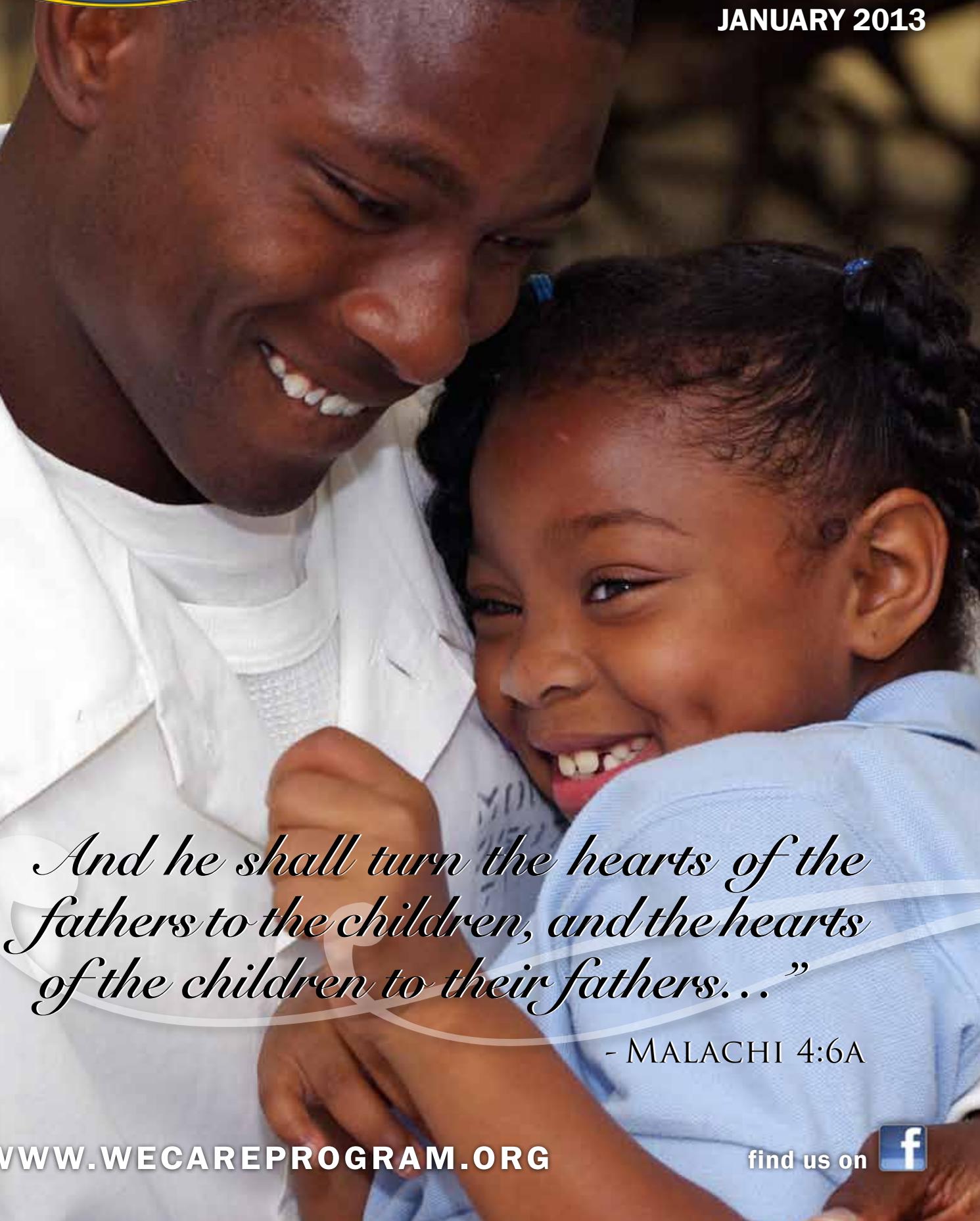




the connection

JANUARY 2013



And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers..."

- MALACHI 4:6A

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SHARING LIFE WITH INCARCERATED

BY DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT
dave@wecareprogram.org

It has been my privilege to teach hundreds of class sessions inside prison walls since 1999. Specifically, I have taught a number of fatherhood-themed courses and have always appreciated the bridge of opportunity this topic affords to reach across culture, religion, and other differences. There is something about talking with another man about his (and my own) children that breaks down pre-conceived ideas we might have about each other.

