



the **connection**

JULY 2010

Celebrating
40
Years

WWW.WECAREPROGRAM.ORG

Volume XLII

Issue 3

Published six times a year, The Connection provides news and views to friends of We Care Program, a non-profit, interdenominational organization consisting of Christian men and women who share a burden for and commitment to "Proclaiming Christ and Discipling Inmates." We are accomplishing our purpose by placing and training missionary chaplains, fostering relationships with inmates, encouraging Christian inmates to live in community, teaching Biblical studies, mentoring, providing outreach opportunities, and collaborating with those who support our purpose.

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Money Talk

Would you like to support the ministry of We Care Program but do not have the cash available? You can make gifts of appreciated assets such as securities, real estate, vehicles, or commodities. Depending on the type of gift, we may suggest you use professional assistance from an organization such as the Mennonite Foundation to help facilitate the gift. We Care can also assist with providing life income to you for major gifts. Life income gifts, in the form of Charitable Gift Annuities and Charitable Remainder Trusts, provide income to you and your spouse. At death the remaining principal would be paid to We Care. If any of these methods of giving interest you, please contact Don Metzler at don@wecareprogram.org.

NEWS

40TH ANNIVERSARY WEBCAST

You are invited to join us in person or by webcast on Saturday, July 24, 3:00 – 4:30 PM (Central Time) as we celebrate God's faithfulness over 40 years of ministry. Join us online through our website or in person at Grace Fellowship, Atmore, AL. All are welcome to an "Open House" at We Care headquarters from 6:00 – 8:30 PM.

DISCOVER PROGRAM

Time is running out for young men to apply for this year's Discover Program, an eight-month spiritual growth experience beginning September 13. Visit our website and click on "Internship" for more information. Applications need to be received in our office by July 31.

WELCOME

Joining the We Care family from Harleysville, PA, are David and Mary Landis and their children, Abigail, Joshua, Benjamin, and Elizabeth. The Landises come with the blessing of their home church, Franconia Mennonite. David joins Bob Depew in assisting with chaplaincy programming at Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore, AL.



NEW!

Are you an alumnus of We Care, or are you curious who is? Check out our new alumni page on the website by clicking on "Team" and looking for the Alumni link under We Care Staff.

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF MINISTRY

The Growing Years: 1980-1989

by: Mike Strehlow

The 1980's were the years that We Care Program, as it is today, really took shape.

Though New Life Foundation (the organization's name before 1983) had already existed for about ten years, if you had gone to Atmore then and tried to find it, you wouldn't have seen much. Martin Weber started NLF so he could keep his job as Alabama's first paid state prison chaplain while accepting financial contributions to support his expanding ministries. NLF also helped when Martin wanted to bring people alongside to minister in prisons with him. But despite all that went on under the NLF banner (prison crusades, a Bible school, a group home and Christian school for troubled teens, a newsletter), in 1980 the organization was mostly Martin Weber and a handful of associates, wearing different hats.

Everything would soon change as the Holy Spirit called for volunteers through Martin Weber's voice and pen. In May 1980, Martin wrote, "Over the past seventeen years, I have...studied a lot of prison ministries. Many have come and gone with little or no lasting effect. As I see it, this waste...can be avoided when a dedicated team of men...works full time inside the [prison] five days a week...because God's love compels them—not because they are obligated to the Board of Corrections. May I ask you some searching questions? Where is there a place more needy than prison? Where is there a group of men that need Christ more than prisoners?"

God called and the Church responded. The decade of the '80's was the Golden Age of We Care volunteerism. In 1983 alone, We Care Program added over 20 ministry volunteers, equaling the total number of staff persons who served in the 70's! Dozens more served in the following years.

Despite all the success We Care had with prison ministry, long time volunteers remember the early '80's as hectic. Martin wanted We Care Program to move into crime prevention, to keep men and women out of the prisons in the first place. And he felt so strongly that the best way to reach (especially) young people was through radio spots and movies, that when construction started on the We Care headquarters building in



December '83, a major component of the new building was its video and radio production facilities. Martin's passion for media production was encouraged by the success of the 1984 Emmy award winning CBS-TV movie, *Dead Wrong*, the John Evans Story, an adaptation of Evans' testimony that Martin filmed a week before Evans' execution. Upon completion of the new headquarters, Martin Weber resigned his post as prison chaplain, after serving 19½ years, to be chief executive of We Care Program.

