-month assignment through the Young Adult Internship program, now an annual opportunity known as Discover. Twenty-three individuals have served in the program from its beginning to 2010.



-2010 We Care Program



The first annual softball tournament was held over the July 4th weekend with two "free world" teams and four Atmore area prison teams.



July 4 2008

Oct 13 2008

A third Economy Shop was opened in Flomaton, AL, on October 13, 2008. The Economy Shops provide about 20% of the We Care operating budget and employ 23 persons.



July 2008

The Board of Directors gave approval to again establish a men's re-entry program (Timothy House) under the leadership of an advisory team. Marvin Bender (second from left) was chosen as director.

April 2009

January 2010

ook place for a new
re Work Center.
January 17, 2008.
was done by inmates.



For the first time, the total number of crusade participants exceeded 400. (Pictured: Eli Yoder prays over respondents.)



2010

Martin Weber, founder of We Care, died April 18, 2009, at age 84.



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3493



Marvin Bender
Timothy House
Atmore, AL

“We need them worse than they do!” This was the response from one resident when he found out that a host couple was coming to the We Care headquarters. We are praying for a couple at Timothy House to exemplify a godly marriage and help create a “family” atmosphere for our residents. Many inmates have not experienced such a heritage. Is God calling you? We are praying for commitments between one month and two years. Aftercare

is not always easy, but this time of transition is vital for men desiring to continue a godly lifestyle after prison. The following is a testimony written by Frank, a current resident at Timothy House.

“Do not be deceived: evil company corrupts good habits.” (1 Cor. 15:33 NKJV) My parents saw things in my friends that I couldn’t (or wouldn’t) see. They tried their best to protect me from choosing the wrong path. I hung around people whose bad habits soon rubbed off on me. Our heavenly Father also wants to protect us by warning us against friendships that would undermine the work He’s doing in our lives. Hebrews 10:24-25 challenges us to stay accountable to each other.

I know that going back home and being around my “old friends” would be a devastating mistake. I’m glad I serve a God that cares who I hang out with. I praise Him for allowing me to go to prison and for the people He put in my life while there. He opened the eyes of my heart to see where my life was heading if I didn’t choose to serve Him. I’m also honored to serve a God of another chance. He gave me what I didn’t deserve and withheld from me what I did deserve. That’s His grace and mercy. I now desire godly friends.

“We can’t pray yet, a brother is missing!” So proclaimed my youngest son Kaden at the dinner table one evening when I was impatient with an older brother and said, “Let’s go ahead, pray, and eat.” His words touched me.

Later that evening, I shared the incident in the service at J. O. Davis, and the words left an even greater impact on the Christian

Irvin Martin
J.O. Davis Corr. Facility
Atmore, AL

brothers there. God was speaking, and eyes filled with tears. You see, a brother was missing. Because of some disunity among the brethren, one young man had left. Since then God has answered our prayers, and the young man has returned.

Like the younger brother in the parable in Luke 15, we sometimes, in a backslidden condition, try to earn our way back to God. We think like a hired servant, who works to receive a wage. The truth is we cannot earn our way back, and we certainly cannot impress God! Too often we believe Satan’s lies and operate as hirelings, not understanding our full potential as sons of God.

The Father in the parable, filled with compassion, ran to His returning son, threw His arms around him and kissed him, proclaiming, “My son has returned. He was dead, but now he is alive!” Consider your “family” circles. When you sit around the table tonight, is a brother, or perhaps a son or a daughter, MISSING?

From the

Recently the men in the Faith Honor Dorm at Fountain

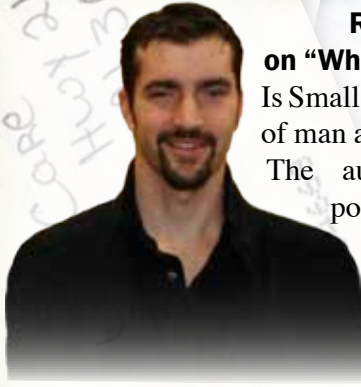
all came to a total agreement. This may have been the first time that two hundred and forty men in prison have ever become of one mind on anything. But when the time came for a vote, it was unanimous: the four-foot rattlesnake that worked its way under the door had to go. The men worked together as fast as possible gathering shoes and other objects to take care of their unwanted visitor. Within half an hour the snake was dead and skinned.

In the following week the rattlesnake story came up several times during conversation with the men. When it did, I challenged them to consider the snake like sin or a bad habit that needs to be removed as soon as possible. To all the men it was obvious that they could not leave a deadly rattlesnake slithering through the dorm. Unfortunately, most people often respect a poisonous snake over a poisonous sin that will destroy their soul. It was a great week and I thank God for the live analogy.



