



the connection

FALL 2021

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Celebrating 50 Years of Prison Ministry



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by Blaine & Sheila Copenhaver

We Care Program's 50th Anniversary Celebration was more than reminiscing about days gone by. It was more than a celebration of God's faithfulness. It was more than delicious food, fellowship, and laughter. It was, for many, a God moment. As we chatted with former and current staff over meals, toured new and old buildings, looked through photo albums, and heard the testimonies of others, God spoke to our souls. He said, "Remember when I first called you to this ministry? Remember the fear you felt in your first few weeks as you worked a job you didn't understand? Remember sharing the gospel for the first time behind prison walls? Remember the men and women that you walked alongside in prison? Remember the tears you cried and the encouragement you received from fellow staff members? I led you and fed you all those many years ago, and I will continue to guide you as you seek Me today."

One theme that pressed on our hearts throughout the weekend was the inadequacy that many We Care staff felt in their responsibilities. In spite of inexperience and lack

of formal education, God's power shone through their weakness. It reminds us of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."

Former Presidents, Phil Weber and David R. Landis, and President Don Metzler shared of God working in humble beginnings, of "crazy" chaplains who left stable jobs and communities to make a difference in Alabama prisons, and of the faithfulness of God's provisions in years of scarcity and plenty. The powerful testimonies of former inmates and We Care staff further showed the effect of one person saying "yes" to the call of prison ministry. Numerous prisoners' sinful hearts have been set free. Multiple generations have carried on the work of We Care. Many former staff and inmates have gone on to raise godly families, pastor churches, and birth new ministries.

We Care's 50th Anniversary Celebration was more than a reunion. It was an awakening to God's powerful work in our lives and the reminder of the open prison fields that are still ripe for harvest.



Ben Nolt, Olive Nolt



Judy Stahly, Jerry Stahly, Daniel Martin



Durell and Carolyn Orendorf



Don Metzler



Then (1986) - Anthony, Jim, Lyndon, Ernie



Now - Anthony Swartzendruber, Ernie Zimmerman, Lyndon Halteman, Jim Hochstetler



Cornhole was a hit.

Describe one or two highlights from your time at New Life Foundation and/or We Care Program.

We Care meant family to me because I was far from mine. It was great to see the Discover teams grow in their walk in Christ. It was great seeing the new headquarters building go up and helping to feed the people who came to build. – **Anna Miller**

The first day I went into prison as a We Care chaplain, hearing the big entry door slam behind me gave me an eerie feeling. But at the same moment I felt peace because I knew this was where I was supposed to be. – **Fawn Jacobs**

Seeing the beauty of Christians coming together from multiple different walks of life to share the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Meeting Sharon Bruckhart, who is now my wife. – **Dale Brubaker**

I was part of a service in Donaldson Death Row one year. One man told me his story and we talked together for about 20 minutes. Two years later I was able to go into Donaldson Death Row again. This man was still there, and to my surprise he came to me with a smile and called me by name! He still remembered my name! – **Durell Orendorf**

My first times sharing with inmates were kind of clumsy and stiff. I learned what friendship evangelism is...to sit down, be a friend, listen, and then relate. – **Dennis Nolt**

Meeting people and developing friendships with inmates and volunteers. – **Irvin Martin**

Our staff at The Bridge became very close as we sought God for answers on how to help the boys. Becoming part of the larger community in Atmore. – **Doug & Diane Miller**

My relationship was one of being mentored by We Care chaplains. I was always impressed with the number of people, young and old, male and female, willing to come from places like Pennsylvania or Indiana to invest in our lives and who genuinely cared about us. – **Michael Liles**

One year I was particularly exhausted from ReNew Hope preparations. To close the Orientation Day service, we stood to sing the final song. I don't remember the song, but I clearly remember God speaking to my heart. As I stood on an elevated level in the back of the auditorium looking out over the crowd of volunteers and resource personnel, God whispered to me that "all these people are about to go out and be the hands and feet of all that prep work." It brought tears to my eyes. – **Noreen Horst**

The opportunity to mentor and disciple some community people. They would sometimes walk into the office, right off the street, saying they heard we help people. We had the opportunity to stand in as adopted parents at a baptism.

– **Roger & Arlene Martin**

Seeing former inmates now ministering for the Lord and how God is using them. – **John Bender**

Going into the prison for Christmas. After a program by our family, we gave each inmate a big homemade cookie and a card that our children had made. – **Linda Nolt**



Celebration service



Doris and John Bender



Michael Liles

What is a significant event that caused you to grow during your time with NLF/WCP?



Daniel Martin and Dale Brubaker

A particular inmate began to challenge me in my classes. I really had to dig into the Word to keep up with him.

– **Dennis Bilbo**

Restoration and peace with my Father! An understanding faculty and prayers for strength in forgiveness and blessing.

– **Sanford Helmuth**

David Landis firmly compelled me to begin teaching a series on Christian apologetics as a class in the Faith Dorm. That was the first time I had opportunity to prepare something substantial and gave me the confidence that I was gifted to carry out the presentation. Certainly my position as a pastor and preaching/teaching weekly goes back to that event.

