

# The Church of the Damascus Road

## 4th Annual Meeting



4:00pm, January 22, 2006  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
1001 1st Avenue South  
Fort Dodge, Iowa



# The Church of the Damascus Road Annual Meeting

## Agenda

4:00pm, January 22, 2006

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

1001 1st Avenue South, Fort Dodge, Iowa

### Welcome, Prayer

**Dinner** — Served by the Human Needs Committee of St. Mark's Church

**Devotions** — Pastor Carroll Lang

**The Meeting** — Mark Haase, President and Richard Hersom, Past President

### Introductions

- Outside Church Council members and spouses
- Former Outside Church Council members and spouses
- FDCF and NCCF Regular Volunteers and StoryTeller Volunteers
- Former CoDR members and spouses/guests
- Correctional Facility representatives
- Others Present
- Getting to know you
  - Who are you?
  - Where do you reside? How far did you travel to be with us?
  - Are you representing a church? If so, which one are you representing?

### Reports

The following reports are included in this packet:

- 4 - A History of The Church of the Damascus Road
- 5 - Minutes of 2005 CoDR Annual Meeting
- 6 - Kite Quilts
- 7 - Outside Council Members
- 8 - Outside Council Meeting Highlights of 2005
- 9 - FDCF and NCCF Regular Volunteers
- 10 - Pastor's Report and Presentations/Sermons/Updates 2005
- 11 - Memorials/Honoraria 2005
- 12 - CoDR Budget and Expenses in 2005
- 13 - CoDR Budget and Needs for 2006 and Contributions for 2005
- 14 - Church Records for 2005
- 15 - Church Attendance at FDCF and NCCF in 2005
- 16 - FDCF and NCCF Donations from Offerings in 2005
- 17 - FDCF Inside Council Reports
- 20 - NCCF Inside Council Reports
- 22 - StoryTeller Program
- 23 - AfterCare Program and Thoughts from a Former Member

### Remarks

- Rev. Carroll Lang, Pastor, CoDR
- Former CoDR Members
- Others

**Benediction** — Rev. Carroll Lang, Pastor, CoDR

A History of  
**The Church of the Damascus Road**  
*by Rev. Carroll Lang*

In 1996, the city of Fort Dodge, Iowa made a second bid to the Iowa Department of Corrections (having lost the first bid to Newton) to convince the IDOC to build a new prison in Fort Dodge. This time around the city's bid committee invited the clergy of Fort Dodge to join them. Three clergymen, the Reverends Marvin Jenkins, Allen Hermeier and Carroll Lang attended these meetings. Persons who had been invited to be part of the bid committee were asked to submit a component to the bid, offering the services they would provide. The clergy provided a "Spiritual Component" to the process, offering two major programs. The first was to provide an experienced parish pastor to start a prison congregation, and the second was to implement the Match Two program.

When the Iowa Department of Corrections accepted Fort Dodge's bid, Hermeier and Lang assembled laity and clergy from the area to form a steering committee. During discussion of the nature of the congregation, whether it was to be non-denominational or a part of a denomination, the Steering Committee was unanimous in stating that it should belong to a denomination. The deciding factor was that the ELCA was the only denomination offering to give financial support, so it was decided that the congregation would be part of the ELCA. The steering committee then contacted the Western Iowa Synod and invited Bishop Curtis Miller to join them in guiding the steering committee through the process of forming a mission prison congregation. Bishop Miller told the committee that the Rev. Delwayne Hahn was the Western Iowa Synod's ELCA liaison and he would be the steering committee's primary guide. Since the North Central Correctional Facility in Rockwell City was only 24 miles west, it was decided to include both sites in the plans to start a mission congregation.

The committee met several times at Christ Lutheran Church in Fort Dodge and a couple times at the synod offices in Storm Lake. The ELCA Division for Outreach had indicated an interest in starting more congregations like this, so they agreed to support this mission start-up, paying half of the mission developer pastor's salary and benefits. A call committee was formed, represented by the Bishop, Pastor Hahn, the WIS Outreach Chair, and ecumenical representatives. The call committee chair was Fr Stephen Hall+, rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Fort Dodge. Several candidates were interviewed. Rev. Carroll Lang was issued the call in June 1997. He was called to begin a word and sacrament ministry at the North Central Correctional Facility on August 1, 1997. Later, when the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility opened in 1998, a word and sacrament ministry was to begin there. Although the call actually comes through the ELCA for a mission developer pastor, the actual letter of call is issued from the synod in which the mission is being developed. Salary is determined by the ELCA Division for Outreach. After the Church of the Damascus Road is self supporting, salary will be set by the Outside Church Council.

The ELCA Mission Investment Fund was instructed by the ELCA Division for Outreach to purchase a parsonage. Rev. Lang was instructed to locate a realtor and locate 3-5 possible homes in the "medium range" (\$40,000 to \$70,000). Del Hahn and Andrew Beal (Region 5 Building Consultant) came to Fort Dodge to view these homes and decided that we would need to set our range higher as the available homes were deemed inadequate by Mr. Beal. Rev. and Mrs. Lang then spent time with the realtor finding homes in the \$60,000 to \$120,000 range. After another visit from Del Hahn to view the 4 possible homes, a home was selected at a cost of \$96,000. As closing time neared, Andrew Beal had an EPA firm conduct an inspection and discovered lead and asbestos in the home. The purchase was canceled, and the Langs and the realtor began another search with a top range of \$130,000. There were none available, but the realtor had some prospects that were on the market for more than that amount, hoping that perhaps the owners would take a lower offer.

The options were narrowed to three, and then two, both for essentially the same price, but one had sewer and water service while the other had its own pump and septic tank. The first one, built in 1992, was purchased for \$153,000. The ELCA Mission Investment Fund paid for the house outright, and the agreement is that when The Church of the Damascus Road is self-supporting the house may be purchased for the same price regardless of what the market may be at the later date.

The Langs moved into the parsonage on October 11, 1997. The rest of the mighty acts of God and the activity of The Church of the Damascus Road, are they not written in the minutes and actions of the secretary and treasurer? And the ministry continues to grow.

## **The Church of the Damascus Road Third Annual Meeting**

The annual meeting of the Church of the Damascus Road met on January 22, 2005 at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Fort Dodge. Father Steve Hall welcomed us and led us in prayer. A delicious meal was served by the Human Needs committee from St. Mark's. There were 37 in attendance.

Vice President Lee Kuhrt opened the meeting by introducing Pastor Carroll Lang, who then led us in devotions from I Corinthians, the first chapter.

Lee introduced the Outside Council members, CoDR volunteers, storyteller volunteers, Glenn Wooten and Jeff Roberts (former members) and Lloyd Bach (PCoA member).

Pastor Lang told us about the Volunteer Service Award we received from Governor Vilsak. He handed out pins to the volunteers. A photo of the group was then taken. He also presented the pastor's report and the 2005 proposed budget. He spoke about our AfterCare program. We are planning on having an AfterCare seminar in the Siouxland area this spring. A letter from NCCF Warden McKinney praising the work that we do there was read.

Former members: Jeff Roberts, Pocahontas, told us that he is working at Pocahontas Feeder Pig and what he has been doing. Glenn Wooten, Ottumwa, talked to us about CoDR and the affect it has had on his life.

Ernie Owen spoke to us about the Christmas card program. We gave a total of 3,000 cards to 1,250 inmates. The budget at FDCF for religious programs is \$0.00. Ernie also read e-mail thank you notes regarding the Christmas card program and the joy it brought to the inmates and staff. Ernie is now at Clarinda. What a loss for Fort Dodge.

Lee introduced Rev. Ed Nesselhuf from Prison Congregations of America (PCoA). Ed told about the KITE campaign which is designed to help support PCoA. Sending a kite means sending a message.

It was announced the fourth CoDR annual meeting would be held on January 21, 2006.

Ernie told us of Carroll's 35 years in the ministry celebrated this past year.

Judy Lang talked about the Simply Giving Program.

Greetings from Bishop Last were brought by Rev. Danette Johns.

The Reverend Fr. Peg Jackson closed the meeting with the Benediction and prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Hansel  
CoDR Outside Council Secretary



*Rollin Swanson, Carroll and Judy Lang holding the quilt given to CoDR.*

## Kite Quilts

**R**ollin Swanson, Pastor Carroll and Judy Lang went to Sioux Falls, SD for a Prison Congregations of America gathering last fall. There were many quilts hanging around the room. They all had kites on them. After an explanation of these quilts, former inmates, prison congregations and others who work with inmates were each given one of these kite quilts to take home.

Why a kite quilt? It is a comforting thing to be wrapped in a quilt, especially if you are sick, cold or in distress. This kite quilt is meant to be used to enfold family members of men and women who are in prison. Those incarcerated leave behind spouses, children, grandparents, and other family members who are in need of love and support. They need to be wrapped in the love and grace of God as they wait for loved ones to return from prison. It is the intent of this quilt to be made and to be given to family members as a sign that they are loved and not forgotten.

