

# The Connection

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

AUGUST 2006

## Chapel Tutoring Program Meets Critical Needs

Mike Strehlow

“Here’s the list, Mr. Strehlow,” said the young African-American man, his Alabama prison whites discolored with kitchen stains. On his face was a smile and in his hand was a piece of paper that was covered with names front and back, written in pencil by different hands. THAT was the moment I knew we had to do something different at Fountain Correctional Facility.

We had been talking. It was late summer ’05 and Fountain of Life Bible College’s second full semester was coming up fast. Chaplain Brian Eskelinen, Dave Landis, Randy Bruckhart, and I were in the chapel office discussing ways

to increase enrollment, and I made the comment, “We’ve started a Bible college in a place that needs a Bible high school. Maybe a Bible grade school.”

I said this because out of about 1200 inmates at Fountain, half to two-thirds of them are without a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED). My point was that only 400 or so inmates were academically eligible to take the college’s courses. But God must have planted something in us then, because it wasn’t long before Brian asked me if it’d be feasible to do some tutoring in the chapel. I told him I’d think about it.

Later that day while in the sanctuary talking to three or four inmates about the college, I casually said to a kitchen worker that we were *thinking* about *maybe* having some pre-GED tutoring in the chapel. A day later he found me and showed me fifty names on a piece of paper. He’d stood up at chow time and

asked if anyone was interested in getting a GED, and the other inmates in the cafeteria practically mobbed him. Fifty Christian lawyers couldn’t have made a better case for a chapel GED program than the fifty names on that one tired looking sheet of paper.

Their eager response is understandable. Most inmates who haven’t got a GED realize they need one; their problem is they *can’t get one*.

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Current students participating in the Fountain Chapel Pre-GED Program are eagerly working towards their GED.

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*Fulfilling the Great Commission in America's Prisons*

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# Outreach (continued)

This is no one's fault. Prison officials, area adult education teachers, etc. are doing everything within their power to meet this need. But there is so little money available in Alabama for adult education that, going strictly by the state's adult education guidelines, *a free world* student may be refused entry into a state GED program if he scores below an 8<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency level. And the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level is well above where most of Fountain's inmates score.

In other words, 600 to 800 of Fountain's inmates are without a GED, AND almost none of them are ever going to GET their GED's, unless something happens.

We happened. We formed a partnership with the county's adult education program (that they don't have much money hasn't stopped them from doing everything they can to help), and got a tutoring program going using the state's books and materials, with inmate volunteers as peer trainers.

The program started late last December. It meets in the chapel, four days a week, five hours a day, and counts as the inmate's in-house job. Now every inmate at Fountain will have the chance to get his GED, if he is willing to work for it.

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Published eight times a year, *The Connection* provides news and views to 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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*Inmate names changed*



We started small, with just five tutors and about twenty students. We still have five tutors and about twenty students, but that's because since the program started in December we've sent eight men on to the trade school to get their GED's. We plan on increasing to about thirty students in the chapel, expanding the program into the Honor Dorm, and taking it to nearby J. O. Davis Correctional Facility as well.

Although our motivation for teaching pre-GED comes from God, it stresses education, not Christianity. Any inmate, regardless of his religious persuasion, can sign up for this program. So one might ask, why are we doing a chapel program that doesn't involve an altar call at the end? Is this a Christian ministry? In my opinion, yes. Oh my, yes.

Christians lead, or should lead, the way in doing good in this world. If we want to follow Jesus' admonition to "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly

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# News of Note

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## Welcome, Sarah!

*Sarah Martin*, Atmore, AL, has joined our team as a part-time bookkeeper for the summer months. Sarah recently returned from Costa Rica, where her parents, Deborah and Carl Martin, are serving as missionaries. Sarah is a member of Mennonite Christian Fellowship, in Atmore. We are blessed to have Sarah fill the vacancy in the

bookkeeping department, even though she will be moving on to Bible College this fall.

## Personnel Shift

The last several months have been a time of change for a number of We Care personnel. Earlier this year, sensing some new directions, we asked *Marvin Bender* to begin assisting the chaplaincy department one day per week at Century Correctional in Century, Florida. Our desire was that God would provide a chaplain to replace Marvin at J.O. Davis Correctional, so that he could be released to serve primarily at Century. That prayer was answered with the return of *Irvin Martin*, who has assumed the role of chaplain at J.O. Davis.