The organization took on even more. In 1985 We Care opened two We Care Centers in Mobile and Montgomery to focus on crime-prevention, prison ministry, and re-entry. The revivals (later called crusades) continued to attract volunteers and increase in size each year, eventually expanding their reach into Montgomery prisons.

When in 1987 Martin's son Phil Weber took over as Executive Director of We Care Program, Phil recognized that the ministry had become overextended. He saw that God moved best when We Care stayed with Martin Weber's original vision, a prison ministry dedicated to putting full-time chaplains in Alabama prisons. So the crime prevention programs were cut, and We Care Program's focus returned to prison ministry, settling the ministry with a single vision and setting its course for the future. ●

A History of 1980-

NLF's influence was extended to Montgomery area prisons through an invitation Martin Weber received to conduct revival meetings at Staton Prison. Twenty-two men from ten different states participated. The following year, spring revivals were held in four Montgomery prisons including Tutwiler, the first meetings of its kind in Alabama's only women's state prison. Montgomery was permanently added as a second base of operations for the annual revival in 1990.

February 1980

Jan 3 1982

Elaine Hess, the first female volunteer to serve in the prison setting under NLF, went to Tutwiler.



1983

We Care Program produced its first film, "My World, My Choice," as part of the crime prevention program. In the next few years, two additional films were produced. Film-making was discontinued in 1987.



1984

After 19½ years as a state chaplain, Martin Weber resigned from that position in order to fully devote himself to leading the growing organization.



January 1984

The film Wrong, Evans S produc the aus Care, p CBS TV won bo award Eagle a

1981

Placing full-time assistant chaplains in Alabama prisons became the primary focus of the organization during the 1980's. Steve Longenecker, who served at Holman, was the first We Care volunteer to serve at a prison other than Fountain, Martin Weber's ministry beginning point. Since then, We Care chaplains have served throughout Alabama and beyond.



1982

1983

We Care Program and New Life Foundation organizations combined into one. We Care Program was the surviving name.

Martin Weber formed the We Care Program, a crime prevention program to work at reaching young people before they begin a life of crime.

Dec 9 1983

Ground was broken for a We Care headquarters building a few miles north of Atmore, AL, near the intersection of I-65 and Hwy 21. It included a video production studio. By April, 1984, the building was nearing completion and already in use.



1970 -

-1989 We Care Program



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...award.

November 1984

The first fund-raising auction was held in PA raising \$10,000. Within several years, a local organization (Support for Prison Ministries) was formed to provide oversight and exposure for the auction.



The first We Care Center opened in Mobile, AL, (pictured) in May, and the second opened in Montgomery, AL, in September. Each center's mission was to work at We Care's three-fold ministry: prevention, prison ministry, and re-entry. These centers were closed in 1987.

1985



Jan 12-17 1986

July 1987

Phil Weber was appointed as Executive Director of We Care.



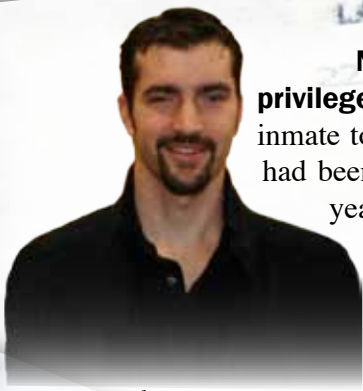
For the first time, over 100 volunteers from 54 different churches participated in prison revivals at Fountain and Holman.

Sept 29 1989

The first We Care Economy Shop opened in Atmore to generate funding for the ministry. Aaron and Vera Martin (on right) were the first managers. At one point in the day the line at the cash register stretched 30 feet.



Next issue: 1990-1999



Jerre Fox
**Staton Corr. Facility
Montgomery, AL**

Not long ago I had the privilege to drive a newly released inmate to a halfway house. This man had been locked up for almost forty years, living in an environment of distrust, violence, and lies for all of his adult life. Although he was friendly, he always seemed withdrawn and suspicious. The day of his release he didn't show any of the usual excitement of a man getting

out of prison. I don't think he even knew how to feel.

