

Construction Has Begun

By David Landis

Construction is now underway on the new headquarters building! Local contractors have prepared the foundation and poured the concrete slab. Our first volunteers began laying the block basement walls on October 2, after which we anticipate a lot of framing work. Although there are a number of individuals and crews committed at this point, there are still many opportunities for those who want to be a part of this exciting opportunity. The foundation has been laid. Will you help us build on it? (Please see ad on page 4.)



Center: Matthew 28:19-20 is inscribed in the footer of the new headquarters building.



In this issue...

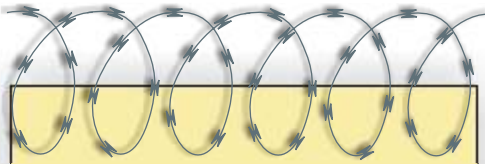
- Pg. 3...News of Note
- Pg. 6...From the field
- Pg. 8...Perspectives



Twenty Years from Now

by Del Yoder

Article distributed by Del during one of his weekly visits to the Fannin County Jail (GA).



Volume XXXVIII, Number 6

Published eight times a year, *The Connection* provides news and views of friends of We Care Program. We Care Program is a non-profit, interdenominational organization consisting of Christian men and women who share a burden for and commitment to helping incarcerated men and women. We are accomplishing our mission by recruiting, funding, training, placing, and administering missionary chaplains and chaplain's assistants in prisons to provide friendship evangelism, teaching, peer counseling, and encouragement.

Direct all correspondence to:
We Care Program
3493 Highway 21
Atmore, AL 36502

Phone: 251-368-8818
Fax: 251-368-0932
E-mail: wecare@wecareprogram.org
Web site: www.wecareprogram.org

Board Chairman: LaVerne Eash
President: David R. Landis
Vice Pres./Business Mgr.: Don Metzler
Editor: David R. Landis
Asst. Editor: Noreen Horst
Layout & Design: Sheila Schrock
Circulation Manager: Noreen Horst

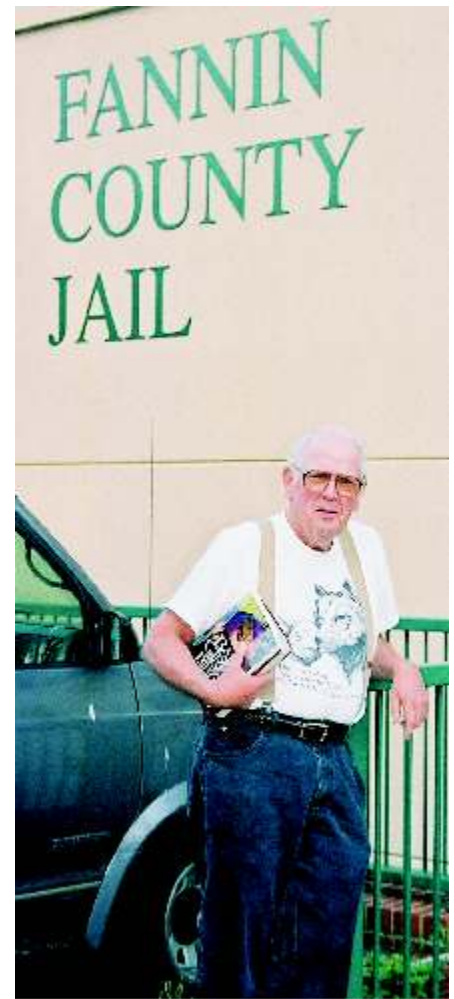
Do you sometimes wonder why Christians visit in jails and prisons? It would be inappropriate to speak for others, but I keep coming back because of visions I have from time to time which surely must be the result of a special gift of Almighty God. These visions are not like dreams and do not occur during sleep. Instead, they come while I am in the jail.