– **Michael Liles**

The January revivals. – **JR Yoder**

During my first crusade in 1998, I realized my acute inadequacy of saying the right things or really making a difference in the prison or in the men's lives. I am still reminded of this. My efforts are futile except for the strength, grace, and provision of the Holy Spirit. – **David Bucher**

Our significant experience centered on the experience of serving others on a daily basis. We discovered there was tremendous blessing in that, which we became more aware of after we finished our term of service with We Care. So we found ourselves looking for opportunities to serve others, and today we are very much experiencing the blessing of serving.

– **Roger & Arlene Martin**

The time spent with brothers in Christ in the institution. I had many deep and meaningful conversations with inmate Christians that challenged me to grow in my own walk with the Lord. – **Jeshua Screws**

Ministering on Death Row with Lavern Eash. – **Jim Britnell**

God stretched me through the need to lead Bible studies at times, to be in front of people, and to depend on Him in working with some difficult situations. – **Elaine Bender**

I worked under the state chaplain for a while at Red Eagle, then later the responsibility was turned over to me. I felt the weight of the additional responsibility, and it made me step out more, which challenged me to depend on God more.

– **Dennis Nolt**

Being handed the leadership responsibilities of a faith-based honor dorm in my second year of service gave me a crash course on leadership and problem solving like nothing else could have. It was a time of tremendous growth and deep satisfaction.

– **David R. Landis**



Fellowship around the fire ring at the current headquarters



Linda Nolt and Anna Miller



Former headquarters building

Did your service with NLF/WCP make a difference in your life since then? If so, how?

It did and it does remind me so much of my continual need of the grace and mercy of Jesus. These men's lives would be mine without that grace and mercy. – **David Bucher**

Definitely made a difference. Caused us to press in to the Father, and we've been on that journey ever since. – **Doug & Diane Miller**

Yes! It made us much more aware of the deep needs and pain other people are experiencing. – **Roger & Arlene Martin**

Because of my poor eyesight, We Care gave me a "Nook" to help me read better, and it has been a blessing ever since. – **Emma Bender**

I grew up through my involvement, by letting God work in and through me. I look at people with much more compassion and grace. – **Dennis Nolt**

It has opened so many doors for me to share with my co-workers. They ask, "Why would you drive the whole way to Alabama and go into prison?" My response, "Because of God's love for me and you!" – **Durell Orendorf**

I did a lot of listening. I came to realize the importance of people feeling heard even when I didn't agree with them. There is truth in the statement, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." – **Elaine Bender**

From the get-go our finances looked impossible, and on paper it made absolutely no sense for us to make a move halfway across the country. However, God has been so faithful! At the one-year mark, support was low and Bob felt God asked him if the ministry was Bob's or God's. Bob again gave it all back to God, and after that, while we had to keep doing our part, we never again lacked and often had abundance. The trust in God fostered by that experience carried over to other areas of life and continues through all the recent changes in my life. – **Polly Depew**

Yes. I became more established in the Word. I felt more blessed with my teaching and interaction with inmates. – **Dennis Bilbo**

I see life now through the lens of my time in prison as a chaplain. The lost seem more lost and in such great need of Jesus. I see the hurting more than I ever did before. My heart hurts more than it ever did before. I realize more that this world is not my home and I'm just passing through. I long more for heaven than the things of this world. – **Sharon Brubaker**



Anna Weber



Linda Nolt, Marla Gehman, Linda Nyce



David R Landis



Atmore Thrift Store

On the lighter side – Share your funniest memory from your time at NLF/WCP.



Jeshua Screws, Marvin E Bender, Allen Screws

With my shorter stature, the men in prison often tell me, “Stand up, Dave,” while I am already standing at the podium.

– **David Bucher**

The look on the inmates’ faces when I would eat the “beef” patty. – **Jeshua Screws**

The time at a staff retreat when Doris Ranck and Goldie Huber sat on rocking chairs and “visited” about the other staff members. – **Emma Bender**

There were plenty of funny times, but the first to come to mind was the Thrift Store fashion show at a staff retreat, and the funniest part of that was when Wilma’s wig fell off.

– **Polly Depew**

At a board retreat we were given balloons to put between spouses and whichever couple popped their balloons first was the winner. Kevin and Renee enjoyed this game so much they asked for more balloons before they headed to their cabin for the night! – **Durell Orendorf**

I so enjoyed watching some of the skits that happened at some staff days. Eli Yoder duct taped Don and Phyllis together to illustrate the importance of working through marriage problems. Ed Ranck acted out a story as it was being read, and at one point he was lying on his back waving his arms and kicking his legs in the air. – **Elaine Bender**

In 1987 I helped build two duplexes behind the headquarters. While troweling concrete, another VSer dared me to let the power trowel handle spin around. I did, and the throttle stuck, causing the trowel to come around extremely quickly. I had to look funny as I lurched and retreated, trying to catch the wild beast without getting my bones broken. After it wobbled wildly (twice) to the extent of the handles hitting the floor, I jumped on it. We never could smooth out all the chipped up concrete. While others nearly rolled on the ground with laughter, I learned a valuable lesson! – **Marvin Bender**