The kite design on the quilt is a trademark of Prison Congregations of America and has become a symbol of remembering Christ and those who are in prison. This quilt expands that message to include those affected by having loved ones in prison. The kite has dual meaning. For most of us it is a light, cross-shaped frame, designed to fly in a steady breeze. In prison terms, inmates send kites (memos) to get information and response from institutional staff. Prison Congregations of America uses the symbol to send a message back to inmates and families that they are not forgotten. The kite is a great symbol since the cross forms the structure, it is attached with a string, (as we are to the grace of God) and it needs wind (the Holy Spirit) to lift it into the sky.

Prison Congregations of America offers kite pins to wear to remember those in prison and now kite quilts are offered to congregations as a way to give support to the many family members who suffer grief as loved ones are sent to prison.

If you would like to make a kite quilt for these families, contact Judy Lang as she has the pattern and more specific instructions.

The Church of the Damascus Road  
**Outside Council Members**

The Outside Church Council shall be made up of persons from:  
Congregations of any Christian denomination in Western Iowa (not more than 13);  
Clergy of any Christian denomination in Western Iowa (not more than 2);  
Synod Staff (nonvoting); Prison Congregations of America (nonvoting).  
Pastor of the congregation, who cannot hold office but who has voice and vote.

CoDR Outside Council Members - 1/2005-12/2005

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Mr. Richard Hersom, President  | Presbyterian, Fort Dodge                               |
| Mr. Lee Kuhrt , Vice President | Lutheran, Pomeroy                                      |
| Rev. Kay Wold, Secretary       | Lutheran, Corwith                                      |
| Mr. Rollin Swanson, Treasurer  | Lutheran, Fort Dodge                                   |
| Mr. Mark Haase                 | Lutheran, Humboldt                                     |
| Mrs. Kathy Hansel              | Lutheran, Badger                                       |
| Mrs. Leila Wilson              | Lutheran, Fort Dodge                                   |
| Mr. John Everts                | Lutheran, Lytton                                       |
| Ms. Margaret (Peg) Jackson     | Episcopal, Fort Dodge                                  |
| Paul Peterson                  | Lutheran, Callender                                    |
| Mr. Dennis Booth               | Lutheran, Lytton                                       |
| Rev. Danette Johns, WIS        | Liaison (Ex-officio member)                            |
| Rev. Ed Nesselhuf, PCoA        | Consultant (Ex-officio Member)                         |
| Cynthia Hanks                  | Office Manager/Financial Secretary (Ex-officio Member) |
| Rev. Carroll Lang              | Pastor   |

CoDR Outside Council Members - 1/2006 -12/2006

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Mr. Mark Haase, President        | Lutheran, Humboldt                                     |
| Mr. Dennis Booth, Vice President | Lutheran, Lytton                                       |
| Rev. Kay Wold, Secretary         | Lutheran, Corwith                                      |
| Mr. Rollin Swanson, Treasurer    | Lutheran, Fort Dodge                                   |
| Mr. Richard Hersom               | Presbyterian, Fort Dodge                               |
| Mrs. Kathy Hansel                | Lutheran, Badger                                       |
| Mr. John Everts                  | Lutheran, Lytton                                       |
| Mr. Lee Kuhrt                    | Lutheran, Pomeroy                                      |
| Mr. Jim Fevold                   | Lutheran, Humboldt                                     |
| Ms. Margaret (Peg) Jackson       | Episcopal, Fort Dodge                                  |
| Mr. Paul Peterson                | Lutheran, Callender                                    |
| Rev. Danette Johns, WIS          | Liaison (Ex-officio member)                            |
| Rev. Ed Nesselhuf, PCoA          | Consultant (Ex-officio Member)                         |
| Cynthia Hanks                    | Office Manager/Financial Secretary (Ex-officio Member) |
| Rev. Carroll Lang                | Pastor   |

## Outside Council Meeting Highlights

January - December, 2005

- Officers for the year were - President, Dick Hersom; Vice-President, Lee Kuhrt; Secretary, Kay Wold; Treasurer, Rollin Swanson.
- Pastor Jan Johnson from American Lutheran Church at Melvin has informed us that 1/2 of their mission fund goes to the Church of the Damascus Road.
- A new copier, Konica-Minolta model Di2010, was purchased for the office.
- Don Bohn, Manson, completed building a utility cart for use at NCCF, Rockwell City.
- John Everts, Kathy Hansel and Fr. Margaret Jackson have attended human needs meetings through the Upper Des Moines Opportunity, Inc. agency.
- The film “Passion of the Christ” was shown at both facilities during Holy Week and was well attended.
- In June the CoDR had a display featuring the StoryTeller program at the Fort Dodge Chamber of Commerce office. We feature a different aspect of our ministry at this location every year.
- Rev. Danette Johns of the Synod office has been looking into grant writing to obtain funds for the AfterCare Program, an extension of CoDR for ex offenders.
- Dustin Lutgen is the new Treatment Manager at Fort Dodge replacing Ernie Owen. Ernie came to our meetings several times. We hope Dustin will do the same.
- CoDR had a booth at Fall Fest in Fort Dodge in September 17. Our new banner was on display. Tomatoes donated by NCCF and other items for sale did not go well, but many people stopped by to visit and we made our presence known in the community.
- In October a “Come and See” event was held at Grace Lutheran in Fort Dodge for people, including prison personnel, who were interested in starting a prison congregations.
- Rollin Swanson reported that there was a huge group and a great time at the Prison Congregations of America benefit dinner in Sioux Falls SD on October 29. Rollin’s table pledged more than \$1,000, \$700 of which was raised at his church’s (Grace Lutheran) coffee hour. Pastor Carroll and Judy Lang also attended the event.
- The Outside Council had 100% attendance at the November meeting!!!
- 1,882 Christmas cards were given to the inmates at FDCF and 360 to those at NCCF. The Outside Council paid the postage; a total of \$830.86. These cards were sent to family and friends.
- Pastor Lang reported having 83 inmates at his Fort Dodge service on December 14.
  
- Ongoing projects:
  1. We all need to become more involved in some form of fund-raising as that is one of the major responsibilities of an Outside Church Council member.
  2. We also need to encourage all area churches to invite Pastor Lang or any of the Outside Church Council members to make presentations to their congregations and other organizations.
  3. We must work at recruiting more ecumenical representation for the Outside Church Council. Currently we have not met our guidelines of “5 members from Ecumenical Contributing Congregations.”
  4. Again this year, Outside Church Council members were not well represented at the semiannual Inside/Outside Council joint meetings. Come on folks, although each of us is very much involved in a plethora of activities, all Outside Church Council members need to attend these important sessions. The Inside Church Council members appreciate your presence, input and wisdom.
  
- **2006 Goals: Continue educating the public to attend worship services, especially at FDCF, keep the financial momentum going, establish additional AfterCare centers, enlist CoDR representatives from each of the WIS conferences and recruit OC members.**



## **FDCF & NCCF Regular Volunteers Present**

The following volunteers have taken a special course, been issued a personal ID badge and, with the exception of NCCF regulations, are able to attend a worship service without having to be on a regular visitor's list."

### FDCF- Current Volunteers

Dwanyne Anderson, Webster City  
Carol Etzel, Fort Dodge  
James Fevold, Humboldt  
Judy Lang, Fort Dodge  
R. Everett Sexton, Fort Dodge  
Cleo May Swanson, Fort Dodge  
Rollin Swanson, Fort Dodge  
Dorothy Zehr, Fort Dodge

### NCCF-Current Volunteers

Candace Booth, Lytton  
Dennis Booth, Lytton  
John Everts, Lytton  
Marge Everts, Lytton  
James Fevold, Humboldt  
Judy Gronbach, Dakota City  
Judy Lang, Fort Dodge  
Paul Peterson, Callender  
Cleo May Swanson, Fort Dodge  
Rollin Swanson, Fort Dodge

### The following individuals are regular volunteers for our Storyteller Program:

Isabelle Benjamin, Bradgate, Coordinator  
Judy Gronbach, Dakota City  
Donna Haack, Pomeroy  
Dennis & Candace Booth, Lytton  
John & Marge Everts, Lytton  
Judy Watne, Galt  
Dorothy V. Zehr, Fort Dodge  
John & Jody Eppley, Humboldt  
Ruth Younie, Pomeroy

Kenneth & Vivian Perin, Humboldt  
Jean Peterson, Pomeroy  
Judy Lang, Fort Dodge  
Rollin & Cleo Swanson, Fort Dodge  
Joyce Hegna, Urbandale  
Dale & Nancy Bruns, Jolley  
Lee Wilson, Fort Dodge  
Lee & Jean Kuhrt, Pomeroy

### The following churches/individuals have contributed books for our Storyteller Program:

Isabelle Benjamin, Bradgate  
First Congregational UCC, Webster City  
New Covenant Christian Church, Fort Dodge  
Nancy Peck, Sioux City  
First Lutheran Church, Clarion  
Trinity Lutheran Ch WELCA, Spencer  
Ullensvang Lutheran Church, Thor

Asbury United Methodist Church  
Webster City  
Ms. Bev Bremer, Le Mars  
AAL Branch 8639, Lehigh  
Lutheran Brotherhood Br 8563, Milford  
Hardy Trinity Lutheran Church, Hardy  
Western Iowa Synod Women's Organization

Many other churches, church organizations and individuals have contributed money for this program

## From the Pastor

The Church of the Damascus Road began in August of 1997 at Rockwell City and in April of 1998 at Fort Dodge, so we are in our 9<sup>th</sup> year of ministry. I have always been amazed at the response and support we have received from congregations and individuals over the years to ensure that this ministry continues. I am grateful and thank God for all of you who are part of that support.

