

# THE Connection

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

October 2008

## Re-Entry Realities

**A**t the start of 2008, 2.3 million adult Americans were in a jail or prison; that's one of every 100 adults in America. Each year 650,000 inmates are released from State and Federal prisons. (That averages 1,800 a day.) According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "At least 95% of all state prisoners will be released from prison at some point." The Bureau also states that two out of three ex-inmates will be re-arrested for new crimes within three years of their release from prison, and more than half of those will be re-incarcerated.

For anyone willing to stop and reflect on the realities of prisoner re-entry, this picture may seem grim. There are a myriad of challenges to address with those returning to society: limited job skills and education, substance abuse, mental health problems, lack of stable housing, and weak support systems. Fortunately, there is a growing amount of interest in this issue as government, communities, and

ministries seek to address the challenges related to re-entry.

At We Care Program, we sense a growing conviction to address these issues. While our purpose is "Proclaiming Christ and Discipling Inmates," we believe we can incorporate strategies into our ministry objectives to help men and women prepare for release. This can include teaching practical life-skills (like financial management), assisting with re-entry initiatives (collaboration), and developing a Christ-centered re-entry curriculum.

We are truly at a beginning point when it comes to fully understanding prisoner re-entry and finding our place in helping to meet the challenges faced by men and women returning to society. But we want to grow in our understanding of this issue and want to encourage you to join us in this journey. To help us better understand this issue, we asked a number of former inmates to respond to questions related to re-entry. We pray that their insights on the following pages will move you to a deeper place of prayer, support, or personal involvement.



*Willie Thomas  
Meridian, MS  
Release Date: 7/2005*



*Scott Ragsdale  
Birmingham, AL  
Release Date: 3/2008*

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Proclaiming Christ & Discipling Inmates



[www.wecareprogram.org](http://www.wecareprogram.org)

# Post-Prison

## 1. What were some of the most challenging issues you faced upon returning to society?

*Scott* - Once a crime is committed and you have served your punishment, society is very judgmental and it is hard to be accepted. It has been the time AFTER I was released, that my true sentence began.



Wayne Ballenger  
Antioch, IL  
Release Date: 12/2007

*Wayne* - Finding a job.

*Sam* - Getting ID and getting signed up for benefits programs were a very big challenge for me.

*Willie* - Getting used to being free. No one to tell you what to do, where to go, etc. Having to pay for EVERYTHING! Realizing that everybody else in the free-world is "trying to make it" too.

*Brett* - I was worried/embarrassed of being stereotyped as a criminal/convict.

*Ray* - The most critical issue I faced and feel most inmates face is housing.

*Joe* - Money management, as well as culture shock and not really being sure of how to handle stressful or tempting situations.

## 2. What was the most helpful thing that anyone did for you upon your return to society?

*Scott* - Someone gave me the one chance to prove that the person that they saw on that piece of paper was not the person who was sitting in front of them being interviewed.

*Sam* - Being blind and unable to drive, I had to rely on my sister, brother-in-law, and friends to drive me to each appointment.

*Ray* - There were two very helpful and extremely critical blessings bestowed on me upon my release: 1) Employment and 2) I was given a car.

*Joe* - I had a group of people around me who walked with me and helped me through my struggles. I was given the opportunity to be successful by people allowing me to learn and grow through my mistakes, never condemning, always being supportive, and at the same time not letting me get away with doing something wrong.

## 3. What can individuals, churches, or organizations do to most effectively help inmates as they return to society?

*Sam* - Welcome these inmates with open arms and encourage them to attend church.

*Willie* - Shelter, clothing, and food are critical needs. Financial gifts, rather than just buying things, allow the receiver to exercise his own free-will and make his own decisions about what is important, even though it may mean he makes some bad decisions.

*Brett* - The norm for inmates returning to society is that they are left without family and the only thing they have to return to is what they knew before they were incarcerated. Churches, prison ministries, and individuals can provide a temporary family to these men and women. Explain and show them how to do the "right thing," provide a loving and caring environment, and show them the other side of society where there are people who care for others.

