



the **connection**

MAY 2010

*Celebrating*  
**40**  
*Years*

[WWW.WECAREPROGRAM.ORG](http://WWW.WECAREPROGRAM.ORG)

# Volume XLII

## Issue 2

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 chaplain and chaplain's assistants in prisons to provide friendship evangelism, teaching, peer counseling, and encouragement.

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

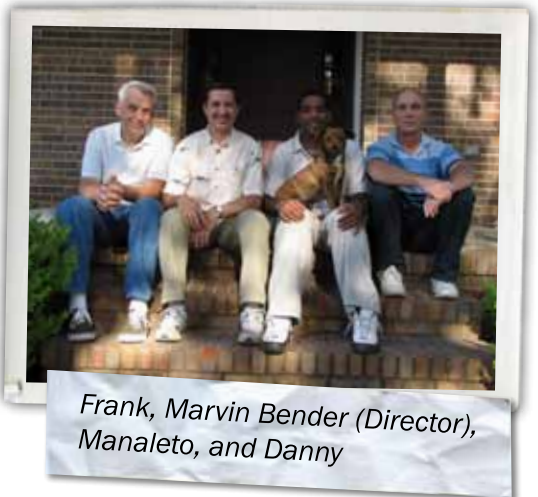
TELEPHONE: 251-368-8818  
FAX: 251-368-0932  
E-MAIL: [wecare@wecareprogram.org](mailto:wecare@wecareprogram.org)  
WEBSITE: [www.wecareprogram.org](http://www.wecareprogram.org)

BOARD CHAIRMAN: Aaron Martin  
PRESIDENT: David R. Landis  
VICE PRES./BUSINESS MGR.: Don Metzler  
EDITOR: David R. Landis  
ASST. EDITOR: Noreen Horst  
LAYOUT & DESIGN: Sheila Copenhaver  
CIRCULATION MANAGER: Noreen Horst

# NEWS

## Timothy House

After a lengthy period of planning, waiting, and some disappointment, we are excited to welcome three residents to the Timothy House, We Care's residential aftercare program. We ask for your prayers on behalf of these men and others to come.



*Frank, Marvin Bender (Director),  
Manaleta, and Danny*

## Moving On...

We extend a big "Thank You" to Ed and Doris Ranck for 4 1/2 years of service as host couple at We Care Program. Along with Ed's chaplaincy duties at Atmore Work Center, the Rancks were also "Mom and Dad" to 22 young adults and volunteers who lived at We Care during their term. Also completing service terms are Discover Intern Patrick Overholt and short-term volunteer Oren Horst. Richest blessings to each of you.

## Read-A-Thon

We Care's 7th annual Read-a-Thon is just around the corner. Check out details on our web-site to take part in this July event and support the work of our chaplaincy staff. All ages welcome!

## Spring Banquets

Approximately 1,150 persons attended We Care's spring ministry banquets in PA and OH and provided generous support to the work of We Care Program. The tour included our first banquet in Plain City, OH. We extend a special thanks to the Wissmann Family, Milford, NE, and banquet committee members who helped to make each evening a memorable event.

## Money Talk

Would you like to eat once a year? That does not seem very reasonable since we need food to live. Just like food is one of the major things the body needs to live, so financial gifts are a major component for We Care's survival. Regular contributions (monthly, bi-monthly, etc.) are vitally important for us to be able to keep ministering the love of Jesus to men and women in prison. We are extremely grateful to those who support us and invite the rest of you to consider giving a regular contribution. Contact us today to find out about automatic giving through debit or credit cards.

# CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF MINISTRY

## *The Foundation Years: Beginnings-1979*

by: Mike Strehlow

There might never have been a We Care Program if Martin Weber hadn't preached so well that he got chewed out by the commissioner.

