



# the **connection**

DECEMBER 2011



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**MAKING A  
DIFFERENCE...  
TOGETHER**

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# MAKING A DIFFERENCE...TOGETHER

by David R. Landis, President

**“I JUST DON’T KNOW IF WHAT I’M DOING IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE!”**

I’ve heard the phrase too many times in relating to staff, and I must admit I’ve said and thought the same thing. Fortunately, I am learning with experience and maturity that we have no reason to make such a statement if we are truly being faithful to whatever God has called us to, particularly if we are involved in anything having to do with sowing the seeds of God’s Word. While we may not be able to see progress on a daily basis, we can see that over time the Kingdom of God is being advanced. **By God’s grace and with your partnership, We Care Program is making a difference of eternal value.**

Vital to the ministry is a wonderful support network of prayer intercessors, donors, and Economy Shop employees. Prayer is the foundation



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**“I HAVE COME TO REALIZE THAT IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING FUNDS FOR THE IN-PRISON MINISTRY OF WE CARE, THE ECONOMY SHOPS HAVE THE POTENTIAL OF MINISTERING TO THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY. OUR EMPLOYEES, CUSTOMERS, DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS ARE NOT ONLY BUSINESS ASSOCIATES, THEY ARE PARTNERS IN MINISTRY!”**

**-GARY MAST, ECONOMY SHOP DIRECTOR**  
.....

of our work, and each month our office sends out almost 500 prayer calendars to intercessors around the country. *(If you’d like to pray for us, we’d be glad to include you on our list. Send your request to [noreen@wecareprogram.org](mailto:noreen@wecareprogram.org).)* We are also blessed with individuals, churches, and businesses who give of their treasure to support our chaplains, General Fund, and special projects. Many others around the country have encouraged us through their participation at our banquets, church services, or other special events. Locally, over 20 employees in three Economy Shops

## THANKFUL FOR EVERYDAY EXAMPLES OF GRACE

During a class he was teaching in the spring of 2010, We Care President Dave Landis mentioned that as a teenager he worked to pay his way through a private Christian academy. That statement got my attention. Throughout my own teenage years, any money I or any of my friends earned was spent on things we had no business doing. Several months after Dave’s class I became Chaplain Eskelinen’s clerk and found myself surrounded by and in daily contact with We Care volunteers. In this place so filled with hate, deception, delusion, and every sin imaginable, these volunteers offer hope, love, and proof that through God’s grace people can and do live what they preach. We see these young men coming in here day after day at a time when most people their age are trying to get ahead pursuing careers and things of the world. I am thankful for what they are doing within the prison system and in the surrounding community. *-D.H., Inmate*

## A PRAYER OF FAITH

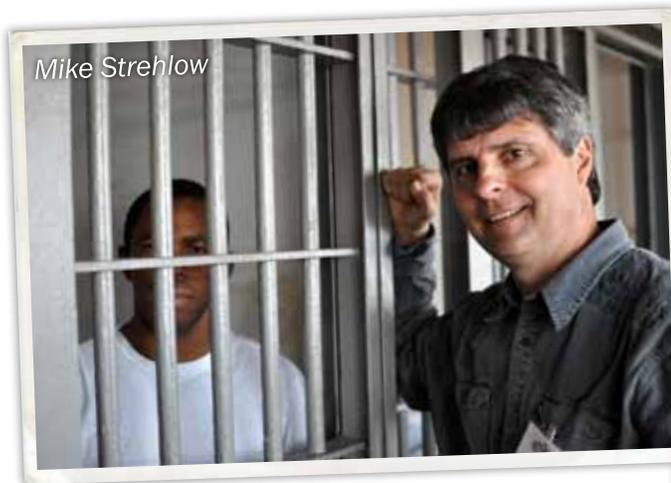
James showed me a letter he had just received from his wife. In it she stated that she needed \$6,000 in ten days to pay the landlord or she would be evicted. James said that she struggles with diabetes, so most of the money she makes goes toward medication. He hung his head in shame and frustration. "Blaine," he said, "I know that I am to be the provider for my wife. But because of my mistakes, I'm locked up and I can't." Not knowing what to do or where he'd get the money, we cried out in faith to God, asking Him to step in and do what felt impossible for James.