In my car I turned on some music and he rolled down the window. As the prison grew farther and farther behind us, his face visibly relaxed, and he began cheerfully talking about the beautiful scenery and the good smells. He liked my music, he liked riding in a car, he liked everything! The tough exterior he had kept for thirty-plus years was falling off like an old shell.

I told him about the goodness of God and how He wanted to make him a new person on the inside and give him new life. He admitted that he needs to rethink how he views God and that he was wrong about some of the things he believed. I wonder how many people will be able to look past his prison record and see a man who is truly looking for new life.

While not everyone leaving prison wants to change, there are two verses I have learned to keep in mind. The first is that love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1Cor. 13:7) The second admonishes us to be careful how we act in our judgment of others as Paul tells how God draws men to repentance. "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing the kindness of God leads you to repentance." (Rom. 2:4)

Let's not be so afraid of being disappointed or taken advantage of that we lose sight of the heart of God.

Recently I was teaching a Bible study

about our faith and where we put our faith in hard times, discussing such questions as these: Do I have circumstantial faith? What do I prop my faith against? Is it what I've seen God do in the

Bob Depew
**Holman Corr. Facility
Atmore, AL**

past, or do I think if I do just the right things, God will do what I want Him to do? Maybe I think if I pray really hard, God will do what I want, or if I'm really good, God will bless me. Or do I have a loving and living relationship with Jesus Christ and stand on the promises of the Word of God, the Bible?

As each one in the group shared his thoughts, one of the men had tears running down his face when it was his turn to speak. He said he was not a believer but had felt drawn to come to the study for some reason. He went on to say that he had tried religion in the past but it "didn't work." Now for the first time he realized that he had a circumstantial faith. That day he asked for prayer and sensed God calling him to a relationship with Jesus. Praise the Lord for the power of the Holy Spirit that still draws people to Himself!



Marvin Bender
**Timothy House
Atmore, AL**

Change. I was praying for change at Timothy House, and God answered.

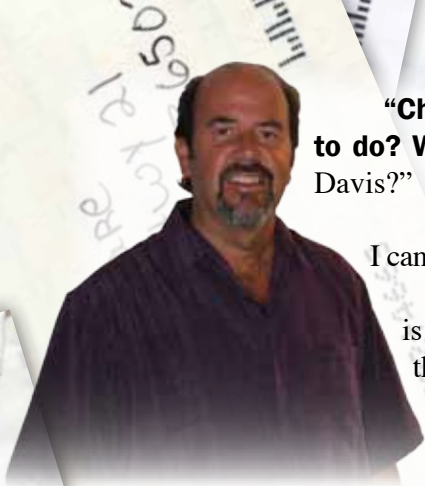
Instead of one resident, we now have three. Very soon I started praying that we'd have a short break before receiving more residents. I was experiencing more demands than I wanted, as transporting them to and from appointments and jobs on different time schedules can take a lot of time and distract me from what I need to accomplish in the office. I'm thankful that God does not continually change His mind like I tend to do. "Lord, give us more residents." "Lord, please wait before sending more."

Change is a big part of life. It comes many times without our asking for it, and we don't always think it is what we want. However, I think we would bring the same change God does in our circumstances—if we could see the same results and outcome that He is able to see. Trust is at the heart of accepting change from God.

I'm now praying for a host couple or single man (or both) to serve at Timothy House. I think this change would supply a need we have—taxi service, cooking, modeling Christian family life, and sharing from our own experiences in life and how to grow spiritually from it.

Maybe God wants to bring change to your life as well. Whatever God is calling you to do, serve faithfully. Embrace God's change; He has a purpose in it.





Dwain Martin
**J.O. Davis Corr. Facility
Atmore, AL**

“Chap, what do you want me to do? What’s your vision for J. O. Davis?”

“I think I’m getting out, Chap; I can’t do this any longer.”

“How can this person say he is one of us (Christians) and do the things he does?”

“Chap, God has given me a prophetic word for you. For your wife, son or daughter.”

All these questions and comments have come from men in the leadership group at J. O. Davis. These men meet daily for prayer, keep the chapel clean, and at any time can be approached and will take

the time to counsel and pray with someone in need.

With the many questions and disagreements brought to me constantly from them, from others, and even at home, I feel overwhelmed at times. So what am I to do with all these disappointments and imperfections? Besides going to my Heavenly Father, I share my problems with the church in prison. They support me by fasting and praying for me, loving me, and holding me up. I love these men dearly.