Front: Marvin J Bender, Emma Bender, Anna Miller. Back: Richard Graber, Wilma Graber, Fawn Jacobs



Arlin Schrock and Marvin Beachy



Former “The Bridge” and “Timothy House”



Pam Sullivan, Brent Yoder, Fern Utz, Ernie Zimmerman, Janice Yoder

Contributors:

Elaine Bender, Chaplain, 1985-1986, Spouse of chaplain, Bible Study Grader, 2001-2019

Emma Bender, Headquarters Volunteer, 2006-2017

John Bender, Crusade/ReNew Hope Volunteer, 1999-2020, Board of Directors, 2003-2011

Marvin Bender, Chaplain, 1987, 2002-2013, Board of Directors, 2020-present

Dennis Bilbo, Associate, 2007-present

Jim Britnell, Staff Pastor, 1995-2006

Dale Brubaker, Chaplain, 2015-2019, Board of Directors, 2020-present

Sharon Brubaker, Chaplain, 2011-2019

David Bucher, Chaplain, 2003-present

Polly Depew, Spouse of chaplain, 2004-2020, Chaplain, 2020-2021

Sanford Helmuth, Host, 2016, Thrift Store Maintenance, 2017-2019

Noreen Horst, Secretary, 2001-present

Fawn Jacobs, Chaplain, 2018-present

David R. Landls, Chaplain, 1999-2001, 2014-2019, President, 2001-2014

Michael Liles, Former Inmate, incarcerated 1995-2007

Irvin Martin, Chaplain, 1994-1998, 2006-present

Roger & Arlene Martin, Chaplain, Maintenance, 1988-1990

Anna Miller, Chaplain, 2004-present

Doug & Diane Miller, Directors and Houseparents at The Bridge boys' home, 1976-1979

Dennis Nolt, Chaplain, 1981, 1989-2000, Board of Directors, 2001-2019

Linda Nolt, Part-time Chaplain and Spouse of chaplain, 1989-2000

Durell Orendorf, ReNew Hope Music Group, 2005-2020, Board of Directors, 2012-2020

Jeshua Screws, Part-time Chaplain, 2012, ReNew Hope Volunteer, 2011-2013

JR Yoder, Chaplain, 1998-2002, 2005

Photos by Mike Strehlow, Chaplain, 2005-present

NEWS

THANK YOU!

We Care extends a special "Thank you!" to Support for Prison Ministries (SFPM) for the financial support we received from them over the years through their annual auction. Although discontinuing the auction, SFPM plans to hold a chicken dinner fundraiser, in order to continue to bless We Care and several other ministries. The fundraiser will take place on October 29. We encourage those of you in the Lancaster, PA, area to purchase meals in support of this effort. For more information visit www.supportforprisonministries.com and click on the Chicken Dinner tab.

LEAVING

Jonathan McMath ended his time as Thrift Store Director in August. We appreciate the great job Jonathan did in leading the Thrift Stores the past four years, and we wish him and his family God's blessings as they move on. Jonathan will be serving as the Youth Minister for Grace Fellowship in Atmore.



Brian Hester



Eric "Popcorn" Washington

REMEMBERING

The We Care family mourns the loss of two former inmates who had maintained close relationships with us. Brian Hester passed away on August 4, after a brief time in the hospital. Brian was one of the "trailer guys" featured on the cover of our spring newsletter. On August 21 Eric "Popcorn" Washington went home to be with Jesus. Popcorn was a valuable part of the We Care family and was always willing to serve where needed. While we miss both of these brothers, we look forward to seeing them again one day.



THE RIPPLE EFFECT

A MESSAGE FROM DON METZLER, PRESIDENT

don@wecareprogram.org

Imagine with me a huge lake with its watery top as smooth as glass. Then imagine a stone being

dropped right in the middle of that lake. What will happen? First, there will be a splash. Then ripples will begin to spread out in all directions from that point, followed by more and more ripples. The circle will grow larger and larger as the ripples spread out further and further.

That is exactly the picture which came to my mind as I was reflecting on the recent 50th Anniversary Celebration of We Care Program. In 1970 Martin Weber started a prison ministry because God gave him a heart of compassion for men in prison. Like from that single stone, the ripples started. Since that time, hundreds of people have served with

We Care, and thousands of others have been impacted by their service. In fact, we can safely say millions have been touched because of the simple fact that Marvin Beachy was introduced to prison ministry by Martin

Weber. Marvin Beachy went on to found the Gospel Echoes Prison Ministry which has, since the early 1970's, printed and distributed over four million Bible studies for men and women in prison.

This is just one example of how one man's work among prison inmates has extended from an original circle of influence to countless additional individuals who have been affected by a "ripple." May

each of us be faithful in doing what God calls us to. While we are all ripples of someone else's obedience, at the same time our own obedience and faithfulness create ripples that touch other lives in need of a Savior.

"Like from that single stone, the ripples started."

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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