These visions are very simple and straightforward. For as I stand talking, suddenly it is like a door opens and I can see—clearly, sharply, forcefully—just what it is God wants to do with the remaining life of the person to whom I'm talking. These visions are never bad or negative. They have nothing to do with the person's past or present, or even future, for that matter, as they are not prophetic. They are simply possibilities—what the person could be or what could happen if that person determined from that moment on to choose good rather than bad, righteousness rather than rebellion.

I feel overwhelmed by the power of these visions, of seeing broken people as they could be, by God's grace—restored, whole, joyous, victorious, leading purposeful lives. I am always excited, wanting to reach out, as if to turn a television around, and say, "Look, look, at what you can be—who you really are!"

But it's a mind picture. All I can do is try to move the vision from my mind to yours, using mere words. Words you've heard before. Words that may seem meaningless, to describe that which must seem impossible to someone like you. Words which the Devil convinces you could never be true.

Out of this vision has come a special "blessing," a way of trying to plant the seed of victory in defeated minds. Sometimes, as the Spirit seems to lead, I will say something like this: "My prayer for you is that, twenty years from now, when your young children or



grandchildren or someone you've just met, hears that you once spent time in jail or even prison, that your life will have changed so radically and positively that they will respond: 'No, you surely must be mistaken about that. For (your name) simply is not the kind of person who would ever have been involved in such things.'"

Again, that is not a prophecy or a statement of probability, but a statement of vision, of possibility. It's my vision. If you will receive it, will let it become your vision for yourself, that possibility will take the first step to becoming reality. Your reality. A life worth living. A life of purpose and prosperity. And pride for your parents, children, and others who may now despair for your future.

That's what brings me to the jail each week. A vision. And a blessing—that the grace of God and our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. Amen. 🙌

News of Note

VOL. 38, NO. 6

Atmore, Alabama

October 2006

Play Ball!

By David Landis
The Connection

A group of eight We Care staffers were privileged to participate in the Gospel Express crusade in Marianna, Florida, in early September. Along with being able to share the Good News with many men and women, six of us

also joined in several crusade volunteer vs. inmate softball games. This was a great opportunity to interact with some men who we would not have met otherwise, and also show by example that sports events do not have to be filled with animosity and vulgarity. We had a great time playing, cheering, sweating, (and losing!). Each game ended with

players from both sides coming together in a circle of prayer, at which time a brand new bat was given to the prison sports department. Thank you, Gospel Express, for the great job you are doing! We are blessed to co-labor with you in the harvest fields of prison ministry.

Right: Bob Depew warms up his arm for an enjoyable game of softball with the inmates.



Gingerich and Bender Lead Read-A-Thon Fundraising

Congratulations to Lyndon Gingerich (IL), Megan Beachy (OH), Emma Bender (AL), and Celia Landis (PA)! Lyndon is our first-place

winner in the youth division of our 2006 summer read-a-thon, and Megan came in second. In the adult division, Emma and Celia placed first and

second, respectively. Seventeen readers raised a total of \$6,914.92 for the work of We Care Program. We send a hearty thank you to all of this year's readers!

Participants range in age from 6 to 65 and live in six different states. They read a total of 337 books. Sponsors, we thank you for supporting their efforts!

Joe Sims Celebrates Eightieth Birthday



Martin Weber and Joe Sims share a moment together during Joe's eightieth birthday celebration, which included barbecued chicken, friends, and fellowship.

On Saturday, September 23, a large group of friends gathered for a chicken BBQ meal to celebrate the 80th birthday of Joe Sims, a man whose story goes back many years with We Care Program. Joe was an inmate at Fountain Correctional during the time We Care founder Martin Weber was serving as chaplain. Martin tells the story of Joe responding to an invitation to follow Christ by going to the altar, quietly kneeling in prayer, then getting up and leaving the chapel. The following day when Chaplain Weber asked him about his response, he said "I did not need a fireball to

hit me. I just took God at His word and He took me at mine." Joe immediately began to memorize scripture and soon had verses and whole books of the Bible memorized. He also became a janitor in the chapel.