I am often asked whether income is sufficient, or are we operating with less than we need to maintain CoDR's ministry. There are so many factors involved in determining whether support is adequate, that I often reply, "We are at about the 97% level of support and more and more congregations are adding us to their budgets, but more support is needed if we are to extend our ministry to include reentry aftercare of ex-offenders."

We do all we can as a congregation to give encouragement, exhortation, and hope to the members so that when they leave they will have a renewed sense of direction and purpose to make a new life for themselves with the aid of the Holy Spirit. However, that's where the support ends for most of the members for whom we wish Godspeed. What is urgently needed is a system of support in the community to which they locate after release, and sadly, this support is almost non-existent.

Together we can turn this around. Prison authorities are becoming more and more aware of this need and are willing to endorse responsible efforts to provide aftercare for ex-offenders.

Two back-to-back aftercare training events are planned for Saturday, March 25 from 9am to 3:30pm, and Sunday, March 26 from 2:30 to 9pm at Bethlehem Lutheran in Cherokee. A fee of \$10 per person includes a meal and an aftercare manual. Try to get 3-7 persons from your congregation and/or community to attend the training together.

Who knows? If we move into the area of aftercare and are successful in keeping ex-offenders EX-offenders, maybe we will even begin giving PREcare in our congregations and communities to keep people from offending or at least keep them from being sent to prison. We could reduce the need for expensive prisons and fulfill the desire of Christ for us to "do to the least of these." There will always be a need for prisons, but — maybe we won't need so MANY!

— Pastor Carroll Lang

### Presentations/Sermons/Updates 2005

- 01-02-05 Grace LC, Fort Dodge, 8:30am & 10:45am Worship
- 01-09-05 Algona UMC, 8:00am & 10:30am Worship & Kid's Sermon, 9:15am SS Presentation
- 01-17-05 Citadel Club, Osage, 7:30pm Presentation, Ruth Sponheim
- 02-13-05 Zion LC, Rake, 8:30am & 10:am Worship, 9:30am SS Presentation
- 02-20-05 First Congregational Church, Fort Dodge 10:45am Worship
- 02-27-05 Zion-St John, Sheffield, 9am Worship (Sermon & Temple Talk), 10:30am SS
- 03-06-05 First Presbyterian Youth, Fort Dodge 6:30pm Presentation
- 04-10-05 Mallard UMC, 9am, West Bend UMC, 10:30am CoDR Sermon with video
- 04-17-05 Presbyterian Church, Jefferson. 9am Sermon, update & AfterCare in SS
- 04-17-05 First Christian Church, Laurens, 9:30am CoDR sermon with video
- 05-11-05 Friendship Haven PEO, Fort Dodge, 1:30;m Presentation by Carol Etzel
- 06-02-05 Faith UMC UMW, Presentation by Jim Fevold
- 06-05-05 First Christian Church,, Laurens 9:30am CoDR sermon with video
- 07-03-05 Mennonite Church, Fort Dodge, 9:30am CoDR/Video, SS after (AfterCare)
- 07-10-05 Zion Lutheran Church, Gowrie, 9:30am CoDR sermon with video
- 07-19-05 Golden K Kiwanis, Fort Dodge 9:30am Presentation
- 07-24-05 Early UMC, 9:00am CoDR sermon with video, Nemaha UMC 10:30am CoDR sermon/Video
- 07-31-05 Zion/Lost Island Parish Worship & Picnic at Lost Island Lake, 10am Preach
- 08-08-05 Rockwell City Lions Club, 6pm Presentation: Jim Fevold, Mark Haase and John Hatcher
- 09-04-05 United Methodist Church, Sac City 9am CoDR sermon/Video, Terry Schoon & the Everts assisting
- 09-11-05 Kanawha Lutheran Church 9am; First Lutheran Church, Britt, 10:30am CoDR sermon/Video
- 10-02-05 Zion-St John, Sheffield, 9am Worship, Supply & Adult forum-Presentation
- 10-25-05 Sac City Lions Club, Sac City 6:30pm Presentation: John & Marge Everts
- 11-03-05 Prince of Peace LC, Fort Dodge, 2pm Women's Fellowship, Presentation-Rollin Swanson
- 11-17-05 Sunnyview Retirement Ctr, Rockwell City: 7pm Presentation - John & Marge Everts
- 11-20-05 Trinity LC, Otteson, 9:00am Supply; 10:30am, Trinity LC, Rutland, Supply

## Memorials/Honoraria - 2005

We received a total of \$710.00 in memorials and honoraria in 2005.

H. Q. & Mary Larson, Stratford - In honor of Pr. & Judy Lang's 40th wedding anniversary  
 Vincent & Leila Wilson, Fort Dodge - In honor of Pr. & Judy Lang's 40th wedding anniversary  
 Fred & Marie Nesheim, Goldfield - Iona Kvale memorial  
 Naomi Torkelson, Thor - LaVonna Nessa memorial  
 Alvin & Gloria Anderson, Eagle Grove - LaVonne Nessa memorial  
 Naomi Torkelson, Thor - Clarius Vik memorial  
 Richard & Lois Christopher, Thor - Clarius Vik memorial  
 Cynthia Hanks, Manson - Charlie Miller memorial  
 Mel & Marian Renken, Manson - Charlie Miller memorial  
 Neal & Virginia Miller, Manson - Merlyn Groot memorial  
 Cynthia Hanks, Manson - Ron Miller memorial  
 Jim & Carol Eich, Webster City - Jack Salocker memorial  
 Neal & Virginia Miller, Manson - in honor of Sharon Hefel's marriage  
 Bruce & Kathleen Hansel, Badger - Harry & Bette Ginkens memorial  
 Bruce & Kathleen Hansel, Badger - Floyd Lenning memorial  
 Leroy & Carla Meyer, Sac City - John Everts honorarium  
 Donna Mae Connelly, Sioux City - Randy Siebold memorial  
 Erma E. Johns, Storm Lake - Mr. & Mrs. John Effken's 50th wedding anniversary  
 Patricia L. Gohman, Monrovia, CA Nicole & Todd Letsche wedding honorarium  
 Roxanne Lang, Cedar Falls - Nicole & Todd Letsche wedding honorarium  
 Brian & Janis Campbell, Emmetsburg - Julianne Strohman memorial  
 Fred A & Marie Nesheim, Goldfield - William Switzer memorial  
 Dale & Lisa Seibeht, Curlew - Marshall & Bev Compton honorarium



*Jamodd Sallis FDCF*



*Daniel Skalla FDCF*

*Jeff Roberts FDCF*



**The Church of the Damascus Road  
Budget 2005**

**Grand Total 131,859.00**

\*Prison Congregations of America  
\*\*Our thanks to St. Olaf Lutheran Church, Fort Dodge, for their  
'in kind' donation of office space valued at \$6,000.00

**Human Resources**

|                        |                  |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Pastor Salary          | 42,490.00        |
| Housing Allowance      | 13,200.00        |
| Utilities              | 6,000.00         |
| Social Security Offset | 4,206.00         |
| Pension & Benefits     | 16,230.00        |
| Continuing Ed.         | 500.00           |
| Professional Exp.      | 500.00           |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>83,126.00</b> |

|                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Office Mgr.'s Salary | 9,960.00         |
| Soc. Sec & Med.      | 762.00           |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>10,722.00</b> |

|                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Pulpit Supply        |                 |
| 1,300.00             |                 |
| Accompanist & Supply | 2,600.00        |
| Mileage              |                 |
| 5,000.00             |                 |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>8,900.00</b> |

