



# the **connection**

Spring 2022



ReNew  
**HOPE**

Recent Activity and  
Continued Impact

[WWW.WECAREPROGRAM.ORG](http://WWW.WECAREPROGRAM.ORG)

find us on 



## ReNew Hope Florida 2022

By David S. Landis

ReNew Hope Florida 2022: smaller and simpler, but no doubt significant.

By early summer 2021 we had a pretty good idea that ReNew Hope in the Alabama prison system was not going to happen in January. Other than our chaplains, very few free world volunteers were allowed inside the Alabama prisons. Florida prisons, on the other hand, were functioning much more normally with faith based volunteers going in and out daily.

In September we decided to explore the possibility of expanding our ReNew Hope reach in Florida. Up until then Century CI was the only Florida prison regularly scheduled in the ReNew Hope event. Although two We Care chaplains are assigned to Santa Rosa CI, we had never really pursued holding a ReNew Hope event there.

### Smaller event actually expands outreach

After a meeting with Chaplain Wieborg of Santa Rosa CI, it was decided to move forward with plans to take ReNew Hope to Santa Rosa and to Okaloosa CI. Chaplain Wieborg was enthusiastic about the idea and was very willing to work with us to bring it about. This ReNew Hope was going to be smaller than normal. In recent years, pre-COVID, the event included 24-25 facilities, with all but one of those in Alabama, and involved around 325 participants. ReNew Hope Florida was going to be in three facilities and was limited to about 55 volunteers, more than half of whom were on the music teams. It would be simpler in that all the volunteers would be based in Atmore and the orientation would be held there as well. The event was going to be significant because we would be expanding ReNew Hope into two new

prisons, Santa Rosa and Okaloosa.

As ReNew Hope Florida commenced on Sunday evening, January 23, an enthusiastic crowd of volunteers arrived at the We Care headquarters. The fellowship around the evening meal seemed extra special after missing last year's ReNew Hope, and for many this would be their first time going back into any prison since the beginning of COVID. After being led in worship by the Mercy Road team, Alvin Landis shared a word from scripture, talking

about the savor of the Savior and challenging us to spread that savor to both inmates and correctional staff in the following week. Chaplain Wieborg from Santa Rosa CI was also present and led a brief PREA training to insure that everybody was approved to enter the prisons.

### A glimpse of the week in each prison

**Okaloosa** – Our volunteers were very impressed with the hospitality that was shown to them from the prison staff. The teams were restricted to being in the chapel only and spent about four hours there each day. Much of the camp was quarantined, which limited the number of men that could come to the chapel. However, what was lacking in numbers was made up with the quality of time

the volunteers had interacting with inmates. In the services some time was given to inmates to share how God was working in their lives. One man, a gang member, testified how an opposing gang member kept trying to provoke him to fight. He was so tempted to get his shank and stab the troublemaker, but instead grabbed his Bible. After a while the agitator realized that his victim could have beat him up and didn't, and they shook hands. At the end of the week, the chaplain extended an invitation to We Care to return





at any time for more programs. The inmates expressed appreciation as well.

*Century* – The men were very responsive to the music groups and speakers. One day an inmate ran into the chapel service in an attempt to hide from an officer. The officer followed him in and then decided to let him there in hopes that the Lord would get hold of him. It was also a blessing that our volunteers could visit in the faith dorms. Chaplain Irvin Martin reports that he witnessed so much joy and happiness among the men. On Thursday, out of the 66 men who attended the chapel service, about twenty responded to the altar call to seek God in a greater way.

*Santa Rosa* – This facility is divided into two large camps, the main unit and the annex. Most of the men in the main unit are in lockup and are unable to attend chapel services, which typically are held only on Sundays. Chaplain Wieborg was willing to try things that were never done before, such as taking music groups into the lockup areas and allowing groups of volunteers to do one-on-one visiting.