Several years later, Chaplain Weber went to the parole board on Joe's behalf. He did not receive a favorable response and remembers seeing stamped on Joe's record "Never to be released." However, through a series of miraculous events, Joe was released in 1973 after serving over nine years in prison. Later, he received a full pardon.

From his release until

his recent retirement, Joe was employed by Escambia Farm and Seed, Atmore, AL. He became and still is a member of Mennonite Christian Fellowship in Atmore. Over the years, Joe has developed a large network of friends from Alabama to Alaska. He is loved by young and old alike and is known for his enjoyment of table games, travel, and grilling chicken (which he did for over 100 people at his birthday celebration!). Congratulations, Joe, on your 80th birthday, but more importantly, we thank and praise God for His saving and sanctifying grace which is so evident in your life.

A PRISON MINISTRY PRESENTATION

The Amazing Grace Tour



Join us at one of the following locations for: Ex-inmate testimonials, Drama & Video Clips, and Ministry Updates.

Date/Time:

Sunday, November 5 (6:30 PM)
Wednesday, November 8 (6:30 PM)
Thursday, November 9 (7:30 PM)
Friday, November 10 (7:00 PM)
Saturday, November 11 (7:00 PM)
Sunday, November 12 (9:00 AM)
Sunday, November 12 (6:30 PM)
Monday, November 13 (9:29 AM)
Wednesday, November 15 (9:30 AM)
Wednesday, November 15 (7:00 PM)
Thursday, November 16 (7:00 PM)
Friday, November 17 (7:00 PM)
Saturday, November 18 (7:00 PM)
Sunday, November 19 (7:00 PM)

Location:

Mennonite Christian Fellowship--Atmore, AL
Grace & Truth--Birmingham, AL
New Holland Mennonite Church--New Holland, SC
Powhatan Mennonite Church--Powhatan, VA
White Oak Church of the Brethren--Manhiem, PA
Hinkletown Mennonite Church--Ephrata, PA
Perkiomenville Mennonite Church--Perkiomenville, PA
Christopher Dock Mennonite High School--Lansdale, PA
Rosedale Bible College--Irwin, OH
Mt. Zion House of Prayer--Utica, OH
Pleasant View Mennonite Church--Millersburg, OH
Griner Mennonite Church--Middlebury, IN
Sunnyside Mennonite Church--Arcola, IL
King Street Center--Hutchinson, KS



Construction Volunteers Needed

We are building a new ministry headquarters and would love for you to help us make it happen!

Specialized work crews and general volunteers needed in all phases of the construction process.

Don Metzler (pictured on left) has been working very hard behind the scenes to bring the project to the point where it is ready for volunteer work crews. Thanks, Don, for your diligent leadership.

Projected timeline and areas of need are available at: www.wecareprogram.org.

For further information, or to schedule yourself or a work crew to assist with this project, contact Don at 251-368-8818 or don@wecareprogram.org.

Volunteers & Intercessors Needed!

29th Annual Prison Crusade

Bringing the Gospel Message to Thousands of Men and Women in Alabama's Prison System

January 21-25, 2007

- Begins with a Sunday of orientation and missions rally in Montgomery, AL
- Four days of friendship evangelism in at least 15 different prisons located in the Montgomery, Troy, Birmingham, and Atmore areas
- Daily morning workshop sessions with gifted teachers in each locality
- Nightly prison chapel services with special music and evangelists
- Open to mature Christian men and women ages 20 and older
- Fees include lodging and some meals
(Contact We Care Program for more information.)

TO VOLUNTEER: Call We Care Program for application or download application online at www.wecareprogram.org.

TO PRAY: Prayer is the foundation of the entire crusade. To encourage our friends who are praying and to unite our prayers around specific praises and concerns from the various prisons, we distribute a daily Prayer Intercessor's Bulletin during the week of the crusade.

To receive the daily crusade updates, please forward your name and fax number or e-mail address to noreen@wecareprogram.org or call our office at 251-368-8818.