Blaine Copenhaver
Fountain Corr. Facility
Atmore, AL

Atmore, AL 36502



Jere Fox
Staton Corr. Facility
Montgomery, AL

Recently I led a book study on “When People Are Big and God Is Small.” The book discusses the fear of man as described in the scriptures. The author, Edward T. Welch, pointed out how unconfessed sin causes us to fear other people because we will constantly feel the need to hide that area of our life until we allow God to deal with it. After that class one of the men told me how he used to view pornography and had never told his wife.

He asked me to pray with him asking God to help him confess this sin against his wife. He was afraid of how she would respond. A few days later he came back to me with a big smile on his face. He had told his wife and she had forgiven him. She actually told

him she was glad he had told her!

This incident caused me to wonder why I am often afraid to let God deal with my own sins. Certainly those of us who love Christ should seek this state of freedom, where everything has come to light and we can move forward without fear, knowing that Christ has paid for it all. “But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.’” (Ephesians 5:13-14 NASB)

Field



Anna Miller
Montgomery Work Release
Montgomery, AL

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

I recently started teaching a Bible study entitled “The Captivity Series...The Key to Your Expected End.”

The writer, a former inmate, pictures her incarceration like the captivity of the children of Israel in foreign lands. God warned Israel many times to stop their idol worship and turn back to Him or they would be taken into captivity. In God’s great love and mercy He brings some to prison so they can find their purpose, to know

and worship their Creator and Redeemer and become who He created them to be. Finding and pursuing that purpose helps them focus on God’s plan for their lives and not be drawn back into the world’s mold and into old habits.

One of the ladies told me that these lessons have changed her outlook about her prison time. She can now see how God has been trying to reach her many times and she wasn’t listening because she wanted to live her way. When I asked if doing it her way was worth it, she said no, but it has made her pray and seek God’s plan and purpose for her life while she is in prison. She wants to know her Expected End so that when she gets out she will not be drawn into the things of the world that have so often taken her back into a life of crime and idols. May this challenge us all, whether bound or free, to fulfill our Expected End until Christ’s return.

It has been over three months since we as a family have moved to Atmore for me to serve in the prison at Holman. I praise the Lord for the opportunity to serve and be a part of what He is doing here in this prison.



David S. Landis
Holman Corr. Facility
Atmore, AL

Some time ago a man came into the chaplain’s office in frustration, “I just want to know which faith is true, Islam or Christianity?” We asked a few questions and then I got to pray with the man. I prayed Jeremiah 33:3 for him, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” Not long ago I met this man again and asked him if he ever got the answer to his question. He responded enthusiastically, “I know that Jesus died for me, and that is more than what Mohammed ever did.”

Another man told me his story about how God has been changing his life. Having just left his homosexual lifestyle, he shared, “I just got so tired of living that way, and God took away the desire. I want to live for God now.”

The Bible says in John 6:44, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” In both of these stories it was evident that the Spirit was drawing the men to God. They continue to face very real temptations. Others test them to prove them genuine. In my work I get to walk alongside and encourage these men and others and join God where He is at work. So I pray all the more earnestly, “Father, show me where You are at work today, and may I join You in that work.”



Turning Towards the Future

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT

This issue concludes our look back over the last 40 years. God has done immeasurably more than we or those before us could ever have asked or imagined (Eph. 3:20). We now look ahead. As much as I wish I could see into the future, only God knows what it holds. What I do know is that there is a harvest of souls before us. Many are lost, totally blinded to the Gospel. Does it not seem that God is still calling us and sending us, as he did the apostle Paul, to “open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Jesus]”? (Acts 26:18)

In the last 40 years, nearly 300 people have answered that call to service with We Care Program. For most, if not all of them, answering the call brought a time of surrender, sacrifice, obedience, and intense spiritual growth. There was a spirit of radical, even reckless, abandonment to the will of God as individuals and families relocated; homes were sold; and businesses, vocations, churches, family, and friends were left behind.

With that call came months and years of behind-the-scenes service to God inside prison walls or in some kind of support role. In many cases, the service took place in difficult working conditions, yielded very little recognition, and included daily interactions with the highest concentration of society’s broken people that you will ever find in one place.

As we renew our commitment to this great work, I pray that God will bring about in those who work and partner with We Care Program a sense of personal renewal, an ever increasing glow of God’s presence and activity in our lives, and an expanding and growing vision for discipleship. It is my desire that our understanding of what it means to disciple men and women towards Christlikeness in the prison system and upon release will reach new levels of insight and application.

As God moves, may we experience organizational renewal and ministry effectiveness in ways that we have not yet seen in our first 40 years. That is my prayer for We Care Program. 🌟

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