



the connection

Winter 2024



Thrift Store Relocation



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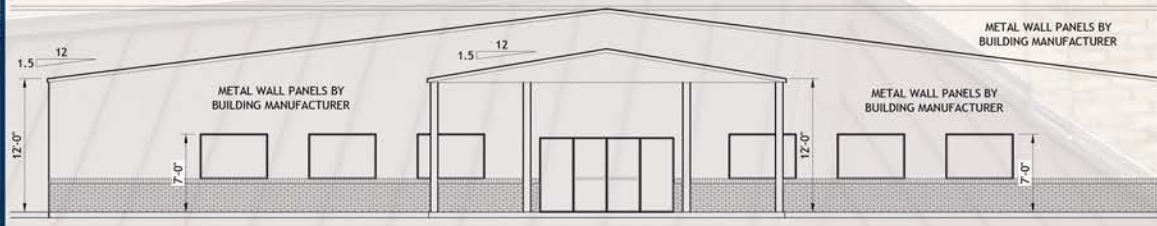


Thrift Store Relocation

On September 29, 1989, a new store opened in downtown Atmore, Alabama. The Economy Shop (now We Care Thrift Store) was started with a goal to generate profits that would support We Care Program's prison ministry. From the very first day, the store has been greatly supported by the local community through dropping off items to be sold, helping to process and price the donations, and making purchases. Over the years the store has gone through a number of remodels and expansions until there is no room left to grow, yet once again it is bursting at the seams. After looking at our options, we feel like now is the time to build a new store. A new building at

a new location will allow for continued growth as we serve the community of Atmore while supporting the work of prison ministry.

We are excited to announce that We Care has purchased land and is planning to build a new thrift store just 2.2 miles north of the current store location. Plans for the new store include more sales floor space, a larger parking lot, a pull-through area for dropping off donations, storage space for supplies that are used in all three of our stores and a parking area for the Thrift Store box truck. Since this project is still in the planning stages, it is too soon to predict an opening date. Our goal is sometime in late 2024, Lord willing.





DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Nathan Kennell
Thrift Store Director



We Care Program owns and operates three thrift stores, along with a recycle distribution center, to help provide financial support for the prison ministry. As Thrift Store Director, my responsibility is to oversee this arm of the ministry.

Our first thrift store opened in 1989 in downtown Atmore, Alabama, only 3.5 miles south of our headquarters. To this day it remains our biggest store. Currently, 17 employees work in the Atmore store, and occasionally a volunteer or two. After 35 years of business in the same building, it is this store that will be moving to a brand new location. The new site is a short 1.5 miles from our headquarters on the outskirts of town.

Our second oldest store is located in the town square of Monroeville, Alabama, about 38 miles north of our headquarters. It opened in 1998 and is our smallest store, successfully operating with five employees and one full time volunteer.

In 2008 the Flomaton store opened. This is our second biggest store and is located on the outskirts of Flomaton, Alabama, which is about 18 miles to the east of our headquarters. Eleven employees staff this store, with the help of an occasional volunteer as well.

The building that houses the Flomaton store also houses our Sorting Center. The donated clothes collected at all three stores are initially taken to the Sorting Center. There eight employees sort through



the clothes, and the items judged suitable to sell are hung, tagged and placed on racks. The racks are then distributed to the stores at the beginning of each week. The Sorting Center workers go through about 40,000 – 50,000 pieces of clothing every week. Only about 10,000 – 15,000 of those pieces

are deemed sellable and get hung for the stores.

So what happens to all the clothes that get sorted out? On the same property as the Sorting Center and Flomaton store is a warehouse that we call our Recycle Distribution Center (RDC). The purpose of the RDC is to recycle all of the unsellable (ripped, stained and soiled) clothes. This is done by baling them into big bales that we then sell to third party graders who will reuse as much of the clothing as possible. They do so by repurposing the clothes into rags and many other products. The RDC is also in charge of maintaining all of our metal scraps. Once we have collected enough metal to make it worth the trip, we deliver it to the recycler. We do our best to utilize as much as we can out of everything that our communities graciously donate to our cause.

If you feel God may be calling you to serve with We Care, but going into prison isn't your thing, give us a call anyway! We would be happy to talk with you about a way for you to plug in with our thrift store operations or knock out some jobs on our long list of projects!

NEWS

ReFOCUS



We Care was blessed this past fall to have Richard and Marj Heatwole of Harrisonburg, Virginia, serve for several weeks through our ReFOCUS program. This program is for those near or in the **R**etirement stage of life, and it offers **f**lexible **o**pportunities **c**entered **u**pon **s**ervice. Richard and Marj found out just how flexible those opportunities could be.

Beginning with the Donut Days outreach in October, where they planned to be regular donut-making helpers, their focus shifted immediately upon arrival. Hostess Sara Petersheim experienced a knee injury the very first day, which put her out of commission for the rest of the week. Marj willingly stepped up and took over the task of feeding three

meals a day to the hungry crew of 20-some volunteers. Richard did a great job in the dual role of helping to make donuts and helping Marj serve the volunteers.