On the first day when the Glick family arrived in their bus, all the “white shirt” officials came out, assuming someone had made a wrong turn. When they realized the Glicks were one of the singing groups that was scheduled for the day, the response was one of welcome and hospitality. Each day a group sang for 25 minutes or so in one of the quads, and then the men spent some time going door to door before the group moved to another quad and repeated the process. The steel doors are very thick with only a small window to look through. The easiest way to talk and listen is through the small crack between the door and the wall. The men seemed very grateful that we showed up.

At the annex most of the men do have access to the chapel when they are not working or taking classes, so we held two services each day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The music group that was responsible for the morning service went to sing in the mental health quads in the afternoon. This was a lot of singing for the music groups, and at the end of the day they were tired.

### Overall Reflections

I am often struck by how the music we bring in during ReNew Hope is culturally worlds apart from what most of the men grew up with yet the effect it has on the compounds is amazing. I heard second hand a testimony of one who is known for being agnostic. “We might question how we know the existence of God, but we cannot deny what we felt as they were singing that music.”

One difference from other ReNew Hope events is that we had an evening rally instead of a morning rally. This was necessary because much of the programming in the prisons required an early morning start. The flip side to this was that we left the prisons by mid-afternoon, giving us ample time to be back at We Care for dinner and the evening rally.

As I reflect back over the week and how God brought the pieces together at just the right time, I am reminded of what an awesome God we serve. God gave us special favor with chaplains and wardens in the Florida Department of Corrections to do things that were new to the prisons, as well as to We Care. Special

thanks to Chaplain Wieborg and Warden Santiago at Santa Rosa CI for all their help, and thanks to the chaplains that worked with them. It does matter who’s in charge!





Friday, January 28, 2022

We Care,

*I want to share some words of encouragement this morning. God has done great things through you this week at Santa Rosa Correctional institution. The "Savor of our Savior" has spread to more than inmates this week. While waiting to get in this morning, I had a Classification officer tell me the good impact the volunteers have had this week. I had an open dorm Sergeant say she noticed a difference in her dorm. I had a conversation with [a] Colonel this morning and he said he was hesitant about singing in the dorms, but after watching he is a believer it is a good thing to let the volunteers sing. He said he would like more of it. Yesterday afternoon I was talking with the Wellness Teacher (she is in charge of promoting exercise, sports and recreation programs) and she thanked me for opening a path for her to do work in the CM dorms. Now that security sees the benefit she will be able to do some things she has been prevented from doing with the inmates. The librarian, and one of the education teachers were there also, and they thanked me for the difference they noticed this week. Your obedience has glorified our Lord this week, I know of no greater way to worship.*

*Once again I thank you and I encourage you with the word of our Lord:  
[Numbers 6:] 24 The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: 25 The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: 26 The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*

*Your brother in Christ,*

*Gary Wieborg*

*Senior Chaplain - F/C*

*Santa Rosa Correctional Institution Main Unit*

Entering some new prisons in Florida with We Care was a great privilege for our family. The administration and staff at each location gave a warm welcome. We were blessed to meet inmates we had known from other institutions and were encouraged to see them continuing to follow the Lord. One day we had a rare privilege of conducting a service in a psychiatric dorm. The warden was present for the entire service and was pleased with the positive impact on the men.

Our son Arlen had the opportunity to share his experiences in running 100-mile races. He related the discipline of training and racing to running and



winning in the Christian life and the importance of "laying aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us." (Hebrews 12:1) The illustration helped the inmates to recognize hindrances that keep them from experiencing a victorious Christian life.

At the conclusion of the services, many inmates came forward in brokenness, recognizing the need to lay aside the weights that were hindering their walk with God. This is one of the visible fruits of God's people praying. We extend a big thank you to all who prayed for the ReNew Hope outreach.

*By the Glick Family*



## Journey to Redemption

By Daniel Birky

### **"I guess this is my life now."**

Nothing on my first breakfast tray looked very appetizing, but I was hungry. It was hard to tell the difference between the piece of bread and the piece of "cake" just by tasting them. As I stirred the powdered milk into the little cup of ice water, I knew this would be my daily fare for a long time. Ten years was the minimum sentence for what I had done the day before. "Better get used to bland food," I thought to myself. "I guess this is my life now."