Although sometimes everything seems to be wrong and the Christian brothers are at each others’ throats, I am reminded that Jesus told Peter He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Any place where Jesus is being lifted up and we are building a church to His Name, the gates of hell will attempt to prevail against it. May we therefore not be found ignorant of the scriptures but build each other up by them!

“Do you believe Jesus Christ is the only true human manifestation of God?” Before me sat a literature instructor who educationally was miles ahead of me. She had studied the literature about and of Buddha, Mohammed, Wiccan goddesses, and more. Her own beliefs



Wilma Mullet
**Ohio Reformatory for Women
Marysville, OH**

in the Field

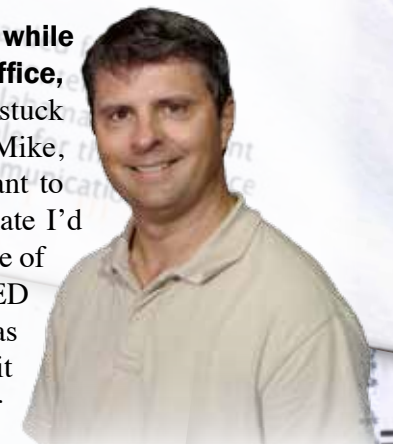
were formed with bits and pieces from each of these, and she wanted to meet with me because “you have an ‘energy’ about you.”

At our first meeting I had told her the only thing I could tell her with absolute assurance was about Jesus Christ. Because of what He had done for me, in my life, personally. She felt that was good because “it’s coming from your heart.” She didn’t intimidate me because, for all her learning, it was obvious she was confused and searching. The future is dark to her even though she embraces reincarnation. Prison has taken her totally out of her comfort zone, and her occasional tears tell me she is really hurting.

I answered her question: “Yes, I believe He is.” She very nicely told me she thought it was unfair that God would have Jesus as the only way. “All I can tell you is what Jesus has done for me. Other great teachers and prophets may give instructions on how to live from now on, but only Jesus Christ can do something about the sin and guilt already inside us. I KNOW He can do that because of what He did for me. My guilt and misery overwhelmed me. I chose to believe that His blood could cleanse me from all sin as He claimed. In my desperation, I asked Him to do that for me—and He did. The peace I felt then and feel now is proof to me that He is who He said He is and He can do what He said He can do...It happened to me.”

“I’ll think about that,” she said as she left.

A few weeks ago while I was in the chaplain’s office, one of the chapel workers stuck his head in and said, “Mr. Mike, there’s someone here you want to see.” In walked a young inmate I’d tested last year, holding a piece of paper. He’d just taken his GED exam and had passed it. I was the first person he showed it to, and I think I was prouder than he was. He just looked sort of dazed.



Mike Strehlow
**Fountain Corr. Facility
Atmore, AL**

In 2009 alone our program helped eighteen inmates at Fountain get GEDs. Considering our average class size is about fifteen, that’s a pretty good number and doesn’t include those we test and send straight to trade school. What’s the best part? Seeing those dazed looks on the faces of the inmates as they hold that paper and realize, “I’ve got a GED. I didn’t get it through cheating. I didn’t con anybody for it or steal it. I got it by working hard. I earned it.” One can almost see the lights going on.



Unified Diversity

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT

How has working with We Care Program helped you to grow in your walk with Jesus? That's one of the questions I have posed to our staff as we share our stories with each other in our weekly staff meetings. My own answer to that question has caused me to reflect on the many ways that my walk has deepened since joining the We Care family. But one stands out.

Working with We Care Program has helped me to appreciate the diversity in the Body of Christ. This has come about through years of interactions with fellow staff members, Christian inmates and officers, chaplains, and a host of prison ministry volunteers from every persuasion imaginable. These relationships have

helped me to formulate my own personal convictions while learning to respect differing views in the Body. I seek to follow the counsel of Paul, who reminds us that *"...if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained."* (Philipians 3:15b)

I realize that I still have lots of work to do in this area of understanding, as there are times when I do not accurately represent the unifying love of Christ. However, I am extremely thankful for every brother and sister in Christ who has helped me to see more fully the oneness that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord, who prayed that we would all *"...be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* (John 17: 23b) 🙏

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