In May of 2012, I, along with a team of teachers and mentors, embarked on a 6-month Family and Fatherhood pilot program at Fountain Correctional Facility. We selected 25 applicants, all with at least one child age 19 or under. The class met twice weekly, touching on fatherhood, employment, and financial issues from a Biblical perspective. Due primarily to transfers, only 15 men were able to complete the program. A graduation ceremony was held on November 19 to celebrate their achievement. Several family members and some of their children attended the celebration, which included a homemade meal provided by the mentors and facilitators.

It was as we were setting up for this event that I noticed Tiffany.* She was darting back and forth across the little room, glancing through the single door every time she passed it. She was looking for her daddy. In the adjoining room with the other men, I was watching Stan.* It was obvious he was her daddy.

His excitement mounted as he anticipated the soon-to-be reunion with his little girl. He was looking for her, and she was looking for him.

At the outset of the program I hadn't been too sure about Stan. I didn't know if he had what it would take to complete the somewhat rigorous requirements of the 6-month program. But I did sense that Stan had a desire to be a better dad for Tiffany, and he desperately wanted to complete something he had started, most likely a foreign concept in his young life thus far. By God's grace and with a lot of encouragement, mentoring, Biblical teaching, and Spirit-filled moments, Stan persevered along with the rest of his classmates. We had come to the closing chapter of the program, our last meeting together. Now, finally, what had been promised at the beginning, an opportunity for the men to spend an afternoon with their children, was about to take place.

Once the officer had completed the visitor "shake-downs," the reunions began. I watched as Stan scooped up his beautiful little girl into his arms . . . both father and daughter with smiles as wide as can be. (The moment was captured in the photo on the front cover of this newsletter.) As I looked on, I thought to myself, "Every effort of the last six months seems like nothing in comparison to witnessing this



Dads

“ ...THIS PARTICULAR CLASS HAD A DIFFERENT FEEL THAN ANY OTHER THAT I HAVE TAUGHT OVER THE YEARS.”

picture of affection.” I caught myself just standing there watching, until eventually I had to turn away as a tear started trickling down my cheek.

I suppose the emotion was reflective of the fact that this particular class had a different feel than any other that I have taught over the years. It was during this 6-month program that my family and I experienced the hospitalization and eventual home-going of our youngest daughter. In fact, I missed six consecutive weeks of meeting with these men due to being out of the area for an extended hospital stay and then a funeral. But before and after that time, I experienced a depth of relationship and interaction that would not have happened otherwise. We walked through the valley of the shadow of death together. Yes, even Stan was a source of comfort and encouragement to me. I will forever be grateful for the genuine expressions of prayer and support that I felt from each of these brothers in white.

That brings me to the main point of this article. While listening to the concluding testimonies of our students near the end of our time together, one theme stood out to me. Though they were thankful for the curriculum and what they had learned, the prevailing theme was “Thank you for sharing your life’s journey

with us.” There was something about being able to walk through life together that meant the world to them. Sharing life experiences, joys, regrets, and burdens with each other. Testifying to the grace of God in all things. Just being present, and open, and honest, and transparent, and available. One by one, that’s what they thanked us for.

I could go on listing everything that We Care Program, by God’s grace, was able to accomplish in the last year. Or tell stories of changed lives and such. But what really strikes me as most important is the fact that our team of dedicated servants are sharing their lives with men or women in prison. Being available. Being present. Being real. Being Jesus.

We Care Program has an incredible opportunity before us. With over 40 years of chaplaincy service to Alabama prisons (and beyond), we are finding that, due to our long-standing reputation, opportunities and open doors exceed available resources. There is a particular need for radically devoted men and women who love Jesus and others to “be present” with men or women behind walls.

For many on our team this “being present” included a total change in life direction and often a relocation from another state to a door of opportunity

(continued on next page)



LOCAL MENTORS (LEFT), SID CHAPMAN (ABOVE), AND IRVIN MARTIN (RIGHT) PARTNERED TOGETHER TO FACILITATE THE PROGRAM



NEWS

N EW ARRIVAL

David and Mary Landis welcomed their fifth child, Matthew David, on December 4, 2012. Matthew is also welcomed by siblings Abby, Joshua, Benjamin, and Elizabeth. David serves as Staff Pastor and as Assistant Chaplain at Holman Correctional.



Matthew David

M OVING ON

As 2012 came to a close it was time to say good-bye to a number of We Care staffers. While not something we look forward to, we certainly want to bless our own during seasons of transition.

