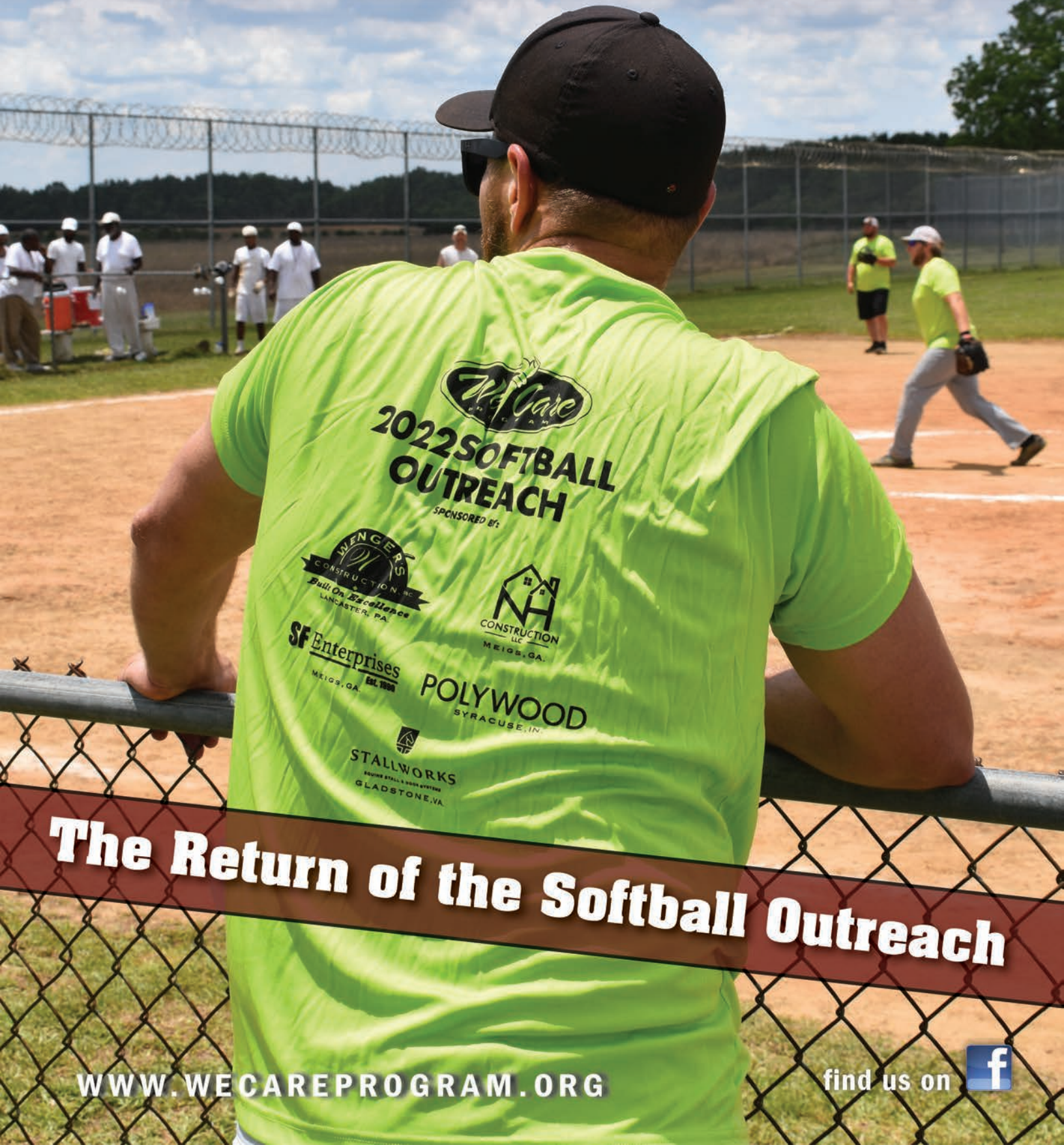




# the connection

Summer 2022



## The Return of the Softball Outreach

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# The Return of the Softball Outreach

