

the connection


Summer 2023



WILLING
HEARTS
& HANDS



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WILLING HEARTS & HANDS

By Don Metzler

Our new host couple, Steve and Sara Petersheim, arrived at We Care on April 25 and officially began serving on May 1. If that last name sounds familiar, it's because Steve is a brother to Omer Petersheim, our previous host. Steve and Sara are being sent by Petra Church in Pennsylvania, where a team of ministry partners are helping to make sure their needs are met while they are serving with We Care.

Since their arrival, both Steve and Sara have been busy in a variety of activities and responsibilities. Less than two weeks after beginning in this role, they hosted many of the guys who came to play in the Softball Outreach. Some of Steve's time has been spent doing general maintenance tasks around the building and property, as well as keeping the We Care vehicles clean and road ready. Sara did some deep cleaning so that she knows where the different kitchen tools and dishes are located in the many cupboards and drawers. Both of them are rapidly learning about what all it takes to keep things going smoothly around the headquarters. One example of some of the unique opportunities for service was the day they helped to package 850 cinnamon rolls into individual containers for taking into prison during Officer Appreciation Week.

While leaving their friends and family behind was not



easy, Steve and Sara are finding fulfillment in being in the Lord's will and being able to use their gifts to bless the We Care staff, volunteers, and guests. Knowing God called them here to serve has given peace, and listening to stories of victories won in prison enables them to see how God is using them as part of a bigger picture.

As hosts at We Care, there are many different responsibilities to learn and to prioritize. One of the challenges of the job is the need to be flexible. In this work, one never knows what situation might come up that needs prompt attention on any given day or who might need to be fed. Steve and Sara are doing a great job and adapting very well, even though this position is a lot different than the jobs they held back in Pennsylvania.

By serving in the role of host couple, Steve and Sara are enabling our chaplains and volunteers be the hands and feet of Jesus behind prison walls. We Care is grateful for them and for all who support the work they are doing. Please pray for Steve and Sara as they walk out the call of God on their lives and strive to keep things at We Care in good shape and running smoothly.



NEWS

BOARD RETREAT



On April 26 the We Care Board of Directors and their wives, along with Kevin Kennell and Don and Phyllis Metzler, arrived at Fairhaven Ministries in Roan Mountain, Tennessee. That evening and the next two days were spent in holding board meetings, fellowshipping, enjoying God's creation and eating together. The relaxing atmosphere of being in the mountains in the springtime enhanced our time away, and seeing a black bear ambling down the road beside our meeting place was an added bonus. We Care is thankful for each of the board members who give of their time and talent to lead this ministry.

NEW CHAPLAIN

Welcome, Tommy Williams! Tommy has been a volunteer at Mobile Metro Jail for many years, working alongside Joe Kolb. Now following in Joe's footsteps, Tommy has joined our team as a chaplain! He resides in Mobile, Alabama, and will continue to serve at Mobile Metro.



GOOD-BYE

After serving for six years as hosts at the headquarters, Omer and Sylvia Petersheim have returned to Pennsylvania. Though we miss them, we rejoice with them that they can now live near their family and enjoy regular involvement in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Thanks, Omer and Sylvia, for a job well done!



You choose which state to participate in:

Alabama
(15+ prisons)

OR

Florida
(5 prisons)

Applications will be available by September 1.

Early morning prison entry with late afternoon exit.
Group meal in each region every evening.

January 21 – 25, 2024
Volunteers needed



Softball Outreach

By Kevin Kennell

Last year, in my article about the Softball Outreach, I pointed out that a softball bat was just another tool to use in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I encouraged more men to get involved, and this year I saw that happen. In 2022, we had about 30 volunteers to play prison softball. This year we had about 70! Having that many volunteers translated into six different teams playing softball in a total of twelve different institutions. The 2023 Softball Outreach was a “home run” in terms of success!