**Administrative**

|                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Telephone           |                 |
| 1,800.00            |                 |
| Printing            | 1,400.00        |
| Postal Expense      | 1,900.00        |
| Subscriptions       | 200.00          |
| Office Sup & Equip  | 2,000.00        |
| Copier Mtnc. Agrmt. | 1,450.00        |
| Annual Meeting      | 300.00          |
| Miscellaneous       | —               |
| 600.00              |                 |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>9,650.00</b> |

**Mission**

|                          |                  |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| PCoA*                    | 5,965.00         |
| Western Iowa Synod       | 596.00           |
| Newsletter               | 3,800.00         |
| Congregation General     | 500.00           |
| Congregation Worship     | 500.00           |
| Congregation Education   | 600.00           |
| Conference Expenses      | 750.00           |
| AfterCare Training       | 550.00           |
| Miscellaneous & Lutheran |                  |
| Resource Center          | —                |
| 200.00                   |                  |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>13,461.00</b> |

**2005 Budget Subtotal 125,859.00**

Office Rent\*\* 6,000.00

**The Church of the Damascus Road  
Expenses 2005**

**Human Resources**

|                               |           |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Pastor's Base Salary          | 34,990.08 |
| ELCA Optional Pension Plan*** | 3,600.00  |
| Thrivent TSA ***              | 3,600.00  |
| Pastor's CE Contribution      | 300.00    |
| Utilities & Furnishings       | 6,000.00  |
| Social Security Offset        | 4,206.00  |
| Pr's Professional Expenses    | 499.92    |
| Housing Allowance             | 13,200.00 |

**Subtotal-Pastor's Salary 66,396.00**

|                                  |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Pastor's Pension & Benefits Pkg. | 15,616.71 |
| CoDR CE Contribution             | 500.00    |

**Total Pastor's Salary 82,512.71**

|                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| Secretary's Salary           | 9,960.00         |
| Employer Payroll Tax Expense | 762.00           |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>10,722.00</b> |

|                            |                 |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Pulpit Supply              | 1,623.65        |
| Regular & Sub. Accompanist | 2,450.00        |
| Mileage                    | 4,949.43        |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>9,023.08</b> |

**Administrative**

|                |          |
|----------------|----------|
| Telephone      | 1,704.53 |
| Printing       | 1,057.88 |
| Postal Expense | 2,042.65 |
| Subscriptions  | 0.00     |

# CoDR Budget and Needs for 2006 and Contributions for 2005

| <u>Budget - 2006</u>           | <u>Needed Income-2006</u>          | <u>Contributions -2005</u>              |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Human Resources</b>         | January 10,841.42                  | January 14,534.97                       |
| Pastor Salary 43,640.00        | February 10,841.42                 | February 8,766.30                       |
| Housing Allowance 13,200.00    | March 10,841.42                    | March 10,801.08                         |
| Utilities 6,000.00             | April 10,841.42                    | April 16,924.02                         |
| Social Sec. Allowance 4,340.00 | May 10,841.42                      | May 7,502.10                            |
| Pension & Benefits 16,835.00   | June 10,841.42                     | June 8,580.99                           |
| Continuing Ed. 500.00          | July 10,841.42                     | July 6,412.79                           |
| Professional Exp. 500.00       | August 10,841.42                   | August 6,044.31                         |
| <b>Total 85,015.00</b>         | September 10,841.42                | September 8,747.39                      |
| Office Mgr.'s Salary 10,320.00 | October 10,841.42                  | October 8,694.91                        |
| CoDR Payroll Tax Exp. 790.00   | November 10,841.40                 | November 14,930.33                      |
| <b>Total 11,110.00</b>         | December 10,841.40                 | December 16,327.74                      |
|                                | <b>Total 130,097.00</b>            | <b>Total 128,266.93</b>                 |
| Pulpit Supply 1,800.00         |                                    | <b>2005 Total Income 128,266.93</b>     |
| Accompanist & Supply 2,600.00  |                                    | <b>2005 Expenses 124,668.72</b>         |
| Mileage 5,500.00               |                                    | <b>2005-Total Surplus 3,598.21</b>      |
| <b>Total 8,900.00</b>          |                                    |   |
| <b>Administrative</b>          | <b>\$100 a Month Club</b>          |   |
| Telephone 2,400.00             | <b>Churches &amp; Individuals</b>  | Trans from MissionPlus 17,500.00        |
| Printing 1,400.00              | Grace Lutheran, Fort Dodge,        | In March, June, July, August and        |
| Postal Expense 1,800.00        | Our Saviour's Lutheran, Callender  | September we had to transfer a total of |
| Office Sup & Equip 1,700.00    | New Covenant Christian, Ft Dodge   | \$17,500.00 from our MissionPlus ac-    |
| Copier Mtnc. Agrmt. 12,000.00  | St. Paul Lutheran, Palmer          | count to supplement our expenses for    |
| Annual Meeting 300.00          | Hardy Trinity Lutheran, Hardy      | those months.                           |
| Miscellaneous 600.00           | Emanuel-St. John Lutheran, Lytton  | Transfer from Savings 7,189.24          |
| <b>Total 9,400.00</b>          | Trinity Lutheran, Spencer          | Included allotted funds for the fol-    |
| <b>Mission</b>                 | First Lutheran Church, Algona      | lowing: AfterCare, CoDR payroll tax     |
| PCoA* 6,475.00                 | First Presbyterian, Fort Dodge     | expense, FDCF & NCCF offerings &        |
| Western Iowa Synod 647.00      | Zion Lutheran, Clear Lake          | CROPWalk donations, Bible funds, Pas-   |
| Newsletter 4,300.00            | St. Paul's Lutheran, Rockwell City | tor & CoDR continuing education funds,  |
| Congregation General 500.00    | St. John Lutheran, Pomeroy         | IKON***, Discretionary funds, Outside   |
| Congregation Worship 600.00    | American Lutheran, Melvin          | Council funds, & Congregation worship   |
| Congregation Education 500.00  | Bethany Lutheran, Spencer          | supply when needed to pay for these     |
| Conference Expenses 900.00     | Our Saviour's Lutheran, Humboldt   | specific expenses.                      |
| AfterCare Training 550.00      | St. Mark's Episcopal, Fort Dodge   | <b>Year-End Balances:</b>               |
| Miscellaneous & Lutheran       | First Lutheran, Clarion            | <b>Checking: 10,041.15</b>              |
| Resource Center 200.00         | Good Shepherd Episcopal,           | <b>Reg. Share Acct. 15,462.43</b>       |
| <b>Total 14,672.00</b>         | Webster City                       | <b>MissionPlus 26,384.87</b>            |
| <b>2006 Budget</b>             | Zion St. John, Sheffield           | <b>Total: 51,888.45</b>                 |
| <b>Subtotal 130,097.00</b>     | Immanuel Lutheran, Forest City     | ***Copier Maintenance                   |
| Office Rent** 6,000.00         | St. Paul Lutheran, Treynor         | Agreement funds                         |
| <b>Grand Total 136,097.00</b>  | Trinity Lutheran, Spencer          |   |
|                                | Patricia Gohman, Monrovia, CA      |   |
|                                | Noel & Linda Singer, Webster City  |   |
|                                | Adam & Inga Sanford, Frisco, TX    |   |
|                                | Fr. Stephen & Roxanne Hall,        |   |
|                                | Fort Dodge                         |   |
|                                | Warren & Melba Shelby,             |   |
|                                | Fort Dodge                         |   |
|                                | Troy & Karyn Leininger, Spencer    |   |
|                                | Jim & Marilyn Fevold, Humboldt     |   |
|                                | Pastor Carroll & Judy Lang,        |   |
|                                | Fort Dodge                         |   |
|                                | Rollin & Cleo Swanson,             |   |
|                                | Fort Dodge                         |   |
|                                | Eunice Loots, Fort Dodge           |   |

\*Prison Congregations of America  
 \*\*Our thanks to St. Olaf Lutheran Church, fort Dodge, for their 'in kind' donation of office space valued at \$6,000.00

# Church Records 1997 to 2005

## Baptisms, Renewal of Baptisms & Affirmations

## Marriages

|              |  | FDCF     | NCCF     |              | FDCF     | NCCF     |
|--------------|--|----------|----------|--------------|----------|----------|
| 1999 to 2003 |  | 51       | 28       | 1998 to 2003 | 12       | 6        |
| 2005         |  | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | 2005         | <u>3</u> | <u>0</u> |
|              |  | 53       | 31       |              | 15       | 6        |

1999 to 2003 - No Baptism Renewals or Affirmations at FDCF, 1 Affirmation at NCCF

2005 - One Affirmations at NCCF

## Monthly Contributions (Pledges) 1997-2005

| Pledges-Churches*  | Pledges-Organizations*** | Pledges-Individuals** |
|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| \$1 to \$50        | \$1 to \$50              | \$1 to \$50           |
| 3                  | 0                        | 20                    |
| \$51 to \$100      | \$51 to \$100            | \$51 to \$100         |
| 1                  | 0                        | 10                    |
| \$101 or more      | \$101 or more            | \$101 or more         |
| 27                 | 1                        | 3                     |
| Fallen short       | Fallen short             | Fallen short          |
| 11                 | 1                        | 12                    |
| No longer giving   | No longer giving         | No longer giving      |
| <u>7</u>           | <u>1</u>                 | <u>18</u>             |
| <b># Total: 49</b> | <b>#Total: 3</b>         | <b>##Total: 63</b>    |

#Of 46 churches & 3 org. pledged, 44 churches are giving; 31 churches & 2 org. are fulfilling their commitment.