During the next couple of days the Christian brothers rallied around him, often spending time in prayer. At the end of the ten days the landlord sent the papers to the real estate agent to put the house up for sale. However, the following day the landlord had a change of heart and told James's wife that all she would need is \$550 and she could stay. She went to work, and at lunchtime a co-worker handed her a check for \$550. Only God could have provided in this way. Our faith has grown, and all the Christian brothers praised God together.

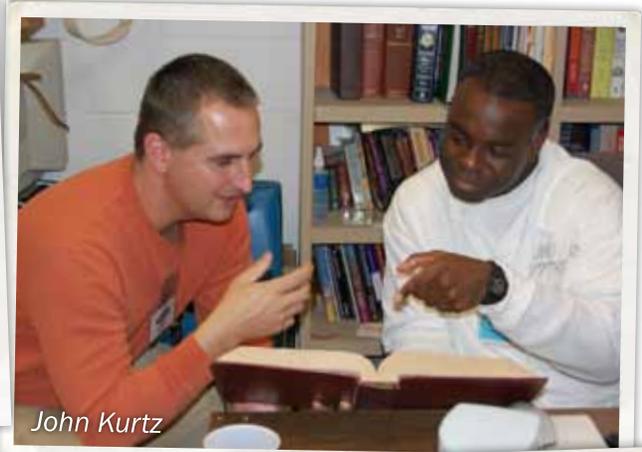
-Blaine Copenhaver, Chaplain



Blaine Copenhaver



Mike Strehlow



John Kurtz

bless the ministry by helping to provide a service to the surrounding area and contributing to our bottom line. It is our privilege to pray for and with each of these groups of ministry partners.

In addition, there are those who partner with us from time to time through short-term serving opportunities. These include hundreds of crusade volunteers, musicians, and evangelists, dozens of softball players, Read-A-Thon participants, short-term and local volunteers. Each one is being touched in a special way through his participation... and we are being greatly blessed in return.

At the heart of our mission are those we call staff. Currently, that number stands at forty, including

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"I'VE BEEN INSPIRED TOWARDS A CLOSER  
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND A GREATER  
LOVE FOR THE BROKEN AMONG US."  
.....

-JEREMY MILLER, CHAPLAIN



James Smoker

an administrative and support team making it possible for thirty chaplains, Discover interns, associates, and mentors to provide approximately 600 hours a week of in-prison ministry to 15,000+ inmates in 15 correctional facilities. Of course, our work would not be possible today were it not for the soil that was prepared by the 268 We Care alumni who have gone before us in the

last 40+ years. We rejoice in their labor and the work that God is continuing to do in and through their lives.

It takes all of the afore-mentioned partnerships to enable us to carry out the central focus of our mission: Proclaiming Christ and Discipling Inmates. Only eternity will reveal the overall impact of our service, but we have experienced and witnessed enough to know that men and women in prison are making first time commitments to Christ, being baptized, rededicating themselves to God, reading and studying God's Word, overcoming addictions, pursuing peace, evangelizing the lost, displaying Spirit fruit, loving the unlovable, and beginning the work of restoring broken relationships. We are also seeing men and women start new lives when released, becoming productive employees and

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"I MAY NOT HAVE SURVIVED LAST YEAR IF IT WERE NOT FOR PEOPLE LIKE WE CARE AND MENNONITE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP (ATMORE)."

-ERIC WASHINGTON, FORMER INMATE  
.....

.....  
"MY LIFE IS INFINITELY RICHER BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE I'VE LEARNED TO KNOW AND THE CHALLENGES I'VE FACED IN MY WORK WITH WE CARE PROGRAM."

-NOREEN HORST, ADMIN. ASSISTANT  
.....

citizens, joining and participating in church families, and continuing the process of becoming the husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters that God intended them to be.