As I lay in solitary confinement that day, all I wanted was a Bible. My heart had grown far from God over the past six months. Man might insist on justice, but I wanted to spend time with the One who was full of mercy. I had grown up in church, and my parents had made me memorize verses when I was young. Now I was very grateful for that as I quoted every passage I could think of. It would be several days before somebody gave me an old Bible with the cover missing. I didn't know what all would happen in this next phase of my life, but I knew I needed God for the journey.

### **A Seven-Year Journey**

When I turned to Him, God was there. He gives peace and forgiveness to every broken soul that seeks Him. And I was broken. I realized that I was the kind of man that needed to be locked up, and only God could transform my heart. I was finally ready to do whatever it takes to let Him work. Like a Father, He loves His children too much to let them continue on in their sin. He had gotten my attention.

My legal journey ended up including two years of house arrest, two years of incarceration, and three years of probation. While in prison, I received a letter that my wife, Danae, was filing for divorce. Having been told that people like me never change, she wrote that she needed to move on with her life and focus on raising the children without me. It was a long road, but through this time, God used many people and many ministries to guide me closer to Him and to teach me what I needed to learn.

### **"Bloody Bibb"**

I was scared to go to prison. I had seen the movies.

Things don't go well for small white guys who can't fight. My lawyer didn't have much advice, except, "Try to get into a Faith Dorm, but that usually takes six months to a year to get in." I wasn't sure what a Faith Dorm was, but I decided to try for it. It turned out, it would change my entire prison experience, and the rest of my life.

Going to prison takes a while. You start out in county jail for a month, then in a quarantine dorm for a week, and then an intake dorm for another month before finally getting placed in your prison location. You don't know where

they are sending you until you are in the transport van. I didn't know anything about the different prisons, but when the other guys in the van realized we were being sent to Bibb County Correctional Facility, I could tell from the looks on their faces that this was not a good place to go. The stories about "Bloody Bibb" during the van ride didn't help.

I walked into the dorm of 106 men, and within the first 20 minutes,

I saw one guy with a needle in his arm, another guy getting beat up behind a set of bunk beds, and the "hump tents" in the back of the dorms to hide the homosexual activities from the guards and security cameras. When the first guy I talked to told me he had been there for 19 years, I realized that this was a whole different ballgame than the transitional places I had been through. For the 1,800 men at Bibb County Correctional Facility, this was home.

### **Prison Ministries**

The first thing I did upon arrival was to ask about the Faith Dorms. There was an honor dorm run by the facility, but it wasn't much better than the rest of the prison, an inmate told me. But the two Faith Dorms run by prison ministry volunteers, "That's where you want to go." I immediately applied, and by God's grace, I was moved there within a month of my arrival.

The Faith Dorm was a much better environment. Everyone was given a job, such as sweeping or cleaning the bathrooms for two shifts per week, but you didn't routinely have to worry about people stealing your things. Bedtime rules were enforced, but that meant you could get a good night's sleep.





But the best part was the classes. Prison ministry volunteers came in every day, and thanks to their time and sacrifice, my two years of incarceration turned into a time when God removed me from my career, my family, and the distractions of life, so I could focus on my relationship with Him. I learned life-changing truths about God, marriage, anger, addiction, and how my actions affected those around me. The program also gave me opportunities to serve others, teaching math classes to inmates working on their GED.

### **"You want them when they get out."**

I was also blessed to work in the prison chapel. Inmates are not allowed in the chapel whenever they want. They can only enter for services. And virtually all of the services happened only because free-world volunteers came in to lead them. Without outside prison ministries, there would have been no more than one service per week. But thanks to the faithfulness of prison volunteers, at Bibb we had services every day.