Dean Miller originally joined our team in 2006, first working on construction projects and then following those with chaplaincy ministry at Holman... particularly to the men on Death Row. Dean recently moved to Montgomery to follow other interests.

Jonathan Zook arrived in September of 2010 as a participant in the 7-month Discover program. After completing that term, Jonathan served as an assistant chaplain at Fountain and J. O. Davis Correctional Facilities until the end of this year.

Sheila (Schrock) Copenhaver began her time with We Care in 2006 with an initial one-year commitment to a book-keeping and graphic design position, eventually concentrating fully on graphics. (A young We Care chaplain with the last name of Copenhaver caught her eye early on, and Blaine and Sheila married on June 14, 2008.) Those who have followed We Care communications over the last six years can testify to a total transformation of We Care's "image." That can be directly attributed to Sheila's willingness to bless We Care with her talents.

A special thanks to each one of you for the way you offered yourselves to the mission of We Care through your various roles. We will miss each of you but pray God's blessing on your future plans.

*Names Changed

Volume XLV

Issue 1

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.

NEW TEAM MEMBER

Frank Gossett was recently welcomed to We Care's ministry team. Frank, the only person to complete the former We Care Timothy House Program, lives, works, and worships in the Atmore community. He is a member of Atmore First Assembly of God. Following an orientation phase Frank is planning to serve locally in an assistant chaplaincy role.



Frank Gossett

CONGRATULATIONS



We Care Chaplain Stan Schrock was recently awarded the "Employee of the Month" award at Century Correctional Institution. Stan has been serving as an assistant chaplain at Century since 2009.

Congratulations, Stan, and keep up the good work!

SPRING TOUR

Plans are underway for We Care's Spring Tour with The Glick Family Singers (OH). The following dates and locations have been confirmed.



The Glick Family Singers

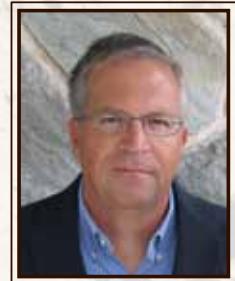
March 13 - Farmville, VA
 March 14 - Harrisonburg, VA
 March 15 - New Holland, PA
 March 16 - Franconia, PA
 March 17 - Honey Brook, PA (AM)
 March 17 - Myerstown, PA (PM)
 March 18 - Bittinger, MD
 March 19 - Wilmot, OH
 March 21 - Plain City, OH
 March 22 - Washington, IN
 March 23 - Arthur, IL

Be sure to keep your eyes open for updated information coming soon to your mailbox or on our website. We look forward to meeting many of you on this tour!

Stewardship Corner

by Steve Martin, Development Director

Last year was filled with much negativity: the election process, Super Storm Sandy, wars and conflicts, and the ongoing economic challenges that many people continue to face. Yes, there are many things to be concerned about. In spite of all that, I remain hopeful—even excited.



Over the past year I have had the opportunity to communicate with many of you. I have also had the privilege of visiting many of your churches. In addition, I have worked with a number of you on projects such as our annual tour, the "Least of These" Conference, and other events. Here are some of my observations:

- There seems to be a growing movement in our churches to reach out to the least of these in our local communities as well as all over the world.

- There is a growing interest in prison ministry, not only with We Care Program, but also in local prisons and aftercare programs.

- I continue to be amazed at the generosity of God's people despite a down economy.

- Last but certainly not least, I am excited about the next generation. Their zeal, compassion, and leadership challenge and encourage us all.

So, in many ways, 2012 was a good year and the prospect for 2013 is bright. Thank you for being a part of the We Care family. I hope to see you soon.



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Richard Heatwole
Atmore Work Center
Atmore, AL

rather casual or even desiring not to be identified with me. I honestly had not known him to be a Christian. As we engaged in conversation, I asked him if he really desired to be a Christian. I wanted to encourage him to be sincere in his commitment to Christ.

"Chaplain, do you know the definition of 'sincere'?" he asked. My eyes must have betrayed me because I did wonder what he was really asking. He continued, "I know there is a dictionary definition, and I have another one."

"Oh no," I thought, "how is he going to justify himself? This could get very interesting!"

"Well, the dictionary says sincere is to be honest and true. My definition is that sincere means to be a sin-see-er. One who can see sin, recognize it as sin, and refrain from it."