Are we making a difference? **There is no doubt in my mind that if everything I just mentioned would come to a grinding halt, much would be lost.** It grieves me to think about it. But all indications lead me to believe God still has much for We Care to accomplish. Doors continue to open before us. New initiatives are being developed. In fact, I think we are on the verge of increasing our impact in ways we have not known or imagined. By God's grace and with your help, we are making a difference. Together. 🌍

## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2012

JANUARY 22-26

We Care Prison Crusade

FEBRUARY 29 - MARCH 6

The "Least of These" Tour

(see next page) →

MARCH 28

**NEW!** Day of Prayer and Fasting

JUNE 7-9

Softball Outreach, *Atmore, AL*

JUNE 15-24

**NEW!** GO Young Adult Outreach,  
*Atmore, AL*

SEPTEMBER 11

8-Month Discover Term Starts

SEPTEMBER 20-22

**NEW!** Ministering to the "Least of These" Conference, *Lancaster, PA*

## THE "LEAST OF THESE" TOUR

FEBRUARY 29-MARCH 6

FEBRUARY 29 - 6:15 PM

Dayton Mennonite Church, *Harrisonburg, VA*  
Banquet Reservations: 540-896-9250

MARCH 1 - 6:15 PM

Franconia Heritage, *Franconia, PA*  
Banquet Reservations: 215-234-4815

MARCH 2 - 6:15 PM

Yoder's Restaurant, *New Holland, PA*  
Banquet Reservations: 610-777-1337

MARCH 3 - 6:30 PM

Youth/Young Adult Missions Event,  
*Lancaster, PA, area*

MARCH 4 - 6:30 PM

Bittinger Mennonite Church, *Bittinger, MD*  
Info: 301-616-8113

MARCH 5 - 6:15 PM

Der Dutchman, *Plain City, OH*  
Banquet Reservations: 614-873-4257

MARCH 6 - 6:30 PM

Yoder's Kitchen, *Arthur, IL*  
Banquet Reservations: 217-259-1324

# THE LEAST OF THE LEAST: *THE PRISONER ON THE CROSS*



BY STEVE MARTIN  
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Recently I was impacted afresh by the story of the thief on the cross. This thief, who obviously had been a prisoner, was one of the last persons that Jesus spoke to before He died. This prisoner, out of hopelessness and desperation, cried out to Jesus in his last moments of life and Jesus responded with words of comfort and hope.

The man obviously didn't deserve such compassion. He was not going to have a chance to make things right or live a more productive life. He was done. It was over! Yet Jesus spoke to him some of the most hopeful words of His earthly ministry, "Today you will be with me in paradise." These words were reserved for the least deserving person of all – a condemned criminal.

Much of Jesus' ministry was focused on ministering to *the least of these*. Many of these people could go on in life and contribute in positive ways. The woman caught in adultery could go and sin no more; the Samaritan woman witnessed in her hometown of what Jesus had done, and Zacchaeus was able to bless many with his money. And then there were the innocent, the sick and the widows, who were in need due to no actions of their own. But this prisoner had caused his own problems and he would never have a chance to make things right. Talk about grace! Jesus extended it to *the least of the least of these*.

Many prisoners today find themselves in a similar situation even if they are not facing imminent death. Many have destroyed so much by their actions and do not have the opportunity to make things better. Can we extend grace and hope to these folks like Jesus did? Can we show them that Jesus simply loves and values them because they are, not because of what they do?

I love how Max Lucado in his excellent book, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*, writes about this prisoner. "And it also makes me smile to think that there is a grinning ex-con walking the golden streets who knows more about grace than a thousand theologians. No one else would have given him a prayer. But in the end that is all that he had. And in the end, that is all it took." Amen! 🙏

# NEWS

## SNOW DUMPS ON AUCTION

A number of our staff persons traveled to Pennsylvania for the annual Support for Prison Ministries auction. The big news was an early winter storm dumping lots of snow over the area just in time for the main auction day. Despite the odds, it turned out to be the best auction yet with a generous contribution coming to We Care Program! Thanks to all of you at SFPM and Farmersville Auction!



LaRonda Bender and Lauren Metzler (daughters of Marvin and Don) braving the auction snowstorm.