In addition, we sensed that the time had come to move in the direction of placing someone at Holman Correctional, Atmore, AL. *Bob Depew*, who for the last two years had been serving as chaplain at Atmore Work Center, consented to take on the role of assistant chaplain at Holman. *Ed Ranck*, who had been assisting Bob, has moved into the leadership role at Atmore Work Center. Finally, to fill the void left by the departure of Randy

Bruckhart at Fountain Correctional this past April, *Blaine Copenhaver*, who had previously decided to remain on staff for an additional year following the Young Adult Internship term, is now serving there as assistant chaplain.

This arrangement results in We Care chaplains serving in five Atmore area prisons, but also emphasizes the need for additional helpers to assist with the enormous challenges of ministering to the over 4000 inmates residing in these five facilities.

## Construction Volunteers Needed

We are building a new ministry headquarters, and your help would be greatly appreciated! Beginning in August, 2006, and continuing through Summer, 2007, specialized work crews and general volunteers will be needed in all phases of the construction process. For a projected timeline listing specific areas of need, see [www.wecareprogram.org](http://www.wecareprogram.org), or to make arrangements for yourself or a volunteer group to assist with the project, contact Don Metzler at 251-368-8818 or [don@wecareprogram.org](mailto:don@wecareprogram.org).

## Last Call for Young Adult Men

Male candidates are vitally needed for this year's seven-month internship program, beginning in October, 2006. Interns are placed alongside staff chaplains to assist with general chaplaincy duties, including, but not limited to encouraging, counseling, teaching, tutoring, and mentoring. In addition, interns will fill in where needed in the general operations of the ministry and will most likely be joining in with the volunteer construction crews (see above) from time to time. Young men, you can make a difference! Applications are due by **August 15**. Call our office for further information.

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Father is perfect" (Matt. 5.48), we have to remember that God makes it rain on the unrighteous as well as the righteous (Matt. 5.45). "... **it is God's will that by doing good** you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (I Pet. 2.15). We are to "live such good lives **among the pagans** that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may **see your good deeds** and glorify God on the day he visits us" (I Pet. 2.12).

We want to bless these men because it is the Christian thing to do. As they are being blessed, these men will come to realize that we are not here to sell them Jesus. We are here because we are serving Jesus, and hopefully,

they will begin to glorify God in their own lives.

Having been a part of this for six months, what is Chaplain Eskelinen's assessment of this? "I think the GED program could be the greatest outreach the chapel has ever done." Amen.

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*Mike Strehlow began serving with We Care Program in February, 2005, as academic dean of the Fountain of Life Bible College at Fountain Correctional Facility. Mike is an avid photographer and lives with his wife Patty and two young adult daughters in Pensacola, FL.*

# From the Field

## Montgomery, AL Staton Correctional Facility

In 2 Kings, chapters 6 and 7, we read a chilling account of a famine in Israel. This famine was so severe that donkey heads and dove dung were being sold for food; some of the people even resorted to cannibalism. Times were difficult to say the least. But there was hope on the horizon! The prophet Elisha gave good news that the famine would soon end. The people received confirmation the next day from four leprosy men that there was plenty of food at the abandoned Aramean camp. A few things we should note are that these men were outcasts of society, they initially hoarded some of the plunder, but later they realized it would be sinful to keep this good news for themselves.

I can't help but relate this to the work of the church. God uses the least likely people to spread good news. We sometimes feel inadequate, but "greater is He who is in me, than He who is in the world." I also realize that like the lepers we tend to hoard our treasures and want to keep them to ourselves—our gifts, time, money, etc.

There are millions of men and women incarcerated in this country and probably only hundreds of full time chaplains who are supported by the church (not the government). Why are there so few workers? Maybe we feel inadequate, maybe we are preoccupied using our gifts and talents on other things, and maybe we don't want to leave a secure situation. Whatever the reason, I know two things for sure. First, there is a spiritual famine right now in our jails and prisons. Second, there is someone reading this that God can use in a mighty way in prison ministry, but who is reluctant, for one reason or another, to step out and share the fruit of the Word of God. The lepers were reluctant to share at the beginning, but realized, "We're not doing right. This is a day of Good News and we are keeping it to ourselves." (2 Kings 7:9)

- Carl Carpenter

## Tutwiler Prison for Women

The month of June was scheduled full with services for the chapel, when suddenly, due to overcrowding and a tuberculosis scare, the chapel was turned into a dorm housing sixteen inmates! Services had to be cancelled for a week. At first I wondered why the Lord allowed this to happen, and I asked Him. He said, "All things work together for good." (Rom. 8:28) I realized that He had brought some ladies to the chapel where they could come to the library, and for one week I enjoyed one-on-one mentoring with many of them. What a blessing!