As I think about it, that is not a bad definition. To be able to see sin and recognize it as sin and then to refuse to participate in it is part of what it means to be a sincere Christian. Is that not what we mean when we say a Christian should "walk his talk"? Maybe this inmate did not justify himself. Let's pray he will become a truly sincere Christian.

That day I learned a new definition of sincere. I deeply desire to be "sin-see-er."



Wilma Mullet
Ohio Reformatory for Women
Marysville, OH

Recently I was approached by an inmate requesting a chaplain's recommendation letter for the parole board.

His intention is to impress the parole board that he has changed his life. He desires them to know he has become a Christian. He shared with me how he had a call to ministry. He told me of his Bible reading, prayer times, and his "good works." I had not seen this man participate in any chapel activity. Other than this particular encounter, he seemed

I know it's full of lies and written by men with their own slant on things."

Specific lies? "It says women on their monthly cycles are unclean and I KNOW that's not true! That women are second rate citizens and I KNOW that's not true!" (Imagine reading the Bible and having that as your main "take away"!) We talked briefly about God's health and sanitation laws given for the protection of His people in view of their wanderings in the wilderness without proper refrigeration and sterilization. We also considered Jesus' high value and care for women. She acknowledged reading briefly from the Old Testament and nothing from the New. She took her father's word for it.

Speaking of Jesus reminded her, "I want what they have, to feel and know Him. I have asked again and again. But nothing happens. Am I unreachable?" she sobbed. I knew from the desperation in her voice that God would not ignore her heart's cry.

After I explained some of the "rest of the story" of the purpose for Jesus' coming, she chose to believe. Leaving, after further discussion, she exclaimed, "I feel better!"

I admit teasing her. "Are you sure?"

She laughed out loud, "Yes, I do feel better!"

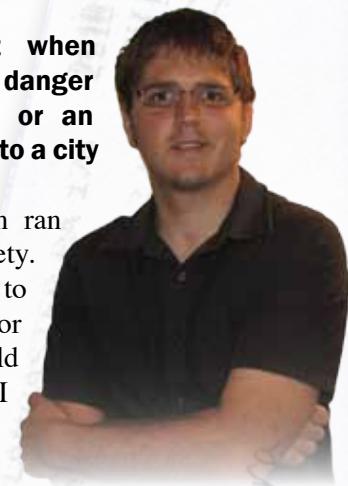
I know our faith is not based on feelings, but I also know from experience that the "peace that passes all understanding" comes only from Him and yes, thank God, we do feel it!

In the Old Testament when someone's life was in danger because of their actions or an accusation, they could run to a city of refuge.

Not long ago a man ran to the prison chapel for safety. Owing several large debts to other inmates, he feared for his life. He asked if he could stay in my office and if I would call security to escort him to a secure cell. As he waited, he began to confess his wrongs. He admitted that he got himself into a place he didn't want to be all because of his sinful actions. When the security officer arrived at the chapel, his accusers disappeared into a crowd of inmates.

When I think about the events that transpired, I find it refreshing that even with all his wrongdoing, caught up in playing prison games, this man knew where he could run to safety.

From



Blaine Copenhaver
Fountain Corr. Facility
Atmore, AL



David Buckner
Donaldson Corr. Facility
Birmingham, AL

The Field

to help provide the menu for our big meal.

(Dialing, ringing) "Hello."

"Hello, Ms. Yancey, this is Chaplain Dave. I'm calling to let you know of a special meal we are planning for the Faith Dorm residents. Do you think your church could provide banana pudding for 300?"

"Wow, 300, that's a lot of pudding, but yes, Dave, write us down. We will be glad to do it!"

"Hey, George, this is Chaplain Dave. I'm calling to ask..."

"Yes, Dave, we will bring sweet potato casserole and help serve. Thanks for asking!"

My calls continued and I secured other deliciousness—dressing and gravy, mac and cheese, green bean casserole, broccoli salad, dinner rolls, cranberry sauce, sodas, and pecan pies. As in past events, our local volunteers are gracious and willing to extend themselves in showing Christ's love to the residents.

The meal was a huge success. The men ate themselves to exhaustion. They felt so loved and cared for. Some of them haven't eaten meals like this for many years. But beyond the scrumptious turkey and fixins, godly words of witness were shared and special prayers prayed over the men as they were served.

So, whether you are a local or distant volunteer, a prayer warrior or financial partner from near or far, thank you so much for caring for the dear ones whom Jesus loves inside these prison fences.

Riiiiinnnnngggg!! "Chapel, this is David."

