



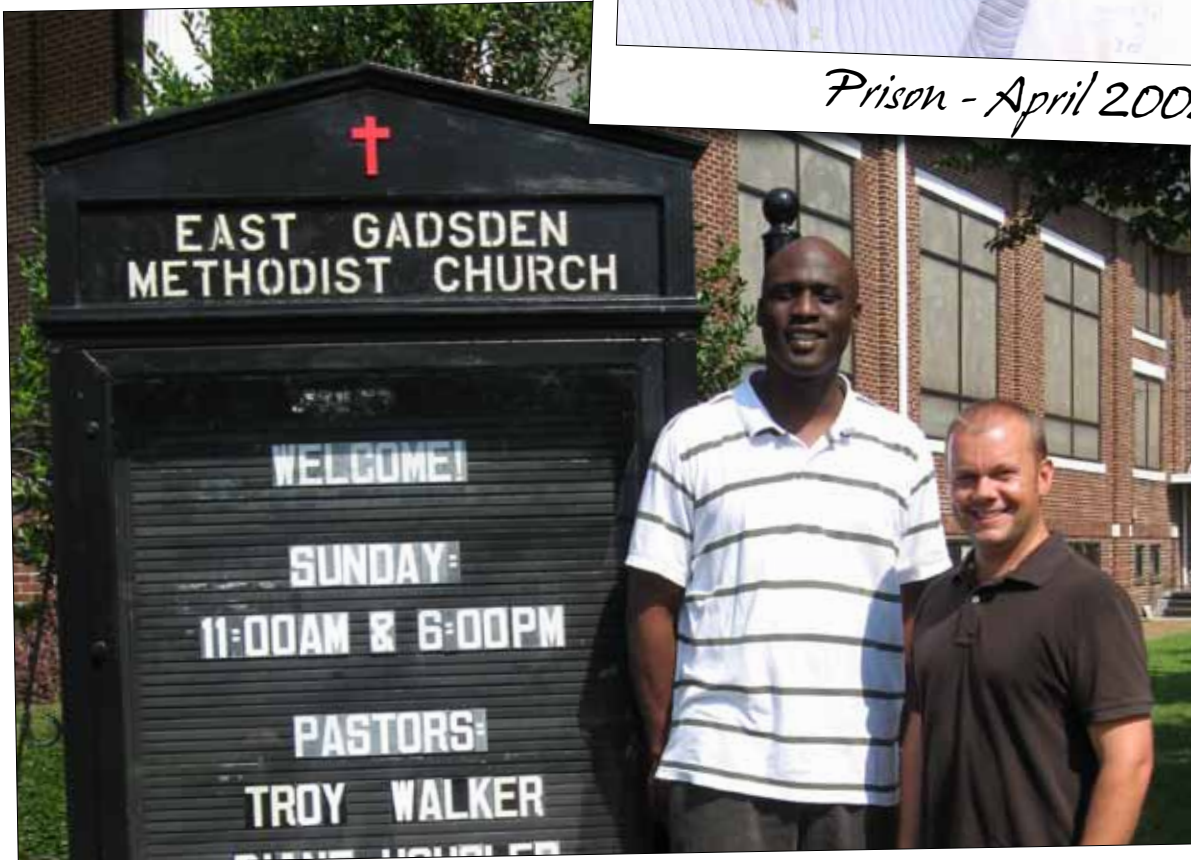
# the connection

SEPTEMBER 2012

*What Are the Chances?*



*Prison - April 2005*



*Pastor - June 2012*





# What Are the Chances...?!

by David Bucher, Assistant Chaplain at Donaldson Correctional Facility

What are the chances that two men, both born in the '70s in Pennsylvania, one in Philadelphia and the other in Lebanon County farming country, would meet years later in a maximum security prison near Birmingham, Alabama? What are the chances that they would become very close friends?