God reminded me of a lesson that I taught to the ladies at the Annex recently. The text was Matthew 14:22-33, where Peter stepped out of the boat to go to Jesus. Peter began to sink when he took his eyes off Jesus and looked around at the wind and the waves. The challenge I gave to the class was that we must keep our focus on Jesus; then we will not get discouraged and lose faith. The Lord told me to practice what I teach. Just as Jesus asked Peter, He is also asking me, "O, you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Are we looking UP or around at our circumstances? God is always greater than our circumstances, but when we lose our focus, our faith sinks. I need to remember that the task ahead of me is never as great as the POWER behind me.

- Anna Miller

## Birmingham, AL Donaldson Correctional Facility

With the arrival of our second child Ethan, we have been made starkly aware, again, of the major work that comes with a newborn. He cannot feed himself, dress himself, or change his own diapers. He needs to be carried around, bathed, put to bed, and taken to the doctor for appointments. We still are not getting a normal night's sleep. His needs are too numer-

ous to mention, and we also have a seventeen-month old little daughter who depends on us for nearly everything.

If we would have calculated all of the challenges, hardships, and sacrifices of parenthood, we might have "passed" on the opportunity before we even got started. But we do it gladly, and the rewards are great and abundant. We love these children so much and wouldn't trade them for anything!

As we work in prison, we serve as "spiritual parents" to "spiritual newborns" and "spiritual toddlers." The challenges and rewards are just as great when taking care of these "babes." There are parallels between the natural needs of a baby to the spiritual needs of these dear men and women who come to faith in Christ. I am guilty of not putting near the amount of effort into spiritually nurturing and caring for these spiritual babes as I do my own natural children. I tend to expect the spiritual babes to take steps on their own to grow and to change their lifestyle and order it aright. It is easy for me to quickly lose patience with them.

I recently had a conversation with a young man who came to faith in Christ at an evangelistic event last October. I had made an effort to nurture him, but I wish I had done more and I know I could have. I met him in a lock-up unit where he was serving some disciplinary time. He released a barrage of accusations toward me for not helping him or teaching him more. I know he was angry about his present situation, and that was partly why he talked the way he did, but I couldn't help but think about what he said.

More people are needed to be "spiritual parents" to these dear people in prison. Are you one of those who God can use in this way? Pray for us to maximize our time in proper ways with the right individuals. And whatever your sphere of influence, may God use you as a good "spiritual parent." - Dave Bucher

## Atmore, AL

### Fountain Correctional Facility

I have seen and heard a lot during my time in prison ministry, though I am still far from expert on the subject. But there are two words I have never heard from any prison minister, and probably never will. Those words? "I'm bored." You'll certainly never hear them from me.

Fountain of Life Bible College's third semester finished strong in May, with some very good students doing excellent, college-level work. Six men from the pre-GED program went on to Trade School to earn their GED's. And we have a nice thick stack of request slips from inmates eager to get involved with both programs.

Are we patting ourselves on the back for all this? We are not; we haven't the time. We are too busy fixing computers and retrieving data that was lost due to a lightning strike, and trying to figure out how our programmer, unexpectedly transferred to another institution at about that same time, had the data stored to begin with. We recently lost half our pre-GED tutors, and they have to be replaced; and a new semester is coming quickly,

both in that program and in the college, and needs to be planned for. And we know we can improve in prayer, in fasting, and in working smarter as well as harder.

Is prison ministry difficult and frustrating? Often. Is it rewarding? Kingdom advancing? Yes, prison ministry is those things too. But boring? Please!  
- Mike Strehlow

### Atmore Work Center

I have been asked to assume the chaplaincy responsibilities at the Atmore Work Center. Like a college student looking at the course requirements at the beginning of a new semester of study, the job seems overwhelming these first days. No longer can I say, "Ask Chap when he comes in," as these decisions now fall on me. Some fellows are supportive, helping me through the maze of the many aspects of my new job, and others are already trying me out to see what they can pull on the new chaplain. I'm looking forward to the challenge of this new position, both the things I will learn and the Truth I am privileged to teach through it.