##Of 50 individuals pledged, 50 are giving; 35 are fulfilling their commitment.

## Annual Contributions (Gifts) 1997-2005

| Gifts-Churches*   | Gifts-Organizations*** / ** | Gifts-Individuals** |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| \$1 to \$100      | \$1 to \$100                | \$1 to \$100        |
| 26                | 4                           | 141                 |
| \$101 to \$500    | \$101 to \$250              | \$101 to \$300      |
| 30                | 1                           | 30                  |
| \$501 to \$1,000  | \$251 to \$500              | \$301 to \$500      |
| 9                 | 1                           | 9                   |
| \$1,001 or more   | \$501 or more               | \$501 to \$1,000    |
| 4                 | 1                           | 5                   |
| No longer giving  | No longer giving            | No longer giving    |
| <u>131</u>        | <u>45</u>                   | <u>400</u>          |
| <b>Total: 200</b> | <b>Total: 52</b>            | <b>Total: 585</b>   |

\*Includes Church Women, WELCA, Sunday Schools & Western Iowa Synod

\*\*Includes Memorials & Fund-raiser Gifts (The majority of individual gifts are 'one time' only.)

\*\*\*Includes AAL, Lutheran Brotherhood, Women's Clubs, American Legion Auxiliary, etc.

## Categorized - Contributions 1997-2003<sup>^</sup>

## 2005<sup>^</sup>

## Total-'97-'05<sup>^</sup>

|  |                   |                   |                   |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| All Lutheran chs., org. & WELCA        | 289,444.37        | 67,838.32         | 428,640.02        |
| Methodist churches                     | 11,628.92         | 2,915.13          | 18,065.66         |
| Episcopal churches                     | 12,769.00         | 2,450.00          | 17,519.00         |
| Presbyterian churches                  | 11,604.69         | 3,208.75          | 19,764.96         |
| Other churches                         | 8,630.67          | 3,402.00          | 14,602.67         |
| Western Iowa Synod                     | 3,720.33          | 0.00              | 3,737.00          |
| Clubs, Secular org., Busns's & Schools | 4,612.97          | 2,130.00          | 9,988.97          |
| Individuals                            | <u>141,543.45</u> | <u>46,322.73</u>  | <u>242,771.45</u> |
| <b>Total:</b>                          | <b>483,954.40</b> | <b>128,266.93</b> | <b>755,089.73</b> |

<sup>^</sup>All figures are from our Quicken records on our computer

## 1997 to 2005

| Database Entries - '97-'03 / '05 | No. Pledged - '97-'03 / '05 | No. Giving Gifts - '97-'03 / '05## |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Churches                         | 41 49                       | 76 69                              |
| Organizations                    | 1 3                         | 13 7                               |
| 5Individuals                     | 28 63                       | 197 185                            |

#Of these, 59 are former CoDR members who have been released and 16 who have been transferred to other facilities.

##The figures in this column equals the total of each category (church, etc.) less the number of those no longer giving. e.g., Gifts-Churches — 200 churches are listed in our DB as giving gifts. Of those, 131 no longer give, hence 200-131=69.

# Church Attendance

## Fort Dodge Correctional Facility Fort Dodge, Iowa

Worship services 5/22/98 to 12/31/04

|       |                |               |                    |                 |                         |
|-------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
|       | <u>Inmates</u> | <u>Pastor</u> | <u>Volunteers*</u> | <u>Visitors</u> | <u>Total Attendance</u> |
| (348) | 18,287         | 295           | 868                | 2238            | 20,630**                |

Worship Services 1/5/05 to 12/28/05

|         |                |               |                    |                 |                         |
|---------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
|         | <u>Inmates</u> | <u>Pastor</u> | <u>Volunteers*</u> | <u>Visitors</u> | <u>Total Attendance</u> |
| (53)*** | 2,294          | 53            | 160                | 357             | 2,865 **                |

Total communed in 2005: 2,622 (92% of total attending worship services)

These statistics include many inmates, volunteers and visitors who have repeatedly attended services.

## North Central Correctional Facility Rockwell City, Iowa

Worship Services 8/28/97 to 12/25/04

|       |                |               |                    |                 |                         |
|-------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
|       | <u>Inmates</u> | <u>Pastor</u> | <u>Volunteers*</u> | <u>Visitors</u> | <u>Total Attendance</u> |
| (375) | 8,174          | 375           | 941                | 2,133           | 11,592                  |

Worship Services 1/6/05 to 12/29/05

|         |                |               |                    |                 |                         |
|---------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
|         | <u>Inmates</u> | <u>Pastor</u> | <u>Volunteers*</u> | <u>Visitors</u> | <u>Total Attendance</u> |
| (50)*** | 1,046          | 50            | 194                | 234             | 1,526                   |

Total communed in 2005: 1,470 (96% of total attending worship services)

| Average Total Attendance/Service |    | Average Total Attendance/Service |    |
|----------------------------------|----|----------------------------------|----|
| NCCF                             |    | FDCF                             |    |
| 8/27/97 - 12/27/04               | 31 | 5/22/98 - 12/26/04               | 59 |
| 1/6/05 - 12/29/05                | 31 | 1/5/05 - 12/28/05                | 54 |

### Legend

\*Our Volunteers began serving in 1999 after applying for the position, and then being trained to be an official volunteer. Upon completion they were issued official badges which allow them to attend a worship service without being on the regular Visitor's List. In 2001 NCCF changed their regulations allowing only ten visitors thus requiring our regular volunteers to be listed on the Visitor's List if they wish to attend a service. Judy Lang must always be on the list which limits our list to 9 NCCF visitors .

( )Number of services each year at each facility

\*\*Includes 79 Federal inmates housed at FDCF. Pastor Lang has a communion service for them during count before the evening worship service. Although they cannot worship at the regular service, they are included in the attendance and communed count.

\*\*\*FDCF-Data not turned in to office due to the absence of Pastor Lang or undetermined circumstances. NCCF-Two services were not held due to Brothers in Blue weekend events held there that week.

**This report does not reflect an accurate attendance for the worship services at each facility throughout the years of our existence, due to lack of reporting during Pastor Lang's absences.**

# The Church of the Damascus Road Inmate Donations

During 2005 the Inside Council members of FDCF & NCCF voted to disperse their accumulated offerings in the following manner:

## Fort Dodge Correctional Facility

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| January 3, 2005                                   |               |
| Prison Congregations of America                   | \$ 25.00      |
| Western Iowa Synod ELCA                           | 25.00         |
| ELCA International Disaster Response              | <u>150.00</u> |
| Total:  | \$200.00      |
| July 29, 2005                                     |               |
| Children International - 3 months dues            | \$ 54.00      |
| Children International - Stefani's birthday gift  | <u>25.00</u>  |
| Total:  | \$ 79.00      |
| December 15, 2005                                 |               |
| Prison Congregations of America                   | \$ 56.25      |
| Western Iowa Synod ELCA                           | 56.25         |
| Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center           | 45.00         |
| RBC Ministries                                    | 45.00         |
| Children International (Quarterly sponsorship)    | 54.00         |
| Children International (Stefani's Christmas gift) | 25.00         |
| Muscular Dystrophy                                | 25.00         |
| Make-A-Wish Foundation                            | 21.75         |
| Stratford Relief Fund                             | 21.75         |
| International Christian Centre for Missions       | <u>25.00</u>  |
| Total:  | \$450.00      |

## North Central Correctional Facility

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| January 25, 2005                               |              |
| Prison Congregations of America                | \$ 25.00     |
| Western Iowa Synod-ELCA                        | 25.00        |
| Western Iowa Synod ELCA - Tsunami Victims      | <u>75.00</u> |
| Total:   | \$125.00     |
| September 15, 2005                             |              |
| Western Iowa Synod ELCA                        | \$ 50.00     |
| Western Iowa Synod ELCA fbo Hurricane Katrina  | 100.00       |
| Prison Congregations of America                | 50.00        |
| Pastor Rodemann, Rockwell City                 | 50.00        |
| ELCA/Division of Global Mission (Maryn Olson)  | 100.00       |
| Keisha Parsons, hurricane Katrina victim       | <u>50.00</u> |
| Total:   | \$400.00     |
| December 20, 2005                              |              |
| Prison Congregations of America                | \$ 25.00     |
| Western Iowa Synod ELCA                        | 25.00        |
| ELCA/Division for Global Mission (Maryn Olson) | 50.00        |
| Toys for Tots                                  | 25.00        |
| Stratford Relief Fund                          | 25.00        |
| Trinity United Methodist Church, Des Moines    | 25.00        |
| Prison Fellowship (Angel Tree, IA)             | <u>25.00</u> |
| Total:   | \$200.00     |