While the Heatwoles were serving in Atmore, Steve and Sara Petersheim had to leave suddenly due to the death of a family member. Richard and Marj stepped in to cover the host couple duties for the next two weeks while Steve and Sara spent time in Pennsylvania with their families. During those two weeks We Care found out we needed almost 7,000 cookies for a Christmas cookie event in a local prison. Once again Richard and Marj stepped up without hesitation, this time to bake cookies. Thankfully, they did not need to make all of the cookies by themselves, but they certainly made a big dent in the total.

Richard also taught a class on the book of Hebrews in a local prison and helped with a number of maintenance projects at the headquarters and in the Thrift Stores. Marj also volunteered some days at the Thrift Stores Sorting Center. Thank you, Richard and Marj, for your willingness to come and for your flexibility to serve where needed!

(If any of you readers are interested in serving in a similar way, please contact us about what flexible opportunities we have for you!)

CHANGING SEASONS



“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1) We see that statement evident at We Care as we observe various seasons of ministry—a chaplain serving for a period of time, one leader moving on and another stepping up, or a donor no longer able

to send financial support due to a new season in life. Now we see another season changing.

After about six years of renting rooms in our mobile home to men coming out of prison, the decision has been made to discontinue this ministry endeavor. We are grateful to have been able to help a number of men get back on their feet in the “free world” through this arrangement. Unfortunately, others of them made choices that led back to prison. We trust that all of the men who lived there for a time were touched with the love of Jesus.

A number of different possible uses are under consideration for this location, so please pray for God’s clear direction as we move forward. Please also pray for the men who rented from We Care in the past. Pray that God will guide their lives and they will be open to His leading.

Donut Days 2023



A sense of anticipation was in the air as the volunteers met together in Montgomery, Alabama, on Monday evening, October 9. As the group discussed plans for the days ahead, a bit of adjusting needed to happen due to a knee injury which forced the We Care host couple to return to Atmore. Thankfully, others were willing and able to fill in and carry out the hosting duties for the week. (See ReFOCUS article.)

On Tuesday the team, along with a few local volunteers, set up the mobile donut trailer at Tutwiler, and donut-making began early. Donuts were served to the ladies and staff at Tutwiler Prison and Tutwiler Annex, after which the team led a chapel service in both facilities. Wednesday morning the crew traveled to Bibb Correctional Facility (CF) where they made and served donuts to the inmates and staff there. Unfortunately, an issue within the camp prevented them from holding a service inside the prison, but Johnny Wagler set up his sound system outside beside the donut trailer and shared in song for those who could hear.

Thursday found the team at Staton CF where We Care Chaplain Steve Stoltzfus helped to coordinate the day's proceedings. Johnny Wagler and Eddie Miller were in the chapel preparing for a service when a security incident shut things down. Although it was disappointing to have the service cancelled,

the donuts were a blessing to the men, and the volunteers were grateful to be allowed to hand out calendar cards while the men moved through the evening meal line.

The team finished out the week by serving two prisons on Friday. They set up the trailer and made the donuts at Elmore CF. Because a fire had damaged the Elmore chapel earlier, the service could not be held inside the prison. Instead, from outside the fence, Johnny and Eddie shared in music and message to the men who came out on the yard. This service took place first thing in the morning and helped get the men ready for some fresh donuts later that day. Donuts were also transported to Frank Lee Community Work Center a few miles away. At Frank Lee a few of the volunteers were again able to hand out the calendar cards while the men went through the meal line. Other volunteers joined them for an evening service at Frank Lee to end the week on a positive note!

We are grateful to Carl and Miriam Strite for bringing their Strite's Donuts trailer from Harrisonburg, Virginia, to enable this wonderful week of ministry. We are also thankful for all the volunteers who served and for the generous donors who helped to cover the expenses for the week. This is a team effort as we work together to help men and women in prison "taste and see that the Lord is good!"

From the Field

Ralph Smith

Madison Corr. Institution
London, OH



I am very blessed to represent my Lord and Savior in sessions held at Madison Correctional Institution. Although I had read and studied God's Word for several years and felt called to share the Gospel with men in prison, I felt inadequate to minister to others. When the opportunity came to attend a We Care Program crusade in Staton prison in Alabama, I wanted to go, but thought I would be overwhelmed by men in the "Bible Belt." I was reassured by my mentor that all I needed was a conviction of my love for God, a willingness to share what God had done for me through His beautiful love, even though I was unworthy, and a peace from Him even though circumstances were very painful. What a wonderful blessing it was to be able to share the message of forgiveness and inner peace with men who were incarcerated. These days I continue to be blessed by sharing the same message in an Ohio prison.

This, then, is my message to anyone hearing God call them to share the Good News in prisons. You need not be a Bible scholar; just let the Lord lead you, and share the wonderful message of forgiveness and salvation to men who are in a very discouraging environment.

Carl Carpenter

Frank Lee Work Center
Deatsville, AL



The meeting started as an average Sunday morning church service at Frank Lee Work Center. We had Bible study taught by an inmate pastor, followed by singing from the hymn books, taking communion and then the sermon. In my mind I'd prepared a pretty good sermon which was inspired by God's Word, had just the right number of examples and even a funny story. I usually read a few verses, talk about them, read a few more, talk about them and so on.