"Hey, David, this is Rick. I am calling to say my buddies and I want to deep fry turkeys for the Faith Dorm residents and the men on Death Row. We will bring 30 turkeys and plan to feed 300! Can you get other folks to bring in the rest of the menu?"

"Sounds great, Rick, but I'll need to first get the warden's approval."

"I know, Dave, but we really want to bring a wonderful Thanksgiving meal for the guys!"

"Thanks, Rick, I will get on it."

The warden approved, and I set off on a marathon of contacting volunteers

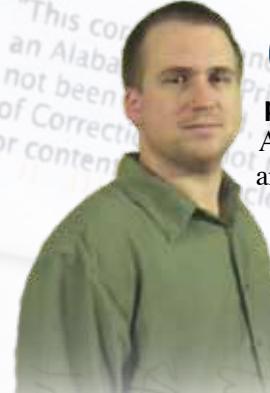
Every Thursday afternoon a small group of men meets for a discipleship class in E dorm. Our classroom is simple, located between the bookshelves in the library. Our purpose is to build up one another, study the scriptures, fellowship and have a good laugh or two.

We talk about things like what Jesus meant when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Or what does it mean when the Bible says, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

"That doesn't work in prison!" they say.

A few weeks ago when one of the men was suffering with an infection, I called for the inmate elders, and we had an anointing service. We rejoice together when we see answers to prayer like a letter arriving from a son or a daughter who hasn't been heard from in years or when one of the men, unable to attend his father's funeral, was given permission to fax a eulogy to be read at the service.

Each meeting is closed with prayer. And hopefully, because we met, each one was challenged to continue on and not give up but follow Jesus!



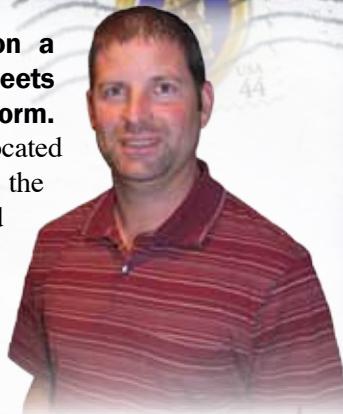
Jeremy Miller
St. Clair Corr. Facility
Springville, AL

One morning I arrived at the prison earlier than usual to prepare for a class in the chapel. As I was hurrying down the sidewalk, an older man approached me. He said that he was struggling through some issues and wondered if I had time to hear him out. I remember feeling impatient and very inadequate as I sat in a pew and listened to his story.

Knowing that most of the struggles he was facing came directly from his incarceration, I sat there feeling as though I could not relate or understand what he was going through. After talking a while, I asked him, "We have never really met before; why did you choose to tell me all of this?"

He replied, "You looked like a person I could trust!"

I have been pondering his response and how a first impression can alter the impact we have on a person's life. We as Christians are instructed in Matthew 5:16 to be the light of the world and to let our light shine so that men may see the good works of the Father and glorify Him. I was challenged that day. Regardless of my circumstances at any given time, as a Christian I am always required to represent the love that Christ has shown me.



David J. Landis
Holman Corr. Facility
Atmore, AL



A WORD OF THANKS

A MESSAGE FROM DON METZLER, VICE-PRESIDENT

don@wecareprogram.org

How often do we take things for granted that, if they were to no longer be available, we would really miss them? I must confess, I am guilty of that in many areas of my life. Lately I have been thinking about the quality of our two full-time secretaries who faithfully and cheerfully perform their duties day in and day out here in our office. Noreen Horst has been serving with We Care for eleven years, and Hannah Neighbors has been with us just over two years. These two ladies are a huge blessing to the entire We Care staff and to many others who visit or contact our office for one reason or another.

The duties they perform include processing all the checks and cash from donations and from sales at our three thrift stores, entering every donation into our database, entering the accounting and payroll data, writing checks to pay our bills and employees, personally answering

each phone call, responding to emails, printing reports, and organizing details and events. And that is just the beginning.

While everyone in this ministry has his or her part to play, some receive more acknowledgement than others. For example, you hear from our chaplains and our president quite often in these newsletters and at banquets and various other We Care functions. Other positions within the organization lend themselves to less recognition. Much essential behind-the-scenes work goes on that is no less important than work you hear more about. Thanks, Noreen and Hannah, for your faithful and dedicated work each day here in the office. Keep up the great work and may God bless you both.



Hannah and Noreen

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