By Kevin Kennell

Not since the spring of 2019 had We Care Program been able to host the Softball Outreach in the prisons of Alabama. We are so grateful the doors opened and the Alabama Department of Corrections worked with us to get teams into a number of institutions again on May 12-14, 2022. Excitement was high as the players gathered after a couple years off. Around 30 men participated as volunteers this year, playing a total of about 24 softball games at seven different institutions. Since the death row yard at Holman Correctional is too small for softball, at that facility the volunteers played volleyball instead.

Some might wonder, "Why a Softball Outreach in prison?" For one thing, it gives volunteers an opportunity to enter into these facilities in a way they are comfortable with: playing softball. I have talked with many volunteers over the years who expressed that playing softball is the only way they were willing to go into prison, but after getting inside and interacting with the men during the games, they realized God could use them to minister to inmates. They also realized there are men of God in prison that can and do minister to them. I have been amazed at how some of the volunteer ball players have stepped into their calling to reach out to incarcerated men just through the avenue of softball that We Care provided. That is one reason we hold this event.

Another reason we play ball in prison is that it gives the men behind the fences something different to focus on for a couple days. When the "free world" and prison ball teams take the field to battle it out, the atmosphere changes. For a few hours, there are no fences, no dorms, and no cells. It is just a day outdoors, playing ball with the guys! Everyone loves a day at the ballpark! Laughter, smiles, energy, competition, and overall good vibes fill the

air as we play ball and drink Gatorade. Many memories are shared of "back when I was young," as each one reminisces about their younger days playing baseball.

All of these things help to set up the real reason for holding a Softball Outreach—to share the love and hope of Jesus Christ! After each game, everyone meets at the pitcher's mound for a time of sharing and prayer. This is usually a very sweet time. Hardened ball players soften a little bit as Scripture is quoted, stories are shared, challenges

are given and prayers are prayed. But mostly, Jesus is shared. When the men hear that the reason these games are happening is to show the love and hope of Christ, trust me, they are listening. Why would volunteers travel from many states away in order to spend their time playing ball in an Alabama prison? It is to give hope and to let the men know that in spite of everything they have done wrong in life, God still loves them and they are not forgotten.

I wish everyone would have the opportunity to participate in this outreach, although I know that is not possible. I am so thankful to those who can and do come. I am also so thankful for the businesses that sponsor this event. Without both of these integral parts, it just wouldn't happen. In addition, I am

grateful for the cooperation from the Alabama Department of Corrections and each one of the staff who help with the logistical details.

In the book of Ephesians we are told about the armor of God. We are told that we need to have the Word of God ready to be used, the shield of faith raised to block the attacks of the enemy, and so on. Sometimes in the battle we also have to pick up a few extra parts. Maybe it is a softball bat and a glove. Maybe it is the tools of your trade. These extra parts are not to be used to attack people, but rather as ways





to open up conversation about our Lord and Saviour, for whom we are ambassadors. Every day we are in this battle;

we can't choose to sit it out for a while. We have to be engaged!

If you are curious as to how a ball bat can be used in Kingdom building, I encourage you to join us next year for Softball Outreach in the prisons of Alabama. You will see the ministry of reconciliation happens in the infield of a ball field and on the bench on the sideline. I can't guarantee that you will hit a homerun, but I can guarantee that you will



be affected for life. I also know that you will affect someone else. In the game of life, a lot of men have experienced the first

and second out in their life, and many are on the brink of out number three. However, God can set them free! God can make a new creation out of the old mess! We get to enter their life and let them know that it isn't time for the third out; it is time for a New Inning, a New Start, a New LIFE in Christ. Let's continue to pick up our tools, our bats, our armor, and fight this battle! Don't quit! Play ball!