It went like this. For six years, beginning in 1964, Martin Weber had been preaching Jesus in Alabama prisons, mainly Atmore State Prison Farm and Holman Correctional Facilities in Atmore. Prison ministry was not Martin's plan when he moved his wife and seven children to Atmore in 1962; he wanted to minister to the Poarch Creek Indian tribe in the area and farm on the side. But some time after Martin arrived, a friend asked him to take a look at the prisons just north of town. Martin looked, saw the crushing need, listened to the Holy Spirit, and began full-time prison ministry in a state that did not even have prison chaplains.

Initially, Atmore State's guards scoffed at the clean-shaven, bespectacled Pennsylvania Mennonite who imagined he could minister to the roughest inmates in Alabama. But they didn't scoff long. Those hardened, violent men flocked to hear Martin preach and stayed around afterwards to get saved. Martin worked so hard and was such a good influence at Atmore State that about two years after he started, the warden called Martin into the office and said, "You've been doing a good job. We know you have a family to take care of and would like to see you get paid."

Because he did not have any ministry credentials, Martin could not be hired as a chaplain. So the warden had him take the test for prison guard. When Martin passed the test and was hired, the warden told him, "Instead of a gun, you can carry your Bible."

In 1970 Martin got a raise by taking a Lieutenant's exam and passing it. By then his ministry was expanding; in that year the Alabama Department of Corrections made him chaplain of ALL the prisons in Alabama! "This is an impossible job," Martin told them, but at first they did not listen.

With all of Alabama's prisons to oversee, Martin's ministry was a lot bigger than his paycheck. He had to have support and regularly preached in churches up north to solicit aid. On one occasion a church in Ohio sent him \$1000 to help with the work: quite a tidy sum in those days.

Too tidy a sum for the Alabama DOC, anyway. When word of the contribution reached the DOC, the commissioner called Martin into his office and severely reprimanded him. Among other things he told Martin that it was illegal for prison guards (which is technically what Martin still was) to take contributions from outsiders.

But the commissioner gave Martin a way. If Martin would organize a non-profit corporation, with a board of directors receiving the money and channeling it to the ministry, Martin's chaplaincy program could get the funding it needed. So the organization was formed. Martin named it New Life Foundation.

With an organization behind him to handle the money, Martin brought in other free world teachers, started a Bible school, and opened both a halfway house for released inmates and a group home for teenaged girls that he named "The Bridge." A year later The Bridge was changed to a home for troubled teenage boys. As his vision grew, volunteers joined him, families came alongside his, and Martin was the president of a ministry.

One of Martin's best ideas was the Crusade. In the mid-seventies, to show skeptical inmates that he wasn't the only free world person who cared for them and wanted to share Jesus with them, Martin brought an evangelist and five volunteers into Fountain (Atmore State) Correctional. This outreach was so successful that it became a yearly event now reaching into 20 prisons.

Martin's success had one more direct effect. The ADOC was so impressed by the work this one chaplain did that it finally budgeted the money to hire state chaplains for most of Alabama's prisons.



*Note: The name New Life Foundation was changed to We Care Program in 1983. ●*

# A History of 1970-

1964-1970

Martin Weber started going into the Atmore State Prison Farm in 1964. Later he expanded his work into Holman. He first went in as a volunteer several times a week. The warden suggested he take the guard exam which he did and passed so was put on the payroll—carrying a Bible instead of a gun. Later he took the lieutenant exam and passed, followed by the chaplaincy exam which he also passed. At that point he was made a state chaplain even though he had no seminary training. This happened about 1970.



Nov 1970

Martin Weber formed New Life Foundation to give structure to his prison ministry. The first service under NLF was held in November 1970.

1970

By 1970 two teachers, Alvin Yoder and Leon Weber, were teaching Bible classes to 64 men at Holman. There was an additional Bible class for illiterate men.

Aug 31 1970

A 6-week Bible school was held at the Prison Farm [Fountain]. The first graduation class was held with 60 men receiving diplomas or certificates.



Sept 1970

During 1970 a Yokefellows group was formed within the Holman prison for fellowship both within the prison and with free world volunteers. The group also helped raise funds for prison religious needs. This included buying a projector and renting movies after they were no longer being sent gratis. Inmates had to be Christians for two months before they could be nominated for Yokefellows.