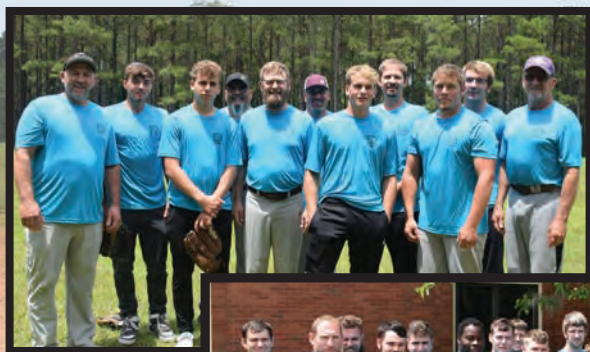
Yet, how do we really measure success? Is it volunteer numbers? Is it number of ball games played? Is it not getting rained out? Is it not getting any games cancelled? Truth is, all those things may be a part of it, but more importantly, it is lives being affected and changed! I know that happened! I listened as the men played ball and shared with each other. I heard encouraging, challenging conversations. I paid attention while the volunteers shared in the “Meetings on the Mound.” I watched as the prison atmosphere itself was changed for a day or two, and I saw officers even join in sometimes. Some of the volunteers came to me afterward to say “thank you” and to tell me that the weekend was life-changing for them. Yes, it was a great success, and our chaplains are still

following up with inmates, having conversations that grew out of the Softball Outreach.

I am so glad we were able to host this event in the Alabama prisons. I am very grateful for the ADOC staff and all they did to make it happen. I am also grateful for all the players and the sponsors that made it possible. I encourage all of us to never underestimate the significance of an encounter. Many things are happening because of the encounters surrounding and during the softball event.

One thing that happened is We Care has now held our first ever Women’s Volleyball Outreach at the women’s prisons. As we strive to follow Christ’s command to make disciples, we are equipped with the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Sometimes we are equipped with a softball bat or a volleyball as well!

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul said, “I become all things to all men that I might save some.” Maybe you don’t see yourself as a chaplain, but are you willing to become a ball player in order to have an effect on someone’s life? Think about it, pray about it, and join us next year for the annual Softball Outreach, or what will, hopefully, become the annual Volleyball Outreach.



We Care Softball Outreach was a new experience for me. I had never had any previous experience with any jail or prison ministry of any kind and definitely didn't know what to expect. I had also never heard "softball" and "outreach" used together. I envisioned playing lots of softball, which we did, but it didn't take long to realize this was way more than just softball. A highlight for me was a rainy day which kept us from playing ball, but instead we met with the inmates in the chapel just to visit and share some experiences. I was a little apprehensive about it, but it ended up being 1½ hours of very worthwhile visiting and sharing.

We were also blessed to have Don Metzler on our team. His 15+ years with We Care was interesting to dig into at times. This was a great experience, and I definitely hope to be able to do it again!

- Tyler Mast, Volunteer

I really enjoyed the three days we played softball with the inmates. I was impressed with the cheerfulness of the men even when the plans suddenly changed. At one of the prisons our games got rained out, so we went into the chapel and visited, enjoying lots of good conversation. I was encouraged to hear many of them acknowledge that they wouldn't be able to make it in prison without Jesus.

Another special part was playing on the team with both my sons. This made an impression on the prisoners. The inmates asked my sons lots of questions about being adopted. They could connect with the boys' struggles with rejection. None of us like to go through difficult situations, yet it amazes me how God uses the big and little circumstances of our lives to connect with others.

- Craig Carter, Volunteer

I was glad to be a part of this event! A highlight for me was playing volleyball with the inmates on death row and getting to talk with them and hear their stories. I was challenged by listening to what they would've done differently and by the faith some of them have in God. It was also fun to see how excited they were when they beat us one game. Thanks for all you do in the prisons!

- Chase Hostetler, Volunteer

Now that Softball Outreach is over for this year, it's been great to connect with the guys that played. One of them told me some of his story.

"Chuckie" came to Holman only about eight weeks ago after spending two years in solitary confinement at another prison. In the last year he lost his mother (who he hadn't seen in 16 years), and while in lockup, he almost died from health issues that weren't properly addressed. He recognizes that God is working in His life and keeping him for a reason. After his mother passed, he quit smoking and really started to seek God. Then one day, out of the blue, he was transferred to Holman. Not long after that we were there playing softball, a sport he has loved since he was a kid.

Chuckie said, "It was so uplifting being out there, having good clean completion. The prayers and the word that was shared with us were very encouraging. Being able to fellowship with those guys—that's the kind of people I need to be around."

We never know how God is moving even when we might not see it. Chuckie had a big smile on his face and was delighted to tell me how he saw God in the timing of all those details of the last year. He was inspired, to say the least!!

- James Smoker, We Care Chaplain



From the Field

Eddie Miller

Century Corr. Institution
Century, FL



Greetings, brothers and sisters. I count it a privilege to share what God has done and is doing through my life going into the prison. First of all, I thank God for counting me worthy in calling me into such a great ministry. Two years after the Lord brought me out of prison in 2015, He brought me back into the prison to preach the gospel.