## Softball Gives Opportunity to Share Hope

*By Benjamin Hess*

"Thank you so much for what y'all do. This is one of the only times we get to feel like real people in here." I've participated in every We Care Softball Outreach for the last decade, and I can't tell you how many comments I've heard over the years that echoed this sentiment from an inmate at Fountain Annex. But the way this gentleman worded it this year was powerful. It's going to stick with me for a long time.

I'm not much of a public speaker. I do my best, when necessary, but that's not the way God has gifted me to share His love. Playing ball, however, comes naturally to me. I've been on a ball field since I could walk. I like to think I'm a pretty solid ball player, and I can hit a softball a pretty good distance. That gives me a unique opportunity to connect with people that may not be likely to walk into a chapel. I love that We Care gives me a platform to use my ball skills to show love to men who need it so desperately. Sports are great at breaking down barriers between people. Even just a simple "Roll Tide" will get the inmates talking in a hurry.

I love having one-on-one or small group conversations with the guys, but I also muster up the courage to give the devotional at the pitcher's mound once or twice during the weekend, because I know my story resonates with a lot

of the guys. I've battled anxiety and depression at times throughout my life. I am fortunate enough to have people in my life who have lifted me up and pulled me out of the negative cycles I found myself in. Not everyone is that fortunate. For many of the guys we encounter during the Softball Outreach, that's a big part of the difference between where I am and where they are. I consider it a privilege to get to use my softball gifts as a way to be able to deliver the message that there's hope. There's redemption. There's a second chance. Those guys face a staggering challenge every day of staying positive and keeping their nose out of trouble, and I count it a blessing to get to encourage them in that walk.

The Softball Outreach weekend is a grind. Each team often plays 10-15 ballgames over the course of two and a half days. Yet it's a terrific opportunity to experience a glimpse of what life is like for men on the inside. I always come away from this event incredibly sore, but spiritually energized. It's immensely rewarding to get to spend time interacting with and encouraging other ballplayers, regardless of which side of the fence we live on. I want to thank everyone who works so hard to make it happen every year, and I encourage anyone to sign up, regardless of ball playing ability.



# CMCA Summit 2022

By Don Metzler

On May 27 and 28 most of the We Care staff and chaplains attended a summit hosted by Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association (CMCA). According to Jerry Blassingame, the outgoing President of CMCA, "The CMCA Summit is unique in bringing together a diverse population of individuals and organizations engaged in correctional ministry, all with a purpose to learn, grow, and be refreshed for ministry."

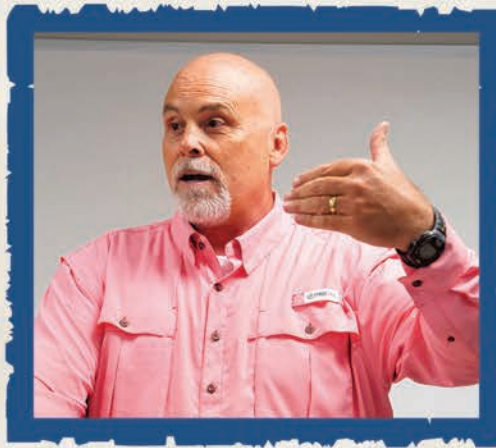
Around 200 people gathered together in New Orleans, Louisiana, from all over the US and Canada for this

conference. All of them are connected in one way or another to prison ministry. Plenary sessions with gifted speakers inspired us to be faithful to the calling God has given us. Various workshops, including one led by our own Chaplain Carl Carpenter, focused on specific areas of prison ministry. Times of fellowship provided opportunities to learn to know others who are also serving God in correctional settings. It was a privilege for the We Care staff and chaplains to participate in this event, and we look forward to attending next year's annual CMCA Summit in Wheaton, Illinois.

## Ministry – One Person at a Time

By Carl Carpenter

One-on-One Ministry. These words can be both exciting and terrifying at the same time. This was the topic I was given to lead a workshop for the recent Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association (CMCA) Summit. I say that one-on-one ministry can be terrifying because we may have fears of how to start a conversation, fears of rejection or awkward moments. What if they ask me a question I can't answer, or what if I lead them in the wrong direction?