It is a storied relationship, mine and Troy's. In my younger years I could not have guessed that one of my best friends in this life was to be a much-taller-than-I African-American man I would meet as I was beginning my prison ministry in 2003. Troy was an inmate and I an assistant chaplain. He had received Christ several years earlier and was already a strong Christ-follower when we met. It did not take me long to realize this was a man who talked his walk and walked his talk. We would later argue (or should I say, discuss) who was the bigger encourager of whom. With encouragement flowing both ways, we are mutually thankful to God for putting us in each other's life.

For four years after our initial meeting we talked several times a week. He often commented on the tunes he heard me whistling as I walked from place to place in the prison, and repeatedly he said, "Dave, I am gonna whistle one day, just like you!" I observed

his walk among his fellow inmates, seeing the witness of

his life and how God used him in the lives of others. He was very respected in the faith-based dorm in which he lived.

Then one morning in February 2007, I entered the institution and heard the familiar words, "[So-and-so] transferred yesterday." In this case, Troy Walker was no longer at Donaldson. I remember thinking, "Now what am I going to do?!" I really hated to see him go! I know the whole point of our ministry is to witness to and mentor men for Christ. We want to see them leave high security prisons for a lower security institution and then return to society. But I was going to miss this guy!

## Outside the Fence

Two and a half years later Troy was granted parole and released from prison. Now the icing on the cake is to walk together with my friend in the free-world. His is a great story of success, and it is a joy to see God use him in ministry to others here in society.

Our major difference in height has always been and continues to be an ever-ready source of jokes. Just recently we visited him at his church's facility, and he offered me a coke from the fridge. I accepted it, saying that if it could be spared, I would take it. He responded, "Well, I'll just tell the kitchen workers a certain chaplain was here visiting, and now we're coming up SHORT on the drinks!" My family has adopted him as a big (and I do mean big) brother, and we enjoy many good times together. Our children love him, and my wife counts him as a wonderful friend!

What are the chances that after two occupational opportunities the Lord would weave the tapestry of Troy's story so that now he would be called upon to pastor a church? What are the chances that he would be the first African-American pastor this church would ever have? Since his recent installation as a pastor, Troy shared with me that life in this ministry has the best and worst of times, so to speak. He feels the great weight of the responsibility to lead and shepherd God's people, and at times he feels more broken than ever before. But then God uses broken people best.



Troy Walker with Bucher Family



# Stewardship Corner

by Steve Martin, Development Director



Ten-year-old Bethany Yoder was very excited about getting started with this year's We Care Read-a-thon. But then the unthinkable happened. On July 1, the very day that she and her siblings were planning to begin reading, Bethany died from injuries sustained in an automobile accident a few days earlier.

Bethany was an avid reader and was looking forward to participating in the Read-a-thon again this year. Last year she read almost 900 pages as her way of helping the We Care chaplains share the Good News of Jesus with prisoners. Her read-a-thon influence continues this year as some of her sponsors are using the pages read by her siblings to contribute in her honor.

According to her teacher Karla Maust, Bethany had a sweet, talkative nature. She was an encourager and often wrote thoughtful notes to her classmates and teachers. New things were exciting to her. One of her common phrases was "I can't wait." And she had a genuine concern for others, especially



for their spiritual well-being. Karla stated, "There definitely will be a hole in our classroom without Bethany this year."

Bethany is sorely missed by her two brothers, Preston and Kendall, and three sisters, Andrea, Laura and Lisa, and her parents Lamar and Julia. Lamar is a member of Anchored, a men's quartet that participates annually in the We Care Prison Crusade.

If you would like to make a contribution to the read-a-thon program in Bethany's honor, you can either mail a check to We Care or contribute online at [www.wecareprogram.org](http://www.wecareprogram.org). Please mark your contribution as a read-a-thon memorial gift in honor of Bethany.



## God's Grace

The main point here, though, is not Troy's story but God's grace. Our relationship and continued co-laboring in God's kingdom have caused me to ask a certain question many times. What are the chances that many more men could come out of prison and be used by God as Troy is? Why aren't there more "Troys"? Certainly there are other men besides Troy who are living for Christ and succeeding in society, but so many men leave the gates and fences of the penitentiary only to re-offend and return to prison. There is still hope for those men, but why does this have to happen?