Completed Applications **REQUIRED** by December 18, 2006



From the Field

Atmore, AL

J. O. Davis Correctional Facility

Jesus. Some say He was a prophet. Some say He was a good man. Still others say He was a great teacher. When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter responded, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Who do you say Jesus is? Our view of this matter largely determines how we live our lives. Many believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but do not obey His teachings. Many who believe His teachings are true still fail to follow Him.

Recently in the "Bondage to Freedom" class, we were having a good discussion concerning the rejection many

i n m a t e s receive from the free world and how much that affects the possibility of their returning to prison after they've been released. Upon trying to fit in at home or at church and trying to get and keep a good job, they face rejection from someone, despair of trying, and revert back to their old ways.

How can we help these people overcome the statistics? How can we best equip them to make things work when they get out of prison? How much do we stress the importance of having a relationship with Jesus Christ? How willing are we to come alongside a paroled inmate and show him what it means to live that out, what it means to trust Jesus when things go wrong at work or home, and how to deal with rejection and mingle back into society?

During the class a young man said in

despair, "This is my fourth time coming back to prison. I don't know what to do to stay out."

I paused, considering what I was about to say. As I looked at him and smiled, I replied, "Jesus Christ can help you. If you trust Him as your Savior, He will help you stay out of prison." There is hope for this young man!

I ask myself, "How many times have I been afraid to proclaim that Jesus is the answer to our needs, to those who say He was just a good man? Do I remember what He's done for me, and where I would be without Him?"

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

- Irvin Martin

Holman Correctional Facility

I have been serving at Holman Prison for almost four months and love it. God has given me so many opportunities. Some of those opportunities have been working in the Faith Dorm where men have the chance to better themselves through education, conflict resolution, peace-making circles, restorative justice,

etc. I was sitting in class recently where some of the inmates were talking about the harm they had caused to their victims and how it affected the victims, their families, community and state. Some of these men had never thought about

the impact their crime had on so many people. Some of them shared how sorry they were and wished they could talk to the victim or his/her family and ask for forgiveness. Then we talked about how their crime affected their own family, such as Dad not being there, hardships on spouse, money sent to the inmates, and time and money to travel long distance for visits. I count it a privilege to be part of these men's lives, to see them grow and change. I know men are beginning to grow when they start taking responsibility for their own actions.

- Bob Depew

Fountain Correctional Facility

Being a twenty-one year old assistant chaplain has been challenging in many ways, especially when I am called on to be a spiritual leader to men old enough to be my father or grandfather. Even more challenging are the times when the regular chaplain is sick or on vacation, leaving me with the spiritual responsibility of some twelve hundred inmates. That is why I am thankful for the inmate chapel staff.

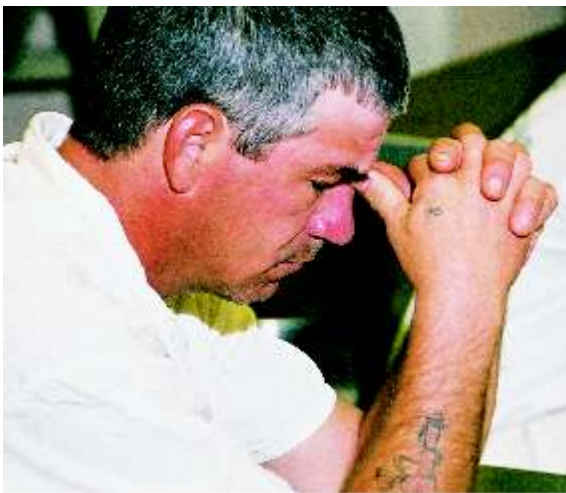
All five of our chapel workers work together smoothly, so the chaplain and I can focus on the many different needs of the other inmates. When I am working without the chaplain present, I find myself looking for their encouragement or for that reassuring look that tells me I am doing OK. You may question why I would take counsel from an inmate, but when the response I get is, "Did you pray about that?" or "You better wait until you talk to the chaplain before you decide to do that," I can't help but appreciate their advice. Many times they have encouraged me when another inmate cusses me out because of an unpopular decision I had to make. And yes, even when I make a poor decision, the chapel workers gently give me advice on how I could have better handled the situation. I have grown to appreciate each one for their humble attitude of service, and thank God for allowing me to serve alongside my Christian inmate brothers in Alabama.