The scripture that morning was 2 Samuel chapter 9. I decided to read the whole chapter first, straight through, because I wanted us to get the overall picture of David and Mephibosheth. As I was reading there was a lot of response from the men at different parts, so instead of

going right into the lesson, I asked, "What do you think of the text?" Many hands went up, and we had an enthusiastic interactive time of discussion. One of the main things we talked about was Mephibosheth and how he was crippled and living in Lo Debar.

Lo Debar means no pasture, a desert, abandoned. Many who are incarcerated feel like Mephibosheth in Lo Debar. Feeling helpless and abandoned is a daily struggle for many who are behind chain-link and razor wire. There was hope for Mephibosheth, and there is hope for those who feel like Mephibosheth today. In one way King David restored and provided for a crippled resident of the desert. In an even better way our Father in Heaven restores us by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ! We all need this valuable message of hope and restoration, and it comes from God's powerful Word!

Michael Liles

Bibb Correctional Facility
Brent, AL



My name is Michael Liles, and I am the pastor of Orrville Baptist Church in Orrville, Alabama. Before I was a pastor, I was at one time an inmate in the Alabama Department of Corrections, convicted of armed robbery. I spent 12 ½ years in prison and was paroled in 2007. I have since ended my sentence and been fully pardoned. Within the past several months I have been afforded the opportunity to re-enter the prison system as a We Care volunteer in the capacity of class facilitator in the Pathway To Freedom dorm at Bibb Correctional Facility. It may be hard for some to understand, but because I came to know Christ in prison, I experience a sweetness in my spirit every time I enter the gate.

Class subject aside, I have found that the guys really have a different demeanor when they are with someone else who has done time. It's a camaraderie that is unique. It gives them hope to know it's possible to leave that place and have a "normal" and successful life. It's hard for me to explain, but when I'm around the guys, I feel different than when I'm in my normal capacity as a pastor; I feel relaxed and that I'm with people I understand and who understand me.

One particular experience stands out to me as I have related to the guys in my PTF class. Recently a 3-year-old child in my church was able to get her hands on a firearm

Spring Tour 2024

March 9 - March 22

Saturday	Mar. 9	Atmore, AL
Sunday	Mar. 10	Meigs, GA
Monday	Mar. 11	New Holland, SC
Tuesday	Mar. 12	Prospect, VA
Wednesday	Mar. 13	Harrisonburg, VA
Thursday	Mar. 14	Franconia, PA
Friday	Mar. 15	New Holland, PA
Sunday	Mar. 17	Newburg, PA
Monday	Mar. 18	Walnut Creek, OH
Tuesday	Mar. 19	Plain City, OH
Wednesday	Mar. 20	Goshen, IN
Thursday	Mar. 21	Arthur, IL
Friday	Mar. 22	Montgomery, IN



Featuring

Music by

Johnny Wagler

www.wecareprogram.org

and accidentally and tragically killed herself. It was a very devastating time for our church family, so I naturally shared it with the guys and asked their prayers for the family. After class several guys stayed back so they could one by one shed tears and ask me to share their condolences with the family. Every week since then a number of guys ask about the welfare of the mother and father and even remember them by name.

I know that Jesus is very present in prison and in the lives of those who would hear Him. These are among those He came to save, but they are a unique group who need support and lots of prayer so that they can see the plan of God in their lives as I have.



January 21 – 25

**Prayer
Requests**

- ☐ For the Lord to touch the hearts of those in prison.
- ☐ For volunteers to be open to the Lord's leading.
- ☐ For good health among volunteers and in the prisons.



GRATEFUL FOR GENEROSITY

A MESSAGE FROM DON METZLER, PRESIDENT

don@wecareprogram.org

According to the Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, the word generosity is defined as "the quality or fact of being generous" or "a generous act." God continues to bless We Care Program through the generosity of His people. We are both amazed and humbled to continually receive donations to be used for the work of ministering to incarcerated men and women in Alabama, Florida and Ohio.

Our three Thrift Stores also contribute toward helping to cover the expenses of the prison ministry. As you can see from the cover article, we are in the planning phases of building a new store to replace the current one in Atmore. When this project was approved by our Board of Directors, it was done so with the understanding that we would need to raise about \$400,000 to get into the new store debt free. We sent this information out to a number of our supporters, and I was blown away by their generosity. Praise the Lord, we are over halfway to our goal!

The purpose of this newsletter is to share what God is doing in and through the ministry of We Care. We don't make it about finances, and I don't plan to start now. I simply share with you this exciting new opportunity before us. If you feel led to assist with this extra need, you can send a gift to We Care with a note "new thrift store" in the memo line of your check. You can also give online by clicking the "Give Now" button at the bottom of our website home page. To indicate your gift preference for this project, please click on "Dedicate This Gift" and then type "new thrift store" in the first line.

We are very thankful for those who support this ministry and look forward to being amazed by the continued generosity of God's people, whether through partnering with us to support the work of a particular chaplain, the general operational needs or this new thrift store building. Please keep us in your prayers as we carry out the mission God has given us behind prison walls.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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