I asked Troy what made the difference between him and others who don't do so well when they are released from prison. "It is nothing special about me, Dave. It is God's grace. It's all about His grace, about

being in and walking in His will. His will is a realm and I want to stay in that realm. He will supply all our needs. It's all about Jesus and staying surrendered and broken before Him. Dave, I can think of other guys I knew in prison whose Christian life I considered to be stronger than mine, but they are still there and I am here. It's all God's grace. There is no other explanation!"

So what are the chances...? The chances are great! The possibilities for life in Christ and His will for men and women in prison, and everywhere, are the same. Rather than asking why there aren't more "Troys," may I, and all of us who follow Jesus, be more faithful in showing Christ to others and leading them to a place where they can connect with Him, a place where they can experience His grace for themselves and the abundant life that comes from a relationship with Him.





# 2012 SOFTBALL OUTREACH

About 45 men came from Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania to participate in the We Care Softball Outreach on June 7 - 9. The volunteers connected well with the inmates who played ball and with those who simply watched. Teams played in eight different prisons across Alabama in spite of the rain that canceled some of the scheduled games on Saturday.

Stan Schrock, We Care chaplain at Century Correctional, traveled with the team from Meigs, GA. He noted that "ministry happened while playing ball with the affirmations and good sportsmanship that was expressed for the inmate team even though the volunteer team was losing. I heard different times, 'good catch' or 'great play' or 'what a hit.'"

Participants were blessed and challenged by going into a prison environment (some for the first time), meeting some of the inmates, and realizing that but for the grace of God they could be there too. Thanks to each one who played and to those who helped make this event possible, including our corporate sponsors, Athens Auto Logic (TN) and Ebersole Spreading (PA).

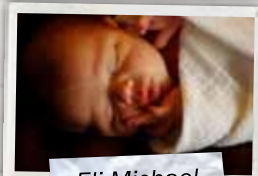




# NEWS

## NEW ARRIVALS

Blaine and Sheila Copenhaver welcomed their first child, Eli Michael, on May 8, 2012. Blaine serves as an assistant chaplain at Fountain



Eli Michael

Correctional Facility, and Sheila is the graphic designer at We Care.

On May 17, 2012, Benjamin Neil was born to David and Veola Bucher. In addition to his parents, Benjamin is also welcomed by siblings Cheney, Ethan, and Sean. David is an assistant chaplain at Donaldson Correctional Facility.



Benjamin Neil

## NEW TEAM MEMBER

In August the We Care chaplaincy team welcomed a new associate. Jimmy Dees began volunteering two days a week at J. O. Davis Correctional Facility in Atmore, Alabama, as an appointed pastor with the United Methodist Church serving in an approved extension ministry. He writes, "The heart of my ministry is discipling men and encouraging them to follow Jesus." Jimmy and his wife Pam are both retired school teachers.



Jimmy Dees



*Come and hear some ways that you can minister to the needs in your own community!*

**SATURDAY, SEPT. 22** 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM  
*ACTS COVENANT FELLOWSHIP, LANCASTER, PA*

For more info visit [www.wecareprogram.org](http://www.wecareprogram.org)  
or contact Steve Martin at 610-909-9285 or [steve@wecareprogram.org](mailto:steve@wecareprogram.org).



## 29th Annual Benefit Auction

Farmersville Auction Grounds, Farmersville, PA

Collector items, beautiful quilts, toys, gift certificates, framed artwork, 3-D pictures, hardware, tools, fresh meats and groceries, and more are waiting for you at the auction.

**Friday, October 26**

4:00-7:00 PM - Chicken BBQ  
5:00 PM - Auction

**Saturday, October 27**

7:00 AM - Pancake and Sausage Breakfast  
8:30 AM - Auction



- 1999 GMC Safari Van**
- 7-passenger with captain seats in the middle
  - Mileage under 165,000
  - In good shape and runs well
  - Available in PA for inspection one month prior to auction

Proceeds from the auction benefit a number of prison ministries, including We Care Program.

.....  
For more information, call  
(717) 625-0232.