In Acts 1:8 Jesus told the disciples, and us, that we will be His witnesses to the ends of the earth by power from the Holy Spirit. Later in Acts 8, Philip was in Samaria with Peter and John and awesome things were happening. People were listening intently to the Gospel, physical and spiritual healings were taking place, and it was an atmosphere of great joy! Philip was in an exciting place when the angel of the Lord told him to go to a lonely desert road to talk to a single man, while sending Peter and John to other villages. One-on-one ministry often takes us off the highway to a rural back road, away from the crowds to a single soul. Philip responded to the call with energy and zeal and did not look at one soul as insignificant. Philip met the Ethiopian where he was, reading God's Word, built on that and shared the Good News of Jesus with him. The Ethiopian was baptized, and his life was never the same!

*Acts 8: 26-39. 26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in*

*charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the*

*passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:*

*"He was led as a sheep to slaughter;  
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
So He does not open His mouth.*

*33 "In humiliation His judgment was taken away;  
Who will relate His generation?  
For His life is removed from the earth."*

*34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch \*said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37 [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."] 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.*



Some of the keys we learn about one-on-one ministry from this text are these: be available, the Holy Spirit is involved, God's Word is powerful, lives are changed off the beaten path. Fears of one-on-one ministry are relieved when we share God's Word because His Word is powerful and perfect. Fears are also relieved when we realize the Holy Spirit is active in our encounters.

Being a good listener is important in one-on-one ministry. When we listen, we earn the right to be heard. What are some characteristics of a good listener? Being relaxed, eye contact, non-verbal responses—such as nodding the head and raising the eyebrows. It is important to be genuinely interested and alert. A good practice is to repeat back to the person to clear up any misunderstandings, "What I'm hearing you say is..." A good listener remembers certain names and facts; a good listener asks God for wisdom (James 1:5); a good listener listens with their heart.

Jim is young and a little high strung. We started talking about legal situations, getting money to buy a motorcycle and



We Care personnel who attended the CMCA Summit

other miscellaneous things. BUT THEN he mentioned missing his mother, his child being moved to another state and the uncertainty of what he will do when he gets out of prison. Being patient in listening helped get to the real reason Jim wanted to talk that morning. We prayed specifically for the things on Jim's heart, and that time together opened the door for additional spiritual conversations.

To be effective, one-on-one ministry involves a lot of prayer. When someone says, "Pray for me" or "Pray for a certain situation or family member," if you can, stop, get a few details and pray with them on the spot. Another possibility is to write down the situation so you don't forget, or set a time that you can meet with them later to pray together.

Whether in prison or in the free world, we are witnesses of Christ. Sometimes ministry for Him may be along the "highway" with crowds of people. More often than not, however, it consists of conversations and prayer on a "rural back road" with one person at a time.

## NEWS



Maria Joy Kennell



Daniel Earley



Tracy & Kristi Benner

## CONGRATULATIONS!

Welcome to the world, Maria Joy! Thrift Store Director, Nathan Kennell and his wife Deborah welcomed their baby girl on Thursday, June 2, 2022. She is already so loved by her parents and adoring big brother.

## NEW EMPLOYEES

We Care is blessed to have a new chaplain on board! Daniel Earley, from Gulf Breeze, Florida, joined our team in May and is currently serving at multiple Alabama and Florida prisons. Tracy Benner,

who has been an associate for nearly three years, transitioned to being a part-time employee on May 1st. Tracy continues to work at Fountain Annex where he had been volunteering.



# From the Field

## Marcus Freed

London Corr. Institution  
London, OH



**W**hat am I, as a Jesus Follower, doing leading a multi-faith dorm that has Wiccans, Buddhists, Muslims, Native Americans, Rastafarians, Asatru, Five Percenters, Pagans, Native Americans, Jewish, Christians, plus others? I have often asked myself that question. I have also wondered if Queen Esther ever asked herself, “What am I doing in the palace of a foreign king?” She has been my inspiration to stay right where I am. In retrospect, I can see how God was preparing me for this opportunity to be a part of building His kingdom in prison.