*Ray* - The most effective assistance to successful re-entry is housing, employment, transportation and spiritual support. Too many times we find only the support of words and lip-service. Newly released individuals need the help that comes from deeds and action.

*Joe* - Give them opportunities, not hand outs. That doesn't mean that you should never give them anything because as a rule people leaving prison have no financial assets. Be there to support, listen to, and encourage them. Correct them when necessary. Just be a brother or sister in Christ.



Brett Robbins  
Birmingham, AL  
Release Date: 8/2007

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Published six 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.

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4. As a previously incarcerated person, what one piece of advice would you give to someone preparing for release?



Ray Phillips  
Mobile, AL  
Release Date: 5/2004

Scott - Don't ever quit. Because [opportunity] is sitting right there under your nose. [It] will be small and you will be tested, both mentally and morally. Pass the test and your doors will open.

Wayne - Expect some letdowns, but don't let them keep you down.

Willie - Get into Jesus! All the preparation and work a man can [do] preparing for release do not compare to the importance of getting rooted and grounded in Jesus.

Brett - Plan! Think about what you are going to do, where you want to live, and take one day at a time; do not get in a rush.

Ray - Remember that you are responsible for the condition that you find yourself in, so it is your responsibility to get on with a new, better and greater life. DON'T BE A WHINER! Be A WINNER. Remember it is all about attitude.

Joe - Avoid intimate relationships with the opposite sex for at least a year so you can focus on rebuilding your life. Be patient with yourself and allow yourself to grow and mature.

## In-Prison

5. What can "in-prison" ministries focus on that would be the biggest help for those preparing for release?

Scott - People need direction. Direction has no age limit. Everyone needs direction. Some people would like to hear about direction, but maybe not on a religious level at first.

Wayne - Just let them know what to expect, and possible letdowns.

Sam - Certainly preach the good news about Jesus.

Willie - Being a real and authentic living example of what a Christ follower should be -- not with flashy presentations, but with genuine love and concern for the well-being of those being ministered to.



Joe Watson  
Atmore, AL  
Release Date: 6/2001

Brett - Education! If these men and women do not have a high school education, they should be made to earn their GED. An education is one of the keys to not return to their old way of life. EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION. I cannot stress that enough.

6. Looking back at your time in prison, what do you remember as the most helpful counsel that prison ministry volunteers offered to you in preparation for release? (Give specific examples with names if you are able to.)

Wayne - The whole We Care group really helped me out. Talks with Dean Miller and Ed and Doris Ranck, and just being around positive people gave me something to look forward to.

Sam - The Faith Honor Dorm was the most helpful thing in my life. Just meeting the many volunteers each year was a blessing to me. The Cleansing Stream taught by Milt Raphael was so good that I took the course three times.

Willie - Stay focused. It's a fast world. If you don't stay focused, you'll get caught up in the whirlwind.

Brett - Being able to work with Blaine Copenhaver, Mike Strehlow, and Brian Eskenlinen on a daily basis allowed me the opportunity to grow closer to God and be able to practice social skills. Being incarcerated you lose many positive learned behaviors.

Ray - For me it was the Kairos ministry that gave me the greatest support. I was also helped considerably by the We Care ministry. I am truly grateful for the peace and comfort the [Honor Dorm] gave me while I struggled to re-focus my life. In many ways I owe my success to the Honor Dorm. 🙏



Sam Hutto  
Creola, AL  
Release Date 3/2008

For ideas on how you can help to make a difference, see "80 Ideas for How Churches Can Help" at <http://www.alabamacprnetwork.com/80ideas.pdf>.

Your prayers, support, and personal involvement would also be a blessing to us!