# → GO 고고고

For several years We Care has talked about creating a short-term mission opportunity for young adults. "GO" is the result of those conversations. Held June 15-23, the 9-day event was everything that we prayed it would be and more.

The twelve participants gathered first for a weekend of orientation and preparation, which included sessions about the gospel, a ropes course, and team-building exercises. During the in-prison ministry phase of the program, we were divided into three teams with each team going into a different prison from about 9:00 AM until 5:00 PM daily. Team members spent time visiting with prisoners, encouraging them, and sharing friendship. Afternoons also included a Bible study/video series entitled "Not a Fan." This time was especially exciting for me as I watched both volunteers and inmates be challenged by the question, "Am I a fan or a follower of Jesus Christ?"

Each evening after a long day in prison, we headed back to the hotel to debrief. Discussions revolved around how we can learn from this experience and live out the gospel in our daily lives, taking the gospel to our workplace, our family, and other relationships. As I analyze the whole GO experience, I find myself encouraged that God continues to call young people to give some time to serve in a special concentrated way. Even more, I am overwhelmed by the continual work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the volunteers and inmates. My final thought about the week is "God moved in us!"

*-Blaine Copenhaver, Director*



# REFLECTIONS



## → KRISTIN YODER

"[GO] challenged me to take this same passion for broken people to my workplace."

## → JACOB POTSANDER

"I talked with an inmate about his dreams to have a 'real family Thanksgiving' and about how he wanted to be a dad to his son and stop running from him. Listening to him talk about all the things I want for my family too and praying about it all was the best."

## → WESLEY MILLER

"I had a very meaningful conversation with a man who can't understand why 'good' people suffer. I explained that because of sin and the fall of man, suffering has become part of the curse. I was able to pray with him, and I felt that he was deeply touched."

## → TERESA SCHMIDT

"[This experience] gave me insight into prison ministry and what that looks like. I would highly recommend it to many young adults!"

## → JUSTIN KURTZ

"[I was stretched] to put more trust in God."

## → ROBERT YODER

"This week has changed my preconceived notions of the prisoners. I looked into their faces and listened to their stories. Standing in their shoes and entering their world for one week opened my eyes to their struggles and need."

## → KERI COPENHAVER

"The GO program helped me to re-focus and regain a vision to GO wherever and share the love of Jesus!"



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





# JUST THINKING...

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT

dave@wecareprogram.org

*Background: On July 24 Dave and Debbie Landis' daughter Darla underwent brain surgery in an effort to reduce the high number of ongoing seizures. Unfortunately her body did not respond as expected, and an extended hospital stay resulted. In the following article Dave reflects on their experience.*

Having served with a prison chaplaincy organization for 13 years, I have always viewed chaplaincy through the lens of prison ministry. That is changing as we sit by our daughter who is in a medically induced coma.

Up until this point, chaplaincy has been for others. My colleagues and I focus on bringing Christ to those with backgrounds of abuse, abandonment, addictions, and brokenness. Void of hope. Years of physical incarceration ahead. Now my wife and I are in a dark place, sitting and waiting, wondering and praying, crying and hoping... separated from our other three children and many we love. An unknown future ahead of us.

Then a gentle-faced, semi-retired-looking gentleman approaches. The grace of Christ is on his countenance. He extends a hand of hope. He listens intently. He draws out our pain and pours a soothing ointment of God's love over the wounds. He smiles...offers words of genuine

encouragement, then asks our permission to pray with us. He brings our Darla and our family and our doctors to the throne of God. And he leaves them there for God's will to be done. Then he walks away, promising to stop by again. I think Jesus has just passed by.

A peace has come over us. For a moment, the burden is lighter. Our strength is renewed. Our situation is bearable. But Darla still lies there, lifeless and silent, sleeping a deep sleep. The machine still pumps oxygen, lights still blink, nurses and doctors keep scurrying about the ICU.

May I offer all of us a gentle reminder? You do not know what the person next to you is going through today...I mean, REALLY going through. You don't have to be a "chaplain" to share the love of Christ. Everyone can look, love, listen, encourage, and pray. As we do that in our day-to-day interactions, I believe God will unveil His will in each of our lives.

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

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