1972

Feb 1972

The 1972... ma... Feb... nev...

New Life F... a mobile h... re-entry by... Anna Webe... helped with... meals.



1970 -

# 1979 We Care Program



1974

▲ NLF constructed The Bridge, a group home for girls aged 12-15 who were in trouble with the law. Open house was held July 14, 1974, and the first girls arrived on August 30. After one year of operation The Bridge changed its focus to boys aged 13-15.

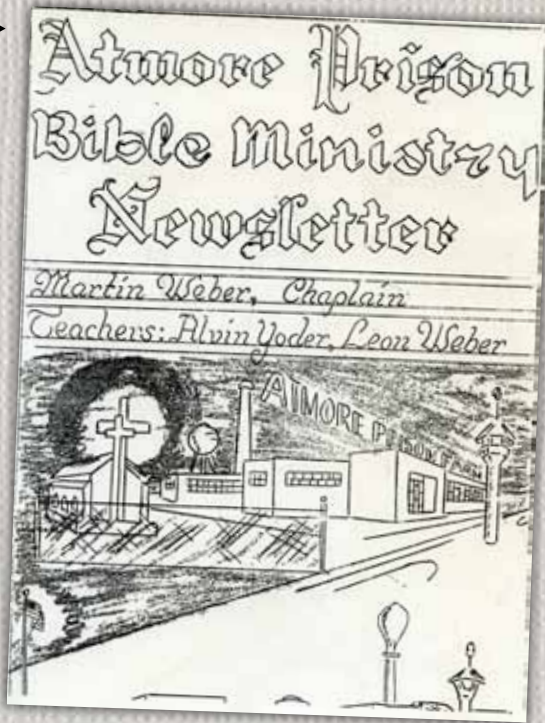
June 1977

Plans were made to send the boys from The Bridge to an NLF sponsored ACE (Accelerated Christian Education) school for the '77-'78 school year. This was the beginning of what is now Atmore Christian School. During that first year a building was purchased and made ready for the following school year. Atmore Christian School provided an alternative to public school and its influences on the boys at The Bridge.

October 1979

▼ In 1979 The Bridge was closed. The state required NLF to revisit some of the house requirements such as no TV and mandatory church attendance. NLF believed it could not compromise; the state refused to renew the license and removed the boys.

▲ The first newsletter in April, 1970, was photo-copied and mailed to 200 persons. In February 1972, the first printed newsletters were sent to 3500.



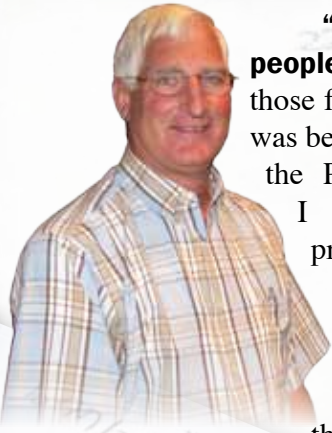
1977

▼ In the mid-seventies Chaplain Weber brought an evangelist and five volunteers into Fountain (Atmore State) Correctional for revival meetings. This outreach was so successful that it became a yearly event starting in 1977 with 36 volunteers. The annual We Care Crusade now reaches into 20 prisons with hundreds of volunteers.



▲ Foundation bought home to be used for released prisoners. Weber, Martin's wife, with laundry and





*Ed Rausch*  
**Atmore Work Center  
Atmore, AL**

**“Chap, you’re like those people from long ago that wore those funny hats.”** I didn’t know if I was being compared to the Pilgrims, the Puritans, or the Amish, but I was sure the idea I was presenting to my class was not being favorably received. The idea for that day was that sometimes we need to avoid actions that are not wrong in themselves but may lead us into places where we are tempted to do wrong. That concept seemed to fly way over the head of

Student “A,” hence the comment about my being so out of touch.