Did my journey in prisons happen by accident? No, it was a “God incident.” In the late nineties, a friend asked me, “Marcus have you ever thought of going to prisons?”

“No,” I replied, “I never thought of it.” Even though I lived within a mile of a prison.

That was the beginning of my God venture in prison. In 1998 I started leading a weekly Bible study which went on for 14 years. All the while God was unknowingly preparing me, building rapport with the London Correctional staff, for my future involvement. At the same time I continued working as a fourth-grade teacher and as a guidance counselor in the London public schools. It was great preparation for the multi-faith dorm.

Retirement from the public school system in June of 2011 opened the door for the chaplain at London Correctional to recommend, to the Horizon Prison Initiative Director, my helping in that organization. I was asked to be a contractor as their volunteer coordinator.

Since then London Prison has been the open door to give me multiple opportunities to have Spirit-led God moments. I want to share just one example of the blessings of Kingdom building. Prior to salvation, Silas lived 15 years being quite a nasty prison creature. In 2012 his cell mate signed him up for a Kairos weekend, and grudgingly, Silas attended for the food and cookies. That is where he found new life in Christ. A year later he joined the Horizon program. After graduating in June 2014, Silas became a leader in the program that fall. Unexpectedly, in November 2014, after 18 years in prison, Silas received a parole to return to his home country of El Salvador in December 2014. Three months later I joined him for our first Joni and Friends wheelchair mission trip. We both became wheelchair mechanics. Silas is a special brother in Christ

who has now completed ten trips with me. God has opened the door for me to also go to the hills of El Salvador to meet his church and now call his church and family mine also.

Last year in May, our Horizon staff returned inside the prison after COVID. For the preceding year, our only contact with our men was a biweekly newsletter to communicate encouragement and information to them. June 2022 completes our rebuilding year after COVID, and as this summer finishes, we will start our tenth regular cycle of Horizon in London. I covet your prayers as collaboration with staff and residents of multiple faiths continues. I trust my Master in “such a time as this.”

## Fawn Jacobs

Tutwiler Prison for Women  
Wetumpka, AL



**Y**ou are better than anything you have ever done (and you might add, or experienced). This truth was shared at a recent prison chaplains’ conference. Through working in prison ministry and by experience, I’ve learned that root problems often go back to past trauma, usually starting in childhood. This in turn can lead to various addictions by trying to cover the pain. BUT, we don’t have to stay there! Praise God! The key is Jesus and getting that root yanked out, allowing Him to pour in healing.

Recently, the lesson in one of my prison classes was on Barabbas. We talked about how Jesus took his place on the cross and the place of all of us, how Jesus felt every pain, emotion and temptation we have ever faced and how His sinless blood covers all. There is no record of Barabbas’ response, but one thief on a cross and at least one soldier that day made a clear choice to follow Christ and secure their destiny. At the end of the class period, I asked the women if there is a favorite verse they hold onto that helps them through. One lady shared Psalm 27:10, “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.” That was so powerful, especially because there was another in the class who had gone through a similar experience as the one who shared. And the beauty of that is neither knew the other’s story.

Knowing others understand where we’ve been and are is healing. We are also not alone! Isaiah 61:1-3 speaks of how Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to open prison doors to those who are bound, to give beauty for ashes. Are we willing to





## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

**David S. Landis, Chaplaincy Director**

Many are asking whether things are back to normal. Well, how do you define normal? With perhaps just a few minor exceptions, it feels like we are living and working in a post COVID world in the prison system. In the last several months there have been short quarantines in a dorm or two here and there, but for the most part it does feel like we have moved past the COVID restrictions.