## GOD'S WORD GOING FORTH

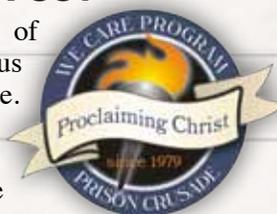
Doors continue to open for Mike Strehlow, Dean of the Fountain of Life Bible College. Starting at Fountain in 2005, Mike is now, with the help of local We Care staffers, facilitating classes at four Atmore area prisons. Since its inception, over 300 students have taken courses, averaging 40 students per semester at Fountain. In this year's fall semester, 95 students were enrolled at Fountain, JO Davis, Holman, and Century. Pray for God's Word to bear fruit and for resolution of logistical challenges at several locations.



Mike Strehlow

## WILL YOU PRAY FOR US?

Each year, hundreds of intercessors partner with us during the We Care Crusade. To receive our Prayer Intercessor Bulletin by email before, during, and after the event, please send your request to [noreen@wecareprogram.org](mailto:noreen@wecareprogram.org) by January 18.



## NOW ON FACEBOOK!

Facebook users, we invite you to "Like" us on Facebook to receive weekly news, updates, and happenings around We Care Program. Just enter We Care Program in the "search" window and look for our logo.





**Richard Heatwole**  
Atmore Work Center  
Atmore, AL

**Y**ears ago in a farm magazine, a cartoon called "Ada" depicted a farmer leaning on the fence looking at a cow and seeing a bucket of milk.

The cow, seeing the farmer, saw a bag of feed. Having been a dairy farmer for fifty years, I do not like the thought of being reduced to a bag of feed.

In prison recently a man came to me asking for hygiene supplies. I did not have any to hand out, and he responded with a disgusted "why not?" His verbal response implied that a good chaplain would do so. "Why are you not handing out any? Why doesn't your church give you some or give you money to buy some?" I felt like he had reduced me to a deodorant stick or maybe a tube of toothpaste. Is that the role of a chaplain?

Then I thought. How often do I reduce God to such simple things? An answer to prayer? A pleasure obtained? A want satisfied? A situation solved? God is indeed generous, incredibly generous! Maybe I would expect God to create the stars I see, but how about the billions I cannot see? So incredibly generous!

However, without a relationship with God my prayers reduce God to a sack of feed or a bucket of milk. God's incredible generosity gave me a Savior. Christ is not my entitlement, my ticket to "stuff." Christ is God's gift of grace. God has made it possible for me to have a relationship with Him again. Christ's work of redemption offers the potential for me to once again be created in His image.

*"Christ is not my entitlement, my ticket to 'stuff.' Christ is God's gift of grace."*



**David Bucher**  
Donaldson Corr. Facility  
Birmingham, AL

**"Y**ou've been talking to this convict way too long, Chaplain Dave!

It's been over an hour! If he can't get said in ten minutes what he's got to say, then it ain't worth saying! He's just trying to beat you out of something!"

I must have had an incredulous look on my face as the correctional officer berated me with these words. I know I felt a flood of very negative emotions! The resident became angry, totally losing focus on our deep discussion about his spiritual walk and life issues. I had no choice but to end our conversation that day, hoping to pick it up another time, and we have. The Lord continues to work in the man's life.

"Those inmates in the Faith/Character Based Dorms are just beating the system; they aren't really doing anything positive, just faking it!" [Gulp] This very un-warm blanket statement from the supervising officer brought another incredulous look to my face and served as a very cold, hard reminder of what many staff we work among think about the men in prison.

The prison staff aren't the only ones who make such strong comments. Inmates also speak harshly about each other. That guy is a box-breaker! He's a thief! He is a child molester! He's gay! There is plenty of negativity to go around. The absolute hardest thing for a man in prison to outlive (especially a man living for Christ) is his past. No one, staff or fellow inmates, seems willing to let a man's past die.

Sometimes as I sit quietly in various areas of the prison and watch the residents and staff, I get tears in my eyes. I can picture Jesus sitting in my seat crying, "How often would I have gathered you under my wings...but you were not willing!"