Please contact us at:

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# Profile . . . . . Marvin Bender

**Assignment:** Missionary Chaplain, Century Correctional Institution, Century, FL

**A Typical Day:** Usually arrive around 7:30 AM. On Mondays I preach and teach in the chapel from 8:00-10:00. Respond to inmate requests for various materials or assistance. Visit lock-up areas weekly, taking literature, books, cards, Bible studies or whatever the men have requested from the chapel. Visit in the dorms and the recreation yard. I frequently am the only chaplain there so I also receive and handle quite a few crisis calls for inmates. Counseling and encouraging is a major part of my ministry.

**Rewards:** Leading someone to Jesus. Watching men soak in spiritual truths they can apply to their own spiritual growth. Praying with men who are experiencing brokenness and repentance and knowing that God is changing their old sinful attitudes or responses to temptations.

**Challenges:** Knowing when to rebuke or pray for a man. Knowing when to say “No.” The daily opportunities are endless, and listening to the Spirit’s leading can be neglected.

**Just for fun:** Playing guitar and singing humorous and serious gospel songs. Hunting and fishing with my boys. Playing games and doing puzzles. Occasionally doing Sudoku or Criptoquip puzzles. I even eat ice cream just for fun!



## Lock-Up at Jackson



Several We Care chaplains were privileged to partner with Gospel Express Ministries at their annual Florida Prison Crusade. A part of that experience was visiting the men in lock-up at Jackson Correctional Institution. Pictured are Dean Miller sharing Christ through prison bars (left), the team singing for the men in lock-up (above), and Don Metzler in prayer for a special need (right).



Volunteers Needed!

# 31st Annual In-Prison Crusade

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

January 25-29, 2009

- Begins with a Sunday of orientation and missions rally
- Four days of friendship evangelism in at least 17 different prisons located in the Montgomery, Troy, Birmingham, and Atmore areas
- Daily morning workshop sessions with gifted teachers
- Nightly prison chapel services with special music and evangelists
- Open to mature Christian men and women ages 20 and older

TO VOLUNTEER: Call We Care Program (251-368-8818)  
for application or download application online at  
[www.wecareprogram.org](http://www.wecareprogram.org).



Completed applications REQUIRED by December 19, 2008.

## 2008 Read-a-thon

\$12,675.46 (our best ever read-a-thon!)

17 readers

ages 5 - 67

4 states

52,000 pages (approx.)

## Congratulations TO THE WINNERS!

Ages up to 12:

1<sup>st</sup> place - Twila Bender (AL)

2<sup>nd</sup> place - Lyndon Gingerich (IL)

Ages 13 to 17:

1<sup>st</sup> place - Kenton Bender (AL)

2<sup>nd</sup> place - Justin Halteman (FL)

Ages 18 & up:

1<sup>st</sup> place - Goldie Huber (AL)

2<sup>nd</sup> place - Celia Landis (PA)

We send a GREAT BIG THANK YOU to  
all of our readers and sponsors!

## Support for Prison Ministries 25th Annual Benefit Auction

Friday, October 24 & Saturday, October 25

*Farmersville Auction Grounds, Farmersville, PA.*

For more information, call (717) 625-0232 or go to  
[www.supportforprisonministries.org](http://www.supportforprisonministries.org).

*A portion of the proceeds of this auction go to We Care Program.*



A photographer at a recent staff event captured this delightful group of We Care family members. They were the winners of our "Clash Day" competition, which generated some strange looks and lots of laughter and fun. Pictured from left to right are: David Landis, Jr., Diana Landis, Debbie Landis, Don Metzler, Doris Ranck, Ed Ranck, Lauren Metzler.

# From the Field

## J.O. Davis Corr. Facility Atmore, AL

*"I hurt until I couldn't hurt any more. Then they started the **Brother's Keeper Program** and I have found that I can share my hurts with others and feel good about myself again."*

In April the inmate chapel staff approached me about putting together a program for sharing and accountability. "We as Christian brothers can learn from each other and encourage one another if we share our struggles," they said.