**Total giving 2005: FDCF - \$729.00; NCCF - \$725**

**Grand total: \$1,454.00**



*NCCF CROP Walkers*



*FDCF CROP Walkers*



# FDCF Inside Council Reports

## Fort Dodge Inside Council President

Our Wednesday night worship starts out with six inmates and Pastor Lang setting up our visiting room for the night. My role in setup is Altar Guild, and helping with the sound system. I take a lot of pride in making sure that everything flows smoothly for the night, for God. This is the only instance in our lives that pride is good, and not a sin. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

We sing a couple of songs while people finish coming in and take their seats at 7:00. After that, Pastor Lang makes the weekly announcements that we all need to be reminded of: "Please don't talk to your neighbor during worship." Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. In Pastor Lang's announcements, he says that we just love to lose members. Usually this means that they've gone home, or transferred to another institution for treatment. We have gained and lost many members this year. It always keeps the front row fresh with enthusiasm. We are to encourage each other. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." A lot of our new members are Rivers inmates (violators) who usually only have a short time to do. We have been blessed with having many Rivers inmates on our Inside Church Council also.

We are a Christian community that accepts all people, just as Jesus did when he prayed for us who crucified him.

We follow a Lutheran liturgy to have some form of organization. I sing the Kyrie and play guitar with Pastor Lang's wife, Judy, who plays the piano each week. Sometimes we have a choir, and sometimes we have other special music.

Our offerings have almost tripled in the last couple of months. I started giving God back 10% of my income and was immediately financially blessed beyond belief. I couldn't contain my excitement, so I told the congregation about my joy also. If we can begin a small good habit in prison, it can carry on with us when we're released, but we have to have discipline.

Our Bible study numbers have been increasing, as well as our numbers at worship. It's such a blessing to be a part of God's plan for this place, and to be a part of his kingdom!

Holy Communion is Christ's meal. He is the host and we are the guests. Some people don't participate in Holy Communion every week, maybe because they don't feel worthy. I'm just eternally grateful that his salvation is given to us all no matter what we do or have done.

We contribute to world hunger through the CROPWalk, and the Souper Bowl each year, and sometimes through our charity list when we distribute our offerings every three months. We also sponsor a child in Chile through Children International, and always send her a birthday and Christmas donation, too. We have certain charities that we are committed to each quarter with a set amount, and then the rest is distributed by other suggestions.

I have learned a lot in the last year and a half, but I have a long way to go about more knowledge of the Bible, as do we all. I have put together a list of 52 scriptures to memorize, one each week of the year.

Brothers in Blue is always interesting to watch as it unfolds. Then as things come together in the midst of the weekend, it's usually over before you know it, and no one wants to leave. God's plan and purpose is always perfect, because he is in charge. The sooner we all realize this, the better off we will be.

The praise and worship music here is so vast and unlimited. We have at least 6 different music books, and 2 boxes full of sheet music to choose from. We have many tapes and compact discs, which the numbers keep increasing because of donations.

This year we purchased a Rogue acoustic/electric guitar, stand, strap, picks, tuner, case, capos, and 2 wireless microphones (1 handheld, and 1 lapel) from Musician's Friend and Kingdom catalog order company. We are still in need of a mixer and a snake used to get the mixer to the back of the room for better sound control. Pastor Lang is still looking for the best deal, and waiting for the right time.

I thank God for the huge number of outside volunteers, guests, and substitute pastors and accompanists that attend our worship services. It's nice to be remembered, missed, loved, and prayed for by our guests. It means to me that they don't forget us when they leave this place. In fact, some say that they look forward to the next time that they can see us again. It is this type of love that gets us through the day sometimes.

*Tony Halsrud*

## FDCF Inside Council Vice President

My journey really only began in December of 2004. I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior on January 22, 2005. At that time, I made a commitment to myself to learn more about our Heavenly Father and the life and death and the resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. I have enjoyed my walk very much to date.

I have grown so much spiritually over this past year. I hope to keep growing myself and to help others grow in the word of our Lord. With the help from the other members of the CoDR Inside council as well as the rest of the congregation, I never have a question that goes unanswered.

There is a lot more that I could write about, but I'm trying to keep this short and sweet. One last thing I would like to say: In my daily devotional by Dr. David Jeremiah, he talks about taglines, such as, "Fly the friendly skies," "Don't leave home without it," and "Good to the last drop." I think the most famous one is from Hallmark cards, "When you care enough to send the very best."

Brothers and sisters, let us remember that is exactly what our Lord did for us. So, wouldn't it be only right for us to give our very best in return?

Walk in his ways, glory in his Word, and be the most faithful, spirit-filled believer that you can be.

May God be with you all.

*Randy Zimmerman*

*Reports continued next page*

## **FDCF Prayer Team and Story Tellers Chairman**

I'm proud to say that I have been put in charge of the Story Tellers program. Dads can come in and read a book on tape and then send the book and tape home to their children. What's really nice is that I get to hear reports on the child and how much they enjoy the books.

I am also the Prayer team leader and we've done exceptionally well this year. We start off and go around the tables praying for people who request prayer for healing and family. The Church of the Damascus Road means a lot to me. It feels like you're part of a family. You get to work with volunteers that come in to the prison and that brightens your day when you can hear what's going on in the real world outside. I have grown so much. I learned responsibility and what it takes to have a spiritual walk with Jesus.

*Randy Elliot*

## **FDCF Evangelism Committee**

I would like to tell you about how evangelism has changed my life.

When I first started this journey, I was separated from my children, which has been the hardest thing I've ever been faced with. Never before had I experienced such a feeling of hopelessness and loneliness, being afraid of anything the future had in store. The only thing I knew that could never be taken from me was God. At that point, I wasn't even sure if God was still on my side.

When I was awaiting trial I met this older gentleman who seemed very happy and content to be right where he was. I noticed he read and studied the Bible everyday. What I didn't know was the whole time he was putting together Bible studies.

One night I approached him and asked "why are you here?" I was stunned by his answer. He turned to me and said, "I've been asking God the same question. And now my answer is standing before me in the flesh." He then handed me a Bible along with the studies. With a smile he said, "Here is your map, follow it and allow it to lead you home." So, wanting to go home, I did as I was instructed, only to find myself further and further from home.

After being introduced to the Church of the Damascus Road, all the pieces were slowly beginning to come together. The energy level of Pastor Lang not only lifted my spirit, but it showed me that life is not at all about me, or where I am; it's about God, and his intentions for us all. I believe God gave his only Son to show the world that we are all lost and will stay lost until we follow the one that knows the way home. We all know the saying, "Home is where the heart is." Well, if our heart is with God, no matter where we are, we're already home.

That lesson gives me more faith than any other I've been taught. I know how it feels to be lost and alone. Now I've been given the gift to bless others with the Grace of God. Doing so fulfills our only purpose in life, which is to spread the Gospel of the Lord.

God bless you all.

*William (Joe) Schwerdtfeger*

## **FDCF Inside Church Council Secretary, Proposal Committee Chair, and Flash and Echo Editor**

I am the Secretary of the Inside Church Council for the Church of the Damascus Road, the Proposal Committee Chairman, and the editor of both the Flash! and Echo! newsletters. This has been a good year for me and I have been blessed with these opportunities.

I attended my first council meeting on February 2, 2005. By the end of my first meeting, I knew beyond all doubt that I needed to be more included in our church. I continued to attend those meetings and on April 24, 2005 I was nominated, received my letter of call, and elected by our congregation the next Wednesday to be a member of the Inside Church council. I continued to become more and more involved. On June 6, 2005 we, as a council, chose to elect all of our new officers on the council. That night we elected Tony Halsrud as our new president, Randy Zimmerman as our new vice president, and to my surprise they nominated and elected me as the new secretary for our Inside Church Council. Not only did that mean that I would be taking a lot of notes, but it was also a blessing from God to me. I know that this opportunity has helped me grow in my faith. I love the experience of being so involved in our church, and I pray that I can continue to serve the Lord in any way that I can while I'm in this prison, or in life altogether.