I remember the first time I went back into Fountain. One of the guys that I did time with came to the chapel. When he saw me, he started crying and said to me, “You didn’t forget us.”

I told him, “How could I? God didn’t forget you, and that’s who lives in my heart.”

Not long ago one of the brothers at Fountain told me they are encouraged because they see the same walk with the Lord on the outside that I had with Him on the inside.

One morning recently I woke up to get ready to go to Century to preach. The Spirit of the Lord started ministering to me about asking who all have received Jesus Christ as their Savior. As I was preaching, my eyes kept going to a young man over to my right. About fifteen minutes before the service was over, it came back to me to ask that question. Everybody raised their hand except this young man to whom my eyes had kept going. I called him up and he just started weeping. He was ready to be saved, and he got saved. Praise the Lord!

Wendy Seabrook

Montg. Women’s Facility
Montgomery, AL



As I peeked into the TV room at Montgomery Women’s Facility, I was met with this question from Susan. “Chap, you’re not going to use this room tonight, are you? LeBron James is playing in the NBA playoffs, and I’m going to watch him.”

My humorous response was “Susan, I wouldn’t want to come between you and the Los Angeles Lakers, especially during the playoffs, so I can find another space to have our Esther Bible study. No worries!” She smiled as I backed out of the room. As a new chaplain at Montgomery Women’s Facility, I needed to find a

different location, fast!

A few minutes later Susan approached me. “You know what, Chap, I could come to the Bible study in the TV room and still catch the end of the game.” God was allowing her plans for the night to be shifted.

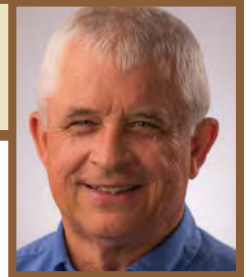
I replied, “Wow, that would be great Susan! We will end by 7 PM so you can catch the rest of the game. I know you will be encouraged by Esther. Her plans were redirected by God also.”

God is so good at redirecting our plans for His glory! He’s allowed me to serve as a Bible study leader at Tutwiler Prison and now as a chaplain at Montgomery Women’s Facility. I get to glorify Him by being an exhorter, a mentor and a counselor to women who are in desperate need of the redeeming love of Jesus Christ.

God is using Esther 4:14 in my life and in the lives of these women. Wherever we are on our life journey, He can redirect our path to Him “for such a time as this.”

Sid Chapman

Fountain Corr. Facility
Atmore, AL

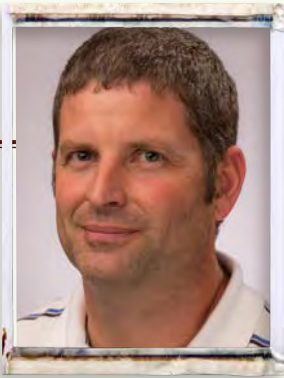


This is my personal testimony of fear and faith. I used to be a scared little boy who would cross the street to avoid speaking to those approaching on the sidewalk! Then how did I get to We Care Program, whose mission is to “Proclaim Christ and Disciple Inmates”?

On June 25, 1994, already a deacon and Sunday School teacher, I saw who Jesus was, saw who I was, repented and by faith believed on Jesus as Savior and Lord! With Matthew 4:19 ringing in my ears, I now had to face my fear of sharing my faith. In order to put myself in situations where I had to fight (share), not flee, I joined our Deacon Evangelism Team. On Easter Sunday 1999, we began a weekly ministry in the Monroe County Jail, but I still didn’t fight (share) or flee, I would freeze! But God kept “dragging” me back (2 Corinthians 5:14) until I realized that these guys were just like me, making mistakes and poor decisions, needing help and hope!!

Then came an opportunity through We Care to mentor a man one-on-one in the Faith Dorm at Fountain Correctional Facility. Having lost much of my fear of “Proclaiming Christ,” I now faced the fear of “Discipling Inmates.” Could I be vulnerable and share my life of faith with a state prison inmate, and would he be real with me?

Since August 2001, I’ve mentored/discipled three men, two of whom were later released and haven’t returned



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

David S. Landis, Chaplaincy Director

In prison ministry I often reflect on the various gifts I see in individuals. I work with a chaplain who has the gift of administration. He does things in minutes that it takes others hours to do. Our hosts at We

Care have gifts of hospitality and serving. It makes me tired just thinking of how they accommodate the needs of so many people!