*From H*



**Marvin Bender**  
Fountain Corr. Facility  
Atmore, AL

# The Field

**“Elmer” participated in a recent Kairos weekend at Fountain.**

Kairos is a Greek word meaning “an occasion, that is, a set or proper time.” In a Kairos event at a prison, approximately one free world man comes in for every two inmates participating. The volunteers purposefully focus on sharing the love of God with the inmates. They teach numerous biblical topics including forgiveness and its importance. All participants gather for a teaching time after which they divide into small groups to reflect on

what was said and illustrate truths learned on a 2’ x 3’ posterboard. Home cooked meals and all the homemade cookies the men want are prepared and provided by volunteers from outside the prison. Believe me, thirty inmates can consume more than a few dozen cookies!

The first evening Elmer asked three men to pray that God would deliver him from tobacco. They prayed and God blessed him not only with the strength to refrain, but also by causing him to get sick of its smell! He testified of his deliverance—and still does, 2½ weeks later. Elmer also forgave his dad and others who mistreated and abused him earlier in life. He wrote their names on a piece of paper and then threw it into the “fire can” to symbolically forgive and release them. He was baptized not long ago and is preparing to go home soon (probably before you read this article).

I have the privilege of praying, counseling, doing Bible studies, and sharing encouragement with many inmates like Elmer. Both he and I desire your continued prayers.



**Jeremy Miller**  
St. Clair Corr. Facility  
Springville, AL

**“Do you believe that my failure in life has become the end of the road for me?”**

The question surprised me. I assured the inquirer that I believe there is more to his life than living behind bars and that his life has a purpose beyond his failure.

Although some of us live in complete denial of our failures, many of us are often faced with the shame and disgrace it brings. While we desire for our lives to be a success, we have to remember that in a fallen world, failure is a part of life. We often fail to realize that even as Christians we are not above failure. In 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 Paul introduces the likelihood of failure in our lives. He talks about the treasure of the gospel that we have in “earthen vessels,” which are our frail and fragile human bodies. God has entrusted His priceless treasure, the gospel, to human beings. What happens to human beings? They are troubled, distressed, perplexed, persecuted, cast down, but never destroyed. Though we are never totally knocked out, we are knocked down continually in life. In other words, we fail a lot.

*“Failing is not the issue. What we do when we fail is.”*

Failing is not the issue. What we do when we fail is. John Keates wrote, “Failure is in a sense the highway to success, inasmuch as every discovery of what is false leads us to seek earnestly after what is true, and every fresh experience points out some form of error which we shall afterward carefully avoid.” So whatever our failure may be, instead of being buried in its disgrace and shame, let’s make it a stepping stone to our success. Jonah failed miserably in his role and responsibility as a prophet. Yet God gave him a second chance to go to Nineveh, and 120,000 people repented before God.

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# Being Transformed... Together

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT



Our current team recently voiced numerous ways serving with We Care Program has impacted their lives. Recognizing that we don't serve alone, we thank you, our ministry partners, for giving us the opportunity to grow through our various roles at We Care. "My prayer life has been strengthened by seeing direct answers to my prayers concerning specific needs in the lives of inmates," writes Lester Huber. Anna Miller has been challenged to be a better steward of her time, while Dorsey McDonald states that serving with WCP has allowed him to "to break through denominational issues and opened many doors of opportunity."

We are being stretched spiritually. Dean Miller has been impacted "by interacting with and observing the Body of Christ in prison." For Jacob Potsander, serving with WCP has enlarged his view of the kingdom of God with all of its diversity. Sharon Bruckhart observes that she is "learning to truly lean on the Lord, knowing His timing is perfect

even when things do not make sense," and Steve Stoltzfus is learning that each individual is important to God, even the "least of these."

We are thankful for "family." Haskell Dunn states, "To serve with those who have a heart to give of themselves encourages me to do the same," and Bob Depew adds, "The great people I work with at We Care challenge me to grow in my own walk with Christ." For Sid Chapman, serving with WCP "has provided me both the opportunity and example of becoming 'an effectual doer' of God's Word to those in prison."

Del Yoder sums it up for all of us this way: "The first big lesson I learned when entering prison at a crusade for the first time was a clear vision...that these men are no different than I, really—that they are made in God's image and need a Lord and Savior, just as I do. That vision has never changed, only deepened and broadened, over the past thirty years or so. It changed my life, by God's grace, for the better. Hallelujah!"

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