That was only the beginning! The same day that I was elected as the secretary, I suggested that we start a Proposal Committee so that we could put our ideas in writing and present them to whom we needed. I am the chair of that committee now. Although we really haven't accomplished much, due to changes made in our facility, it is still a good resource for us to have. For example, we tried to get it approved that we could be allowed to bring snacks to our meetings or have pizza at our Inside/Outside Church Council meetings. That proposal was turned down, but we do have other things in the works. We're currently trying to get it approved for us to be able to bring our Bibles to our Wednesday night worship service. We are currently not allowed to bring anything with us, because we have our worship service in the FDCF visiting room. We're also trying to start a pen-pal program. There are a lot of inmates who don't receive much mail while in prison, so we believe this would be a great program that would make it possible for those inmates to receive mail through a pen-pal program. As I said, it is in the works, and we hope that we can continue to try and make new opportunities available.

I've also had the opportunity to become the editor of both of our newsletters, the Flash! and the Echo! I became the editor in August of 2005. Since I became the editor, it has been an excellent learning experience for me. I do have some past writing experience, and my area of interest in high school was mainly business and literature. I had hoped to major in both of those areas in college, so this has been a blessing for me in more than one way. I love the experience, and I know that it will benefit me tremendously down the road in my life. My dream is to become a professional writer some day, so this is a true gift from God for me. I have learned a lot working along side a very intelligent man in Pastor Carroll Lang. This opportunity has let me see a lot of persons' love for God through their writings and artwork. The Echo! is available for inmates at NCCF, FDCF, and visitors who attend services at either facility. The Flash!, on the other hand, is sent to over 2000 people through the mail every other month. Not only are these newsletters an opportunity to make people aware of our congregation, they are also a fantastic chance to evangelize others. This is a gift that God has granted me, and I do it all for the Lord. I truly hope that these newsletters

*Reports continued next page*

help spread God's word and truth. We accept articles and artwork from inmates and anyone who wishes to contribute. That means you! This is definitely a great way to get many people involved in spreading the Gospel. So far I haven't had any complaints, so I hope that means you all enjoy both the Echo and Flash.

As I said before, God has blessed me over and over this year. Beside everything else that I've mentioned before, I also help set up and run the sound system for our Wednesday night service, and also had the chance to be a resident assistant rector at the Brothers in Blue weekend in June and December of 2005. So, as you can see, the Lord has kept me busy this year. I'm glad that I've had these many opportunities to shed some light on the Lord's path. Even though we are in prison and attend a prison congregation, the Lord still works in our lives. I leave you with a verse from the Bible that I try to live my life by: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" Philippians 4:13 (NIV).

Don't thank me for what I've done. Thank God, because that's what it's all about.

*Gene D. Cook Jr.*

### **FDCF Inside Church Council Fellowship**

Hi, my name is Rodger Verch or "Johnny" to my brothers. This is what fellowship means to me. Fellowship means family. Some of us never had one before becoming a Christian, but now through fellowship there are now some who call me brother. Fellowship means coming together with Christ, putting all differences aside and showing our love and praise to God and his son, Jesus. In The Church of the Damascus Road, we come together in faith and love to share God's word. We call each other "Brother." Even though we are in prison God loves us and we love one another.

*Rodger "Johnny" Verch*

### **CROPWalk**

I am a librarian for the Inside Church Council. I would just like to thank God and Jesus for bringing this family to me, as well as to others. The CROPWalk was great and made a difference even though we were not that many. Every little thing counts for those who are suffering and are in need of food.

*Joseph Kosiba*

### **FDCF Librarian**

Being a new librarian, I enjoy seeing the library and a great amount of books. Most of the books are donated and this is greatly appreciated. We do have approximately 2,600 books in the Chapel Library and we have many topics to choose from. We have many videos to watch as well and this can be a blessing to see them. Come and check some out. God Bless.

*Micheal J. Smothers*

### **Christmas Card Give Away**

This event was a huge success. It gave every inmate the opportunity to send three Christmas cards out at no expense to himself. This provided an excellent way for inmates with either no money or who for some other reason would not have sent any cards out to get into the giving spirit of the season, and to let their loved ones know that they were in their thoughts during the holidays. I believe that this also gave inmates another way to connect with the outside world on another level and simply let them tell somebody, "Hey, I may be locked up, but its not all about me. I care about you, also."

The inmates that took advantage of this made for a total of 1,882 cards to provide postage for, which cost \$694.86. To me this whole activity was a demonstration of selflessness and the meaning of Christmas through and through. I know it meant a lot to all the recipients of the cards as well as all the inmates. It was a win-win project done in a manner that I believe made Christ proud!

*Randy Elliott*

# NCCF Inside Council Reports

Greetings from the congregation and the Inside Church Council of the Church of the Damascus Road at NCCF. Once again, at least for me, this past year has passed rather quickly. I believe in part it is because we (the members of CoDR) have the chance to meet regularly on Tuesday evenings for Prayer Team and Bible study, and we also come together on Thursday evenings for singing, worship and fellowship with many regular volunteers and many, many outside guests. This gives us a chance to get out of our environment and fellowship with others, both from the outside and the inside, and experience the love of God.

We are thankful for this opportunity and would like to thank the members of the Outside Church Council for their support and all they do to help ensure the survival of the Church of the Damascus Road here and at Fort Dodge. Without an outside voice, this probably wouldn't be possible. We would also like to thank every congregation for their thoughtfulness and their giving spirit, for without them making us part of their missionary work there would be no CoDR. Thank you, and may God richly bless you all!

Among the highlights from last year we experienced several from our congregation who received releases and from time to time they report back through Pastor Lang and others that they are doing well. I believe that success at least in part is due to their membership in CoDR. It is always good to hear that one of ours has made the transition and is doing well.

On the second Tuesday of each month we shorten our Bible study time to hold our Inside Church Council meeting. A lot of our business is replacing council members and adding others to our standby list, as Pastor Lang would say, "We love to lose our members," and unlike most churches we lose many throughout the year.

We have recently decided to distribute our offerings quarterly, so those who give will have the chance to see their good deed of giving in action. This past year we decided to give to the missionary field, too. Our missionary is spirit-filled and full of Ruth. She is active in educating and working with those infected and affected by the HIV-AIDS epidemic in Africa. She is located in Namibia. We were blessed with a visit from her this past fall. By the way her name is Maryn Olson. She came to share her work and ministry with us and to thank us for our prayers and our support.

We all are aware of the many huge natural disasters this past year and like many we gave for the Tsunami relief and when Katrina struck it touched family members of one of our congregation members as well. They were forced to relocate to Iowa and we felt blessed that we could send a gift their way, too. Like many, we are aware of the big things around the world, but we are also mindful of those in our backyard. We also sent gifts to Angel Tree and Toys-for-Tots to help provide gifts for the less fortunate children of those who are incarcerated and those who are not. I think the inside council and the stewardship committee do a good job deciding on where our tithes and offerings go.

We also held a CROP Walk in October and raised a nice sum for that cause. Not many are willing to walk but many give and we are thankful for that.

Our education committee came up with another foundation-building class called, "Basic Training for a Few Good Men," and we are currently holding another marriage class called, "Growing Together," which is often requested and is responded to well. We are always on the lookout and listening for suggestions of other building for success curriculum we may offer.

Our worship committee continues to make prayer request slips available on each unit and our prayer team continues to PUSH (Pray Until Something Happens) and God has been faithful, as many of our prayers have been answered. Praise be to God!

Our evangelism committee reaches out in many ways, but one of our biggest success stories is Story Tellers. Our Vice President, David Porter, heads up Story Tellers. He, Pastor Lang and the inside and outside volunteers do a great job in providing the opportunity for the men here to read a book while taping it on cassette and then sending it home to their children. What a great way for the fathers and their children to stay connected.

I could go on about how great our Christmas plays have been and all the great special music we have each week. And what a blessing it is each week to meet new visitors or to continue the friendships that are developing with the regular volunteers, but I wouldn't know where to stop, because the next week is always just as special as the last.

We enjoyed many blessings this past year and we are eagerly looking forward to learning more, telling others more, giving more, and worshipping and praising God more!

May God bless each and every one of you this New Year, too!

*Marc Leonard*

## **NCCF StoryTeller coordinator**

As I settle into the job of being NCCF's first inmate Story Tellers Coordinator, I find myself busier and busier every month as our Story Teller readers have more than doubled over the last year.

History: Up to November of 2004, the NCCF staff oversaw the soliciting and scheduling of dads to read books to their children. This was not working well because of the inmates' work schedules not coinciding with the staff's, so the staff asked Pastor Lang if the Church of the Damascus Road could handle the whole thing. Pastor Lang agreed, since that is how the program works at FDCF. Pastor Lang asked me to coordinate the program and I accepted the challenge.