As I teach in the prisons, I am amazed that men who have lost so many of life’s basic freedoms by their past behavior are quick to defend their lifestyles and are resistant to hearing truths that can keep them from repeating those same mistakes. What I present may be considered radical, but I can take my “funny hat ideas” and walk up to the prison gate when I am ready and I can walk free. And I believe, by the grace of God, the truth I teach will one day enable others to apply these same values to their lives and walk in freedom with me.



*Anna Miller*  
**Tutwiler Prison for Women  
Montgomery, AL**

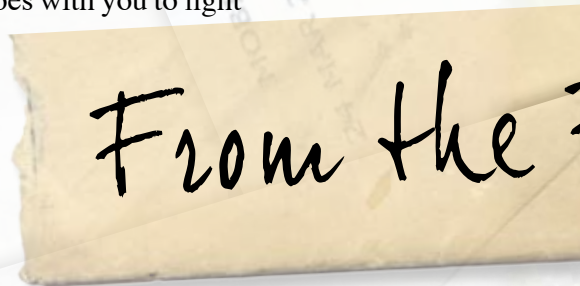
**This past winter I taught a class on spiritual warfare in the Faith Dorm.** The class members and I learned a great of the craftiness of Satan as well as the power of God and the weapons to use against the enemy. Ephesians 6:12 says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against spiritual

hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Many of the women had played around with things they thought were trivial and found out by doing so they opened a door to spiritual strongholds. Satan is such a liar and deceiver, and he gets us to try little things that seem harmless at the time but have bitter consequences later. We cannot play with fire and not be burned.

But praise God He gives us victory in Christ Jesus! It gave us all comfort to know that through Jesus’ death on the cross we can find power to break down

every stronghold. It also made us aware that some of our battles are fought by the Holy Spirit in the spiritual realm. Deuteronomy 20:4 states, “For the Lord your God is He who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to save you.” We rejoiced that we are on the victory side and that we have Jesus to

fight our enemies and to release us from the strongholds that had kept us in bondage. That is why the cross has a special meaning for us. Jesus took our place and died that we might live. Through Jesus Christ and His blood that was shed for us, we can be free indeed!



*Dean Miller*  
**Holman Corr. Facility  
Atmore, AL**

**Every Sunday morning that I attend the services on Death Row** at Holman, I am encouraged by the love in the Body of Christ for one another and for Jesus, especially from the church leaders. An exceptional hunger for Christ is evident. Recently when I attended the service, the atmosphere was electric with the presence of God. These guys are not anything special, and to me their circumstance would be one of the worst of

any in the world, yet they appear to have a love, joy and contentment that is extraordinary. They cry out to God with a hunger and thirst for His presence. They have a desire for His righteousness and His kingdom to come. These individuals see their need for Christ and long for Him. Through their hunger and thirst for Jesus, He comes near.

As I go into the prisons and throughout life in general, I find an uneasy contentment in myself and others in life apart from Jesus Christ. We do not see our need. However, apart from Christ we are “under the Law and condemned.” Not just those who are on Death Row, but everyone. This should make us hungry and thirsty for Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the law. This should also make us grateful to God who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ regardless of our circumstances. We all need Jesus whether we realize it or not. May we daily hunger and thirst for Christ who is life and rest.

*We Care*  
*3493*  
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*3493*  
*Atmore, AL 36502*

Field

The chaplain and I recently received a request from an inmate

that went something like this: "My constitutional rights are being violated, so I need you to do the Russian roll lizard and crank that

Holy Ghost up and woppdy, woppdy, woo and abracadabra and tell God and Jesus Christ they gotta do better than that.

They're taking too long to bodda bodda bing badda badda boom... something isn't right most definitely, and it's time for me to be on my way out of this place..."