- Blaine Copenhaver

Atmore Work Center

As chaplain, I have a burden for the Atmore Work Center concerning the continuing care of the inmates during the times I cannot be there. It would be presumptuous to suppose I could handle the spiritual needs of some 250 men even if I worked full time in the camp, and in light of this, I am working toward recognizing the spiritual leaders already there and equipping them for ministry. Currently, there are four men that stand out, and my goal is to meet with them weekly to develop the gifts that are within them. I am encouraging them to bring others into the class who display leadership abilities and the qualities necessary for such ministry. This will help broaden the effectiveness of the chaplaincy program with the goal of having men available in the camp 24/7 who are the salt and light Jesus commands them to be as Christians.

- Ed Ranck



Birmingham, AL

Donaldson Correctional Facility

The Faith Based Honor Communities are in-prison, structured communities where inmates live, work and commune together, though sometimes without the unity part. But still, it is structured and it isn't every man for himself like it is in most other areas of the prison. I was given oversight of our Faith/Honor Dorm at Donaldson in October of 2003, and as you read this, remember to pray again, and often, for those of us who oversee these programs.

The founders of these programs had great ideas and goals, which can and are still being realized. The structure, teaching, and quietness aid inmates in focusing on spiritual and life issues and returning to society one day. Many also testify of the closer walk they now have with God since being a part of the community. We are glad to see these positive changes happening in the lives of the inmates we have grown to love.

One big discouragement I face in this overseeing role is the fact that many

men apply for and come into the Faith/Honor Dorm just for the good environment and not for the things it was set up for to benefit them. They are content with where they are in life and are always quick to say they are better than they used to be and are certainly not doing the things they see other inmates doing. Continued growth is not really what they want, and they have no interest in growing closer to God or even beginning a real walk with Him at all. They are content with outward life reformation, but are closed to inward heart transformation that God desires for them.

They are content with outward life reformation, but are closed to inward heart transformation that God desires for them.

I know you can lead a horse to feed and water, but you can't make him eat and drink. Sometimes I would like to force-feed the horse and hold his nose under water until he drinks, but it won't work. May God help me and Christian inmates in these programs to lead lives that will spark a desire in these contented ones to dig deeper and climb higher with God. May all of us not be content with where we are today, but desire to become more of what God wants us to be so we can be better used by Him in His kingdom.

- Dave Bucher

Marysville, OH

Ohio Reformatory for Women

Even though I saw her walking slowly by my window on her way to our appointment, I was surprised how long it took her to get to my office. She had come in so victoriously and energetically some three weeks earlier when she joyfully announced her 2½ week victory over her eating disorders. That was a tremendous victory, and I still rejoice over it.

But this time she was different. She had relapsed some and hated herself for it. Her focus was on her defeats. "I wasn't going to come in. I didn't think you'd even want to talk to me." Remembering my depression years earlier, I was well familiar with cycling effects, so I couldn't condemn her. Of course I would talk with her, gladly.

Jesus walked with his stumbling disciples for three years. He was with them during their doubts, their fights and struggles, their shameful failures, as well as some remarkable victories. Never once did He write them off. He knew what He could do with them if He was given the chance.

The road ahead may be long, but because there is God, I will gladly walk it with her. I will continue to rejoice in the victories. Pray that she continues to let me (and Him) share the journey with her.