One particular volunteer at Santa Rosa Correctional Institution just loves to share the gospel. Recently he came into the office, drenched with sweat but wearing a broad smile, saying that three men in confinement had given their lives to Christ that morning. This older guy gives a day or two each week to prison ministry, and his passion is to make sure everybody is given the opportunity to know Jesus.

My friend Mark occasionally volunteers in prison and is great with one-on-one conversations. In addition, Mark loves bringing in his BBQ grill and cooking chicken. I like to call that kind of ministry "A Serving of Chicken in Jesus' Name."

On any given week some of our We Care staff are busy teaching discipleship classes covering a range of

subjects. Others are visiting the sick in prison and those in confinement. Some are working in an office doing administrative types of work.

Presently, We Care is embarking on a venture at Bibb Correctional Facility to implement the Pathway to Freedom program in a dorm of 80 men. These men are committed to taking four classes a week over the course of a year. With those classes there will be homework to check, tests to give and grade, and records to keep. These men are our responsibility for a whole year! An endeavor like that takes people! We need more teachers who can teach a class at least one day a week, and we need another person or two with the gift of administration to help keep records and give oversight to the program.

The Bible tells us that the body of Christ has many members. Some function as hands, some as feet, others as eyes, etc., but all belong to one body. Years ago I heard a speaker ask, "What's in your hand?" He was challenging us as listeners to consider our stewardship of the gifts and abilities God had entrusted to us.

I fully understand that not everyone is called to work in a prison setting. However, I do ask you, "What is in your hand? Are you leveraging your gifts for Kingdom impact?" I'm not telling you where to use your gifts, but I am giving you an opportunity! Think about it.

to prison. The third man and I continue to learn/grow with the help of the Spirit and the Word! Our amazing Father has used men who once frightened me to show me how to overcome my fear by faith. (2 Timothy 1:7)

Mike Strehlow

Century Corr. Institution
Century, FL



For over two years I've ministering at Century Correctional Institution. Unlike some states, an inmate doesn't need a re-entry plan to be released from a Florida state prison; when he has paid his debt to society, he's free. This may mean he gets released with no money, no clothes, and nowhere to live. Not much of a chance for a man to start a new life with all those strikes against him.

Many of the correctional officers at Century grew tired of watching inmates leave prison with just the clothes

on their backs, so they decided to do something about it. When an impoverished inmate had to leave prison, they tried to find him a place to live, even if it was a homeless shelter, and give him enough clothes to be able to go a week without doing laundry. If this sounds small, it isn't. Prospective employers like to hire people wearing clean clothes. The thing is, who ever heard of a clothing drive for men leaving prison?

About six months ago, an officer told me what they were trying to do and how hard it was for them to do it. And something (probably the Holy Spirit) went DING. We Care Program has three thrift stores, which sell donated clothing at very good prices. I got word to my ministry partners, and they quickly gave enough money to buy a nice bag of clothes for the officers to pass out. Then We Care Program officially got into the act, and now the thrift stores give men's clothing to Century CI by the bag full. It's impressive. These days, part of my ministry is just to run the bags of clothes from the thrift stores to the prison. And the Pants Ministry is a hit, as much with the officers as it is with the ex-inmates.

2023 VOLLEYBALL OUTREACH

A MESSAGE FROM DON METZLER, PRESIDENT

don@wecareprogram.org



Sometimes God opens doors we are not even knocking on. Such was the case with the first ever We Care Volleyball Outreach. When requesting approval from the Alabama Department of Corrections to hold this year's Softball Outreach, we were asked what we would be doing for the women. Volleyball seemed like the best option, so we quickly recruited some volunteers and got them cleared and trained in short order. After coming together to practice the evening before, 15 ladies went into Tutwiler Prison for Women and Montgomery Women's Facility to play volleyball on June 9. It was a lot of



fun to introduce something out of the ordinary into those prisons, even if was for just a few hours. The volunteers were able to connect with the women and bring encouragement and hope that comes through Jesus. We received many requests to do it again and/or bring in a softball team the next time. Time will tell what doors God will continue to open, but our desire is to be faithful and step into the opportunities He provides.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

3493 Highway 21
Atmore, AL 36502-4669
Phone: 251-368-8818
Email: wecare@wecareprogram.org