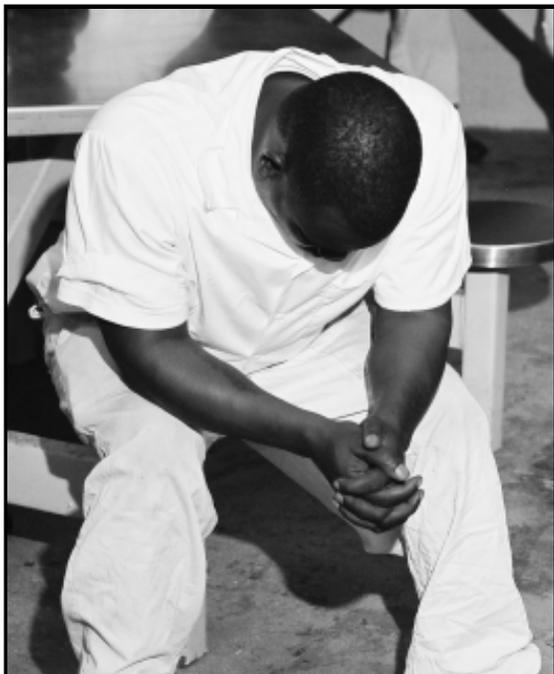
- Ed Ranck

### J. O. Davis Correctional Facility

In the "Bondage to Freedom" class, participants are finding out what it means to be free from their past. Sin not dealt with holds us down. But beyond that, at the very core of our upbringing, lie things that happened to us as children that have affected our adult life, perhaps negatively.

During one class session we were talking about broken relationships when "Cliff" walked into the chapel. He was captivated by the teaching he heard, and soon he was crying. He then shared his story. "I was 13 when my daddy died of a sudden heart attack. He used to pitch softball with me a lot. I was very hurt that he died. I didn't understand why God allowed it to happen. After that my mother and I didn't talk about him, and we grew more apart from each other and started drinking. In later years I was married, but in 1998 my wife and children left me. I was angry at God. I guess I've been bitter ever since my father died."

Later in my office his tears of sorrow turned to tears of joy as he rededicated his life to God and asked Jesus to forgive him. I exclaim, *Hallelujah!* - Irvin Martin



# One.

"I tell you that ...there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." - Jesus, Luke 15:7

*Will you help us share the Good News?*

Chaplain's Assistant Positions Available  
in Atmore, Montgomery, Birmingham, and Troy, AL

Please contact [dave@wecareprogram.org](mailto:dave@wecareprogram.org) to begin a life-changing experience.

# Perspectives

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David R. Landis  
President

Several months ago, I was privileged to walk alongside staff associate Del Yoder as he conducted his weekly visitation at the Fannin County (GA) Jail. As he moves from cell block to cell block, administering a healthy dose of father-like counsel, encouragement, biblical instruction, and prayer, he also distributes his own weekly written message, out of which came the following excerpts:

*I recently was in a facility where the atmosphere wasn't real welcoming as the inmates there were tired of hearing, from their viewpoint, the same message preached over and over. As one person put it, "All of us in this cell are saved, so why do we have to listen to someone preach salvation?" Certainly, the person has a point, but I couldn't resist saying something like it sure looks as if maybe you haven't yet learned how to live the life Jesus Christ calls us to.*

*Perhaps that's the problem. Maybe the word "saved" just doesn't mean to us what the Bible says it should. Maybe we need a new word or term that helps us understand the total change in our lives that the Bible teaches us we should experience when we become Christians. Maybe a term like, say, "born again." Well, of course that's hardly a new way of saying it, but perhaps it can give us a bit more of the meaning the Bible teaches of how Christians should feel about themselves and live out the Gospel in everyday life.*

*This idea became stronger through a conversation with another jail minister, one I haven't known long, who in talking about his walk with the Lord Jesus referred several times to having been born again only about a year or so ago. I naturally thought he was very young in the Christian faith and thus was making great progress, but he soon set me straight.*

*Instead, he (like me) had been a "Christian" most of his life, attending church regularly and doing all the good things that church people are supposed to do (again, like me). What he meant was that only recently he had experienced something very life changing. Some call it being sanctified, or filled with the Spirit.*

*This man feels like a new person, one who had almost literally been put through the birth process and emerged with new life. Joyful. Praiseful. Thankful. Wanting to do good, so that God is glorified, and so that others might come to know the joy of the Lord as he has.*

*Am I saying that because you are here, you're not saved? Hardly. For one thing, that's not my call. But I am saying that the Bible clearly teaches that those who are saved will live – and keep on living – radically changed lives. Lives that look ever more like the life Jesus lived while here on earth, and that the Apostles and disciples lived after He went to Heaven.*

*Is born again a good term for what's lacking? Here's what Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again." (John 3:3) It is obvious from reading the rest of this chapter that being born again (or saved) is not meant to be something having to do with life after we die.*

*Whether or not you have responded publically to an invitation to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ – if you're not filled with joy and peace, if sin is still running far too much of your life and you just can't break free – there's a new life God's wanting to give you. You need to be born again. The Bible says so.*

I'd love to hear from you.  
Contact me at  
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