Now five months later the program is growing in strength and number. We meet together every Monday morning for an hour. Objectives include establishing unity among Christian believers, building integrity, encouraging each other in our spiritual gifts, learning to forgive, practicing communion, learning responsibility, praying together, and being accountable to each other. Each week prayer partners team up for the

week. Recently I interviewed the class about the program. Here are some of their responses.

**Question: What has Brother's Keeper done for you?**

**Responses:** "It has taught me to be responsible." "The prayer partnership/accountability has developed in me a caring heart for others." "It has helped me tear down strongholds of isolation in my life." "It has taught me integrity." One man exclaimed, "My prayer partner and I have been praying as we walk together in the prison yard. It has given me a boldness to witness and to bring my Christianity out in the open!"

**Q: Why should we continue the Brother's Keeper Program?**

**R:** "There is an atmosphere created here where I can share my hurts and struggles and know that people really care and don't judge me." "People express rejection and hurts that they were not able to before." "We discover our gifts and find areas of common interest."

**Q: How has the Brother's Keeper Program stretched you?**

**R:** "I have been challenged to be truthful

and honest." One man responded, "I was procrastinating on something, but because of being accountable to my prayer partner, I couldn't conscientiously push it off any longer."

**Q: What is the most important aspect of this program to you?**

**R:** "I experience God's love here." "It gives me an opportunity to talk and have people listen to me." "I have learned more about myself and how to respond to others." "We all receive from each other because we all have something different to give."

*Demetrius shared his experience: "I learned to tear down the boundaries of loneliness, depression, isolation, and self-centeredness."*

*It was only through applying the principles of the Brother's Keeper Program that I was able to meet people and share about the goodness of God.*

*What a blessing it is to me!"*



Irvin Martin

## Donaldson Corr. Facility Birmingham, AL

"What??!! No, Chaplain Dave, you cannot be serious about this!!!"

This was the reaction from our six inmate chapel workers when I asked them to make it their business to welcome each of their fellow inmates who come to our regularly scheduled chapel services.



Dave Bucher

I replied, "Yes, I am very serious!"

They protested, "No, Dave, we cannot do that. Some of the guys we can shake hands with, but some of those others, well, no, we can't!" "Chaplain Dave, you know the low-down people who live here." "When some of those guys come out for services, we have no idea where their hands have been last; well, some we do, 'cause we saw where they had 'em!" "**We just can't shake all these guys' hands!**"

I asked our workers, "Are you glad when many guys, including the corrupt ones, from all over the prison come out to the service?"

"Yes, we are."

"Are you willing to show in this small way that you love them, are concerned about them, and are very glad

they came to hear the Word of God proclaimed?"

"Well, we can try."

"That's the (S)pirit!" I responded. We spent time praying together about it, and they have shown much growth since then.

As you can tell, this issue provoked a very lively discussion. I know their concern about the handshakes is quite real, but what would Jesus do if He was welcoming men into our chapel service? I believe He would touch each and every man regardless of who he is or what he has done. I am convinced that for great things to happen in the prison, they'll happen as Jesus works through His disciples who live inside. We outsiders play an important role to encourage them as they fulfill the Great Commission in the harvest fields they live in.

## Frank Lee Work Release Montgomery, AL


About 16 months ago we packed up our belongings in New York and headed south to Alabama. Were we insane, stupid, or following God's leading? This past year has definitely been a period of change and adjustment for us. I wouldn't describe it as painful, but simply necessary adjustments that come with this type of transition. Carol and I both marveled recently that we feel so contented with our move.

We praise the Lord for meeting our needs in so many ways. The Lord blessed us with a buyer for our New York property and an available property here that was within our budget. People partnered with us both financially and prayerfully so this call could become a reality. God wonderfully provided a job for Carol, and we had never even thought to ask Him for that type of work. We have found a church home where we are well fed spiritually and are building a circle of friends that we thank God for.

When we look back, we can see how God met our needs in the past, but we still find ourselves becoming anxious


about the future. At times like this I am more understanding of the children of Israel. They constantly forgot what God did in the past as they worried about present and future needs.