However, not all prison ministries are the same. Many of them just wanted to come in, preach to the inmates, and go home, having done their good deed for the day. Prison is a place where inmates have been rejected by society, and most of us just want to feel accepted. While we appreciated anyone who would take the time to visit, we could tell who truly cared about us as people. One such ministry was actually told by a prison chaplain, "We have dozens of ministries that want to come in and preach to the inmates, but you are the only one that wants them when they get out!"

### **We Care**

As January came, I could sense from the other inmates that the upcoming ReNew Hope Conference that I saw on the upcoming calendar was a little different than all of the others. Guys who never went to chapel services were sincerely looking forward to it. When the first service started, the chapel was completely filled to its capacity of 250, and the line of men still waiting to get in were sent back to their dorms to try again the next evening.

The service was amazing. Prison is an environment with all adult males, but most of us have families and children on the outside. Seeing the families singing together reminded me of my children, and made me feel like I was home.

The gospel was preached, and Loyd Gingerich made his

way through the entire auditorium, spending a few moments praying individually with each man. Many inmates hadn't seen their fathers in years, and it felt like a father's blessing when Loyd put his hand on their shoulders and prayed for them by name. I don't think I stopped smiling the entire service.

Another thing that set We Care apart from the other ministries was that they didn't just go to the chapel: The volunteers visited each one of the dorms. There were 1,800 inmates at Bibb, and the chapel holds 250. You don't have to be good at math to realize that most inmates never attend a chapel service. I appreciated We Care for taking the extra effort to reach those who were never reached by any of the chapel-only ministries.



"The visitation team has been eating suppers with us and mingling with the inmates during chow," I wrote in a letter to home that week. "It is special to see them wanting to come here and see what our life is like as much as they can. It makes us feel like they really care."

### **Since Prison**

When I was released, I moved back to Illinois to live near my parents. Finding work was hard. I applied many places for six months, and every rejection felt personal. In theory, everyone wants ex-convicts to find work somewhere and become productive members of society, but in reality, people don't want ex-

convicts working beside them at their own place of employment. I was discouraged. I was glad to be out of prison, but getting out did not solve all my problems.

However, I continued to be faithful to church and attended weekly Bible studies to stay close to the Lord. When an opportunity came to share my testimony with the We Care volunteer team from Arthur, Illinois, I was glad for the chance to encourage them in their ministry. I mentioned in my story that I was still looking for work. Not long afterwards, David Yoder, one of the team members who had met me at Bibb two years earlier, hired me to help with their business. (I found out later that another We Care team member would have hired me if David hadn't offered first.) I have been with I-57 Roofing for three years now, and the Lord has greatly blessed my life through them. My dad participated in ReNew Hope after I was released, and it was special for him to go to Bibb





and pray over my old bunk, thanking God for His protection during my incarceration.

Although my marriage was legally over, God led me to not give up on it. God convicted me of the selfishness and wrong motives that were a part of my life for so long. He worked on my heart, not only to do the right actions, but to serve others for the right reasons. Through video calls and occasional visits, I was able to spend time with my children, help them with homework, and send freezer meals home with Danae.

Almost three years after my release from prison, Danae brought my children to Illinois for another visit, but this

time she wanted to talk with me. We spent several hours together that evening, and despite what others had told her about people never changing, my lifelong closest friend could tell that God had brought about true changes in my life. We began talking on the phone every day, and on January 1, 2022, we were married once again.

God has truly blessed my life. I'm still not sure I can say I am glad I went to prison, but I definitely would not want to go back to being the person I was before I went there, and I am thankful for prison ministries like We Care that God used along the journey.

## Journey to Mutual Benefit

By David Yoder, Co-owner of I-57 Roofing

In 2017 I went to ReNew Hope in Alabama for the first time. My father had participated previously for several years, so I heard a lot of stories about We Care and what happens inside the prison. Going as a volunteer myself, I had a lot of mixed emotions, knowing this was the same prison my father went to as a volunteer and a lot of the inmates would remember him as the guy that played harmonica.