- Wilma Mullet

Support for Prison Ministries's 23rd ANNUAL BENEFIT AUCTION:

October 27-28, 2006; Farmersville Auction
Grounds, Farmersville, PA

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27

4:00-7:00 PM Chicken BBQ (eat-in or take out)
5:00 PM Auction of crafts, tools, collectibles, and more

Home made baked goods and a variety of food items (eat-in or take-out) available throughout the sale.

Many Gift Certificates sold at Silent Auction both days.

Proceeds from the auction benefit several prison ministries, including We Care Program. Since 1984, the SFPM Annual Benefit Auction has raised over \$1.23 million, touching inmate lives in many stages of development.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28

6:00 AM Pancake & sausage breakfast
8:30AM Auction of artwork, quilts, gift certificates, pedal tractors, used vehicles, and more

Special Auctions:

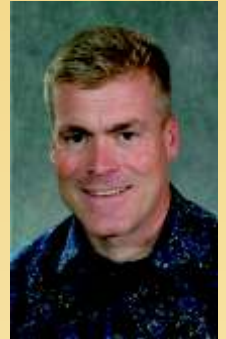
Winross and Collectible Toy Sale: 7:30-8:30 PM (Fri.); Specialty items: 11:30 AM (Sat.); Used car and 1932 Ford Truck: 12:30 PM (Sat.); Quilts: 1:30 PM (Sat.)

***For more information about Support for Prison Ministries (SFPM) and the auction visit their website: www.supportforprisonministries.org**

PERSPECTIVES

with David R. Landis
President

I'd love to hear from you.
Contact me at
dave@wecareprogram.org



A matter of concern to me is the direction our country is headed in relation to those classified as “sexual offenders.” On the one hand, our sex-crazed culture practically worships sexual perversion of all kinds through various forms of media. Among other things, pornography addiction is rampant. On the other hand, when one is finally “caught” in the demon infested web of sexual activity, particularly those classified as “sexual offenses” by law, he is practically crucified, thrown on the cultural trash heap, and branded for life.

Please don't misunderstand me. I shudder when I think of the tragedies that have occurred, not only in families that I am personally acquainted with, but also in countless others across America, due to sexual sins of all kinds. I believe that those who violate human dignities should suffer consequences for their actions. But I wonder about my own and the church's attitude towards this group of people who in some cases have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

I speak out of my own acquaintances with many in prison who are part of this “S” group. (Yes, they are easily identified by an “S” behind their number on prison roster sheets.) Ever since I began my work in prison ministry, I have struggled with this group. “How could they have done what they did? What is just punishment? What about the victim(s) and victim families? But more importantly, where does the Gospel fit into this picture?”

All along, although my own convictions and beliefs have been shaky at times, I have maintained that the Gospel I believe and preach is available to all. I want no part of an exclusive Gospel. The only way that I can walk into a prison (or anywhere, for that matter) with confidence is to believe that the message of reconciliation that I carry is available to every

single man I might encounter on any given day. That includes pedophile, predator, rapist, or anyone else who falls into the category of sexual offender. I believe when the Gospel we preach is embraced, then healing, restoration, and transformation will surely come. The road may be long, questions many, but it will come.

Unfortunately, I think our response more closely identifies with the way the culture of Jesus' day responded to un-touchables. As with the lepers of that day, we would prefer to seclude the “unclean” in separate colonies, making sure they identify themselves as “unclean” before they come into our presence. Brother and Sister, the Jesus I know did not back away from uncleanness. In fact, he mingled with and touched many who were considered un-touchable. He was friendly to sinners. How He responded to society's outcast is something I am still processing as it relates to sexual offenders, but a recent conversation with a Christian brother who by our standards fit this mold makes me question how well we, the church, and maybe specifically those of us in prison ministry, have responded to those who are fighting these sexual demons. He wondered, if, in heaven, it just might be easier for all of us if there would be a separate area for people like him. God, may our hearts be broken by the things that break yours.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to purify us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:11-14 🔥

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Atmore, AL 36502
Permit No. 99

3493 Highway 21
Atmore, AL 36502-4669
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