In living out my calling as a Christian to bring the message of hope to God's crown of creation, man, who has been deceived by God's arch enemy, I am challenged to remember God's faithfulness in the past as I depend on Him in the future.



Steve Stoltzfus

## Tutwiler Prison for Women Montgomery, AL




One of the women assigned to work in the chapel was not happy about it. In the past she had been hurt by the church and therefore did not want to be a chapel worker. As we worked together, she shared

Anna Miller

with me occasionally, and over time she came to accept her job, but was still very hesitant to trust us. Now she has been transferred to another facility.

Not being able to consistently disciple those we learn to know on a personal level is one of the frustrations in prison ministry. Sometimes we have only a short time to impact some of the lives we encounter at the prisons. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Later in that same chapter, verses 10 and 11 state, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it." Keeping this principle in mind, I can trust God to put other people in Angel's path to continue to point her to Jesus. It is not God's will that any should perish. Pray for her as you read this story. I sincerely hope that we made a positive Christlike impression on her while she was with us and that she could see that not all who call themselves Christians are like those who hurt her in the past. May we be more aware that we need to be redeeming the time and planting the seeds of the Gospel.

## Fountain Corr. Facility Atmore, AL



I watched the three hundred pound, muscle-bound man begin to cry as the voice on the other end of the phone blurted out his worst nightmare. He had hoped this day would never come, but here it was. He knew that his mother was getting up in years and might pass away while he was still in prison. However, he would never allow himself to believe it would actually happen. The truth was, besides his mother's harping trying to get him back to church, she was the best friend he had ever had. Hanging up the phone, he buried his face in his hands.

Blaine Copenhaver

After a few minutes, I broke the silence. "I'm sorry about your mother. I'm sure she was a great lady."

He nodded his head in agreement and then stammered, "She was the best." Blowing his nose and wiping his eyes, he continued, "She used to make the best apple pie, and she was a godly lady. She used to drag me to church every Sunday." Laughing, he remarked, "Boy, she could give a hard whipping. I'm going to miss her." We talked for a few minutes, and I encouraged him to not forget the faith of his mother.

After he left the office, I was reminded of how Satan does his best to take everything away from us. Not only has this man spent years in prison away from his family, but also it cost him to be absent from his own mother's funeral.

# PERSPECTIVES

with David R. Landis  
President

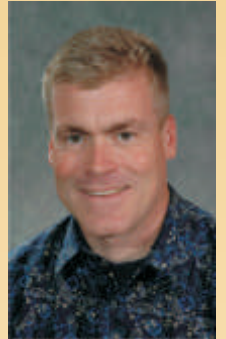
In my early years at We Care I had the mind-set that we should concentrate on helping inmates find Christ and grow in him while they were in prison, but when it came to helping men and women after release, there were other specialized ministries and individuals to whom we could pass the baton. In part, I think it was easier to approach things this way knowing the small size of our staff at the time and our desire to provide the best chaplaincy services we could with the limited resources we had. Besides, with Christ, were not all things possible for these men and women re-entering society?

However, there was always this deep nagging feeling inside me when someone I knew was nearing release and all that I could really say was “God bless you as you go...I’ll be praying for you...” or something like that. I also suspected that without some degree of continuing relationship after release, these men or women in whom we had invested countless hours of mentoring, teaching, and discipleship could quickly be

snatched away by the enemy because of the harsh realities of re-entry.

We are increasingly sensing that God is asking us to incorporate new objectives into our general ministry discipleship strategies. We can no longer hide behind desks and podiums while neglecting some very practical needs. That is why we are teaching Biblical studies and practical life skills with an emphasis on preparing inmates for successful re-entry. That is why we are exploring new opportunities to bless departing inmates with “first-days” critical needs. That is why we are opening a transitional home (Timothy House) for growing Christian men who desire a fresh start. All of this requires more prayer, more personnel, more finances, and maybe most importantly, more faith. Will you join us in “*Proclaiming Christ and Discipling Inmates*”? 🙌

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



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