Most of the We Care chaplains have been back in the prisons since the fall of 2020, doing one-on-one ministry and leading classes and services. We are very thankful for these opportunities. Many of our ministry partners in other states have not been as fortunate, and only within the past few months have other ministries also been allowed back into the prisons in Alabama.

However, some challenges remain. For several years the Alabama Department of Corrections has struggled with severe staff shortages. Many prisons are operating with less than half of the recommended staff for running a prison. Many of our chaplains are working in prisons that

presently do not have a state chaplain. This often puts our staff in challenging situations when it comes to advocating programming and communicating chaplaincy concerns with the Department of Corrections.

Florida prisons are experiencing some staffing issues as well. Occasionally, religious volunteers have been told they cannot enter on a particular day because of a staff shortage. Aside from that, Florida has been more intentional and deliberate about trying to get volunteers back into the prisons. Because of this effort to recruit volunteers, there are openings for volunteer chaplains at many Florida prisons.

So are things back to normal? Not really. I do not expect that things will ever really look just like they did three years ago. Still, it does seem like we have a wide-open door for ministry in Florida and in Alabama. Do you have a stirring in your heart to make Christ known to those in prison? Today we have open doors, tomorrow is unknown. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38) To learn more about prison chaplaincy, give us a call. We would be delighted to start a discussion to see how you can be a part of fulfilling the great commission in the correctional setting.

surrender our ashes, our brokenness at the feet of Jesus? He's waiting. What a tradeoff! The trials we go through are not meant to destroy us but to grow us, to build a testimony for ministering to others, sharing how God brought us through and made us overcomers. So never, never waste the pain. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4) There is purpose we may not see now, but down the road, like I, you may.

### Eddie Miller

Santa Rosa Corr. Institution  
Milton, FL



**I** thank the Lord for the opportunity He has given me, after being incarcerated for many years, to be able to go back into prisons and be used of Him to minister the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It has been an awesome experience for me, seeing men and women being transformed by the power of the Gospel and being set free in their minds. Even though

sometimes there were challenges, I would always reflect on the challenges that my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ faced during His ministry. Therefore, I was encouraged in the Lord my God and compelled to press on. Proverbs 18:16 says that our gift makes room for us and brings us before great men. I'm a living testimony that the gift of God that He placed on my life has made room for me in the prison system and brought me before great men and women. Not only are the inmates being ministered to, but the administrative staff as well.

What's really a blessing to me, and what really encourages me, is when someone says, "I remember what you said a month or two ago." One brother told me that he was sleeping and he heard my voice. Others have told me that when they were going through something, they remembered some of the things I said to them and that helped them through their situation.

This call to go back into prisons came on my life while I was incarcerated. God is doing what He promised me He was going to do if I stayed faithful to Him. I am and I will. Continue to lift me up in prayer. God bless you.





## SPURRING ON ONE ANOTHER

A MESSAGE FROM DON METZLER, PRESIDENT

[don@wecareprogram.org](mailto:don@wecareprogram.org)

As I reflect back on my time at the CMCA Summit in New Orleans, a couple verses from Hebrews 10 come to mind. Verses 24 and 25 say, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Often these verses are quoted in the context of Sunday church services, but I believe they also apply to other areas of life and ministry. The recent gathering of prison ministry laborers is one such occasion.

Serving the needs of incarcerated men and women can be a draining task, so it was a blessing for

We Care staff and chaplains to be able to take a few days to recharge in soul, body and spirit. Hearing stories of God's faithfulness to others in similar ministry work and being challenged to persevere will help us better serve those God has called us to reach out to behind the fences.

What about you? Who do you need to connect with to be recharged and encouraged? Maybe it's a friend or a group of fellow workers. It could be ministry partners or others from your church. Whoever it is for you, I encourage you to put forth the effort to meet together so you

can "spur one another on toward love and good deeds." We all need an occasional boost of encouragement and fresh energy for our work, and those we serve will be blessed by our having received it.

*"We all  
need an  
occasional  
boost."*

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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