While this request is quite humorous, it is also sad to realize what this man thinks he needs. He thinks if God would only fix his problem and give him freedom, everything would be okay. What he fails to see is that physical freedom pales in comparison to spiritual freedom. Getting out of prison would be like putting fresh paint over rust; the paint will only last temporarily. It is only when the rust is removed and paint is applied that true lasting joy will be found. How many times have we asked God to fix our problems or take our pain away when we should be asking Him to clean our heart?



Blaine Copenhaver  
Fountain Corr. Facility  
Atmore, AL

"Man, Dave, that makes three. You better slow down a little, Dave!" "Tryin' to get yourself another Brady Bunch, aren't you, Chaplain Dave?!" "Dave, how many kids you tryin' to have?!"

I just smiled. I don't mind the questions and fun poking. The guys are rejoicing with me. I know they are longing to live in society and live a family life like I have the privilege of living. Many of these men have known me all of these seven years. They knew me as single, no kids, no wife or girlfriend. They have now known me for six years as married, loving my wonderful wife, fathering three children. It is an awesome challenge and a huge responsibility to walk among these men being an example of a godly, faithful husband and father in my family. Most of them have failed and have been failed miserably in these areas. May the Lord continue to use me!

Stopping by my office, Charles was literally bouncing

with excitement. "I have never felt so good, Chap. I have the peace of God in my heart. I feel it and it is real. I have forgiven my brother!"

He was referring to having been attacked by another "Christian" brother with a deadly weapon. It is easier perhaps to forgive someone who is not a believer and does us bodily harm than to forgive a Christian brother who injures us on purpose, especially if the brother who did us harm is looked up to as a leader in the Christian community. "It was hard for me to forgive him, Chap. Last year I would have struck back. Some of my friends have told me that they will help me get even. One of them told me he would spit in his food for me, but I told him not to do it. I told them I have no bad feelings toward him. They think I am weird and don't understand that I have forgiven him. It feels wonderful, Chap!"

Later that day David, another inmate, stopped by my office. "Do you know Charles?" he asked. "A lot of these fellows that come up to the chapel have a different side to them back in the dorms. But Charles, he is different! He is the same back in the dorm as he is here in the chapel."

I know the grace of God for me, but when one of them experiences it, WOW. This is the grace of God working in the lives of these men. Stories like this one motivate me and remind me why I am here.



Stan Schrock  
Century Corr. Institution  
Century, FL

"Hey there, Chaplain Dave! How is Little Ethan doing these days?"

"Well," I said, "he is doing just fine. He is learning more big words. He's learned that he can turn on the light switches by jumping up to reach them or by pulling over a chair to stand on. He is as active as ever and is overflowing with energy! And," I added, "he is learning how to be a big brother to his new baby brother!"

"What!?" my inmate friend looked at me in disbelief.

"I didn't even know you and your wife were expecting another baby! And now you tell me he's already here, he's two months old, and Ethan is learning how to be his big brother?!" Joking, he said, "Dave, I should have been the first to know!"

Hearing his exclamation, several other guys chimed in with a barrage of statements and questions.



David Bucher  
Donaldson Corr. Facility  
Birmingham, AL



# Pondering God's Great Work

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT

Our family's initial commitment to We Care was for one year. It was to be a time of stepping away from our "normal" and allowing God to direct our steps for the future. Little did I know that for the next 11 years and counting I would be associating with what I have now come to know as a very, very special organization. I am continually reminded on a personal level of the tremendous privilege I have to "Proclaim Christ and Disciple Inmates" with some of the most dedicated, servant-hearted people I have ever encountered.

More recently, I have become increasingly aware of the rich history that is a part of this organiza-

tion as well. A family visit to Focus on the Family's visitor center in Colorado Springs last summer inspired me to as a leader to increase our emphasis on the importance of We Care's history and the evidence it gives to God's faithfulness through the years.

This year we celebrate our 40th anniversary. We are dedicating this and the next three issues of "The Connection" to help us all re-discover the wonder of God's hand at work through the last four decades. We also plan to unveil a new historical display at our 40th Anniversary Open House on July 24, 2010.

"Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them." Ps. 111:2

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