Entering the prison on that first day, we went directly to the chapel. We visited with the chaplain a few minutes, then a number of inmates came over and wanted to socialize. They wanted to know our names and get us coffee, water, or whatever we needed to make us feel welcomed. A few inmates were on the stage playing music, so some of us went up and introduced ourselves. I walked over to the gentleman that was playing piano. After telling him my name I told him I'm from Illinois. His name was Daniel Birky, and to my surprise he was also from Illinois. I certainly wasn't expecting to meet someone that lived an hour and a half from me! During that week I saw Daniel every morning, but I didn't interact a lot with him.

Every morning we went to the chapel where Loyd Gingerich led the Bondage to Freedom seminars. I really enjoyed that; it was a great way to interact with the inmates. One of my biggest fears of going into prison was that I didn't have great Bible knowledge and I just knew I would be asked a question I had no idea about. The longer I was there the more I realized the inmates aren't looking for someone with a lot of Bible knowledge; they are looking for someone that just listens and that they can trust.

Two years later I had the opportunity to go to ReNew Hope again. That year Daniel Birky's father Roger went along, and by then Daniel had been released from prison. On the trip down Roger began sharing how Daniel was having all these interviews with various companies. Everything would go well until they did a background check and then they wouldn't hire him.

At the time our company really needed an office manager. Roger mentioned that Daniel could interview immediately. I was thinking we wouldn't be able to afford a guy with his level of knowledge. After returning home from Alabama, I talked to my brother Marcus, who is co-owner with me in the company. I told him about the situation and how Daniel applied for different jobs and no one was willing to hire him. We gave it some thought and prayer, and two weeks later we had Daniel come for an interview.

In the interview it seemed like God opened a door for our company even though Daniel had no experience in the roofing industry. It was up to us whether we would walk through that door. Daniel was exactly the guy our company was looking for; he had tremendous knowledge about the bookkeeping side of things, which was our company's biggest challenge at the time.

Daniel has been employed full time with the company since 2019 and is one of our biggest assets. His work ethic and his eagerness to learn new things and take advantage of the opportunities in front of him are remarkable. Marcus and I believe since we hired Daniel there has been a protection over our company that is extraordinary. We give God all the glory.

# NEWS

## GOOD BYE!

Serving first at Timothy House and then at Mobile Metro Jail, Joe Kolb has been a part of the We Care team since 2010. Recently he retired from regular ministry at the jail, though he hopes to continue volunteering occasionally. We'll miss you, Joe, in the We Care family, but we wish you all the best!





## "TRAILER GUYS" UPDATE

### A MESSAGE FROM JAMES SMOKER

In prison we are frequently asked the question, "Chap, I need a home plan. Can you help me find a place?" An inmate in this situation usually has either lost his family while incarcerated or doesn't want to go back to the same community—trying to avoid old friends.

At We Care we have been able to provide a "landing place" for some that need a place to live. In the Spring 2021 issue of the newsletter we shared about four men residing at the We Care trailer. Two of the four, Bruce and Raymond P., have since moved on to other communities and jobs. Brian passed away in August 2021, and Walter continues to reside with us.

In the last year four others came to the trailer as rooms became available. In February 2021, Surlo joined us after spending 20+ years in prison. He is currently working a job at Escofab, a welding/fabrication shop. Billy moved in when he was released in the fall of 2021. He opened a small engine repair shop and stays busy with that. Raymond S. also joined us in the fall



of 2021. He is employed by Popeye's, a fast food restaurant. The latest one to join us is Stafford, who was released in February 2022 and is employed at Alto, a plant that manufactures car parts.

Each one of these "trailer guys" is assigned a We Care mentor to assist him as he adjusts to life in the "free world." Most importantly we strive to support and encourage them in their spiritual journey, holding them accountable and being available as they go through the good and the tough times. Each of them is very thankful and appreciative of We Care giving them a second chance.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

3493 Highway 21  
Atmore, AL 36502-4669  
Phone: 251-368-8818  
Email: [wecare@wecareprogram.org](mailto:wecare@wecareprogram.org)