Our new method of scheduling dads to read has been more effective than before and I am pleased to report that we are overbooked with readers and have a waiting list. We can schedule ten readers each month, and lately that has grown to as many as thirteen to fifteen, and God has provided us time to get to them all in a timely manner.

I asked God, upon taking on this responsibility, to give me, and teach me new ways and give me new ideas on how to encourage reconciliation between these men and their children and families, and in his infinite wisdom God has answered my plea by now allowing the men to read books to their nieces and nephews and other children in their family circles. So, in the last year the Story Teller Program has expanded in all areas and in many ways as the men also pay a cheaper "Media Mail" postage rate, saving them money, and also paving the way for new readers to come on board. God has been, and continues to be, faithful, and I thank and praise him for it. Thank you to all the outside volunteers who come in on Saturdays and help record the dads reading.

*David Porter*

*Reports continued next page*

## Worship Assistant Sign-Up

**This is a list of the members who signed up to assist in several areas including the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Readings, Psalm, Prayers, and communion assistants in the Thursday Night Worship Service.** *Note: individuals may have assisted several times in these areas due to spacing we only submitted each name once.*

| <b>Readers</b>    | <b>Set-up Crew</b> | <b>Temple Talk</b> | <b>Liturgy Asst</b> | <b>Music/Singers</b> | <b>Communion Servers</b> |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| John Simpson      | David L. Porter    | Brad Booher        | David Porter        | Anthony Bone         | Brad Booher              |
| Jasper Young      | David Hintz        | David L. Porter    |                     | Jamodd Sallis        | Marc Leonard             |
| Dennis Kaplan     | James Raymond      | Robert Blau        |                     | Robert Williams      | David L. Porter          |
| Todd Yaw          | Jasper Young       | Crieg Nietfield    |                     | Brad Booher          | Cary Straw               |
| Micah Sinnwell    | Joseph Polk        | Jerry L. Hansen    |                     | David L. Porter      | Crieg Nietfield          |
| Crieg Nietfield   | Anthony Bone       | Jasper Young       |                     | Daniel Skalla        | Todd Yaw                 |
| Jeffrey Anderson  | Joe Sanders        | Joseph Polk        |                     | Michael Maser        | Anthony Bone             |
| Lloyd Abbey       | Larry Griffis      | Todd Yaw           |                     | Millard Sanders      | Jerry L. Hansen          |
| Michael Maser     | Bruce Plucker      | Rick Kenney        |                     | Robert Blau          | Robert Blau              |
| Robert Blau       | Raymond Hill       | Jamodd Sallis      |                     | Randy Smith          | John Bothwell            |
| Michael Black     | Brad Booher        | Brandon Wickett    |                     | Rick Kenney          | Andy Hesseltine          |
| Brad Booher       | Jeffrey Anderson   | Anthony Bone       |                     | Richard Bryant       | Ronnie Furness           |
| Dannie Harman     | Lyle Harris        | Lyle Harris        |                     | Patrick Platt        | Rick Kenney              |
| Robert Krieger    | Randy Smith        |                    |                     |                      | Mike Davis               |
| Anthony Bone      | Brandon Wickett    |                    |                     |                      | Millard Sanders          |
| Tom Williamson    | Larry Maxwell      |                    |                     |                      | Randy Smith              |
| Rick Kenney       | Paul Harrison      |                    |                     |                      | Alan Schieffer           |
| Jerry L. Hansen   | Lloyd Abbey        |                    |                     |                      | Timothy Kuanagh          |
| David L. Porter   | Caleb Roedel       |                    |                     |                      | John Willcoth            |
| Andrew Hesseltine | Shawn Westfall     |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Chris Mosset      |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Randy Smith       |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Lyle Harris       |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Jamodd Sallis     |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Marc Leonard      |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Daniel Skalla     |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Millard Sanders   |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Howard Hicks      |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Robert Williams   |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Caleb Roedel      |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Brandon Wickett   |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Paul Harrison     |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Bruce Plucker     |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |
| Alan Schieffer    |                    |                    |                     |                      |                          |

I would like to thank everyone who participated in the worship services of the Church of the Damascus Road, and all who were diligent in serving as an active member, and to the Inside-Outside Council. As for the Evangelism Committee, As chairmen I have since delegated the authority as I felt the Lord lead men in stepping up and taking the initiative to lead and individuals responsible for the guidance of the committee are, Paul Harrison: co-chair, Tony Bone, Millard Sanders, and Lloyd Abbey. Special 'Thank You' to all who participated in the 2005 Christmas play, and all the outside volunteers and guests who come in week after week to share Christ and their lives with us. Special guests of the year were Maryn and Amy Olsen. Special thanks to the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Youth who provided Christmas Cards for the inmates to send out to family and friends. This was the first time CoDR could provide the cards. Live in peace and serve the Lord. Faithfully, David L. Porter, Vice President, CoDR.

### NCCF Evangelism

Looking back on the year 2005, I just realized that the last eight months have passed very quickly. I remember when Pastor Lang invited me to Thursday night worship for the first time, and upon my response of, "I'll consider it," his response was to "make it a commitment!" Just how do you say no to that? Well, I fulfilled that commitment to "come on down!" I often wonder if he had any idea what he was getting into!

The Church of the Damascus Road provides a great atmosphere that embraces all denominations and religious backgrounds regardless of what stage you are on your spiritual path. This openness creates a great network of God's people through the Inside/Outside Church Council, a great congregation and a host of wonderful volunteers. All gather for structured Bible Study, (sometimes more structured than others) and very inspirational worship that enriches the lives of the residents here at NCCF.

I have been very fortunate to have such a constructive way to spend my time here, that not only allowed me to meet some great servants of God, it inspired me to get involved with the Inside Church Council, and its committees. The Church of the Damascus Road has also allowed me to answer a calling that I had no idea how dear it would be to my heart: Aftercare. I'm really proud to be a part of helping our Christian brothers reenter society with a support system sponsored by God! In the last eight weeks, we have been able to capture the attention of the D.O.C. through an awareness campaign that has awarded us with different forms to help with information on potential candidates for aftercare, and the support of some of the counselors as well. It is also heartening to discover that the world holds an army of people that are willing to get involved to help this cause. As of the date of this letter we hold a list of over one hundred employers that are willing to hire an ex-offender, and a lot of research has gone into ways of funding transitional housing, and meeting the individual needs of each candidate. Now that the foundation is built, let's build the walls by getting as many people as we can into the training for aftercare teams on March 25 and 26. Anyone with ideas or questions may contact me through Pastor Lang.

Thanks to all the Outside Council members, the churches and individuals for all their support. Happy New Year, and God bless you all!

*Paul Harrison*

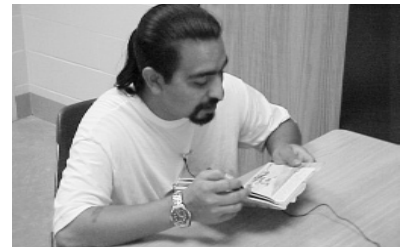
# Story Tellers Story



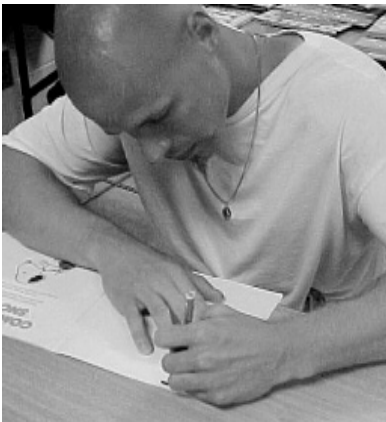
1. Volunteer "engineers" set up recorders before fathers arrive.



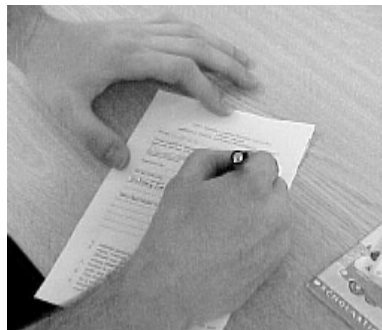
2. Fathers select books to read to their children. Books, cassettes and envelopes are donated by outside congregations and individuals.



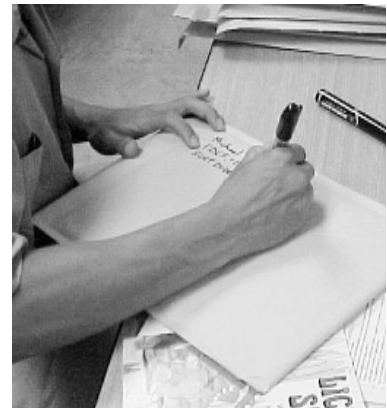
3. The father reads the book, recording it on cassette tape. A brief greeting may be given at the beginning and the end of the recording.



4. A brief message may be written in the front of the book.



5. A store order is filled out, except for the amount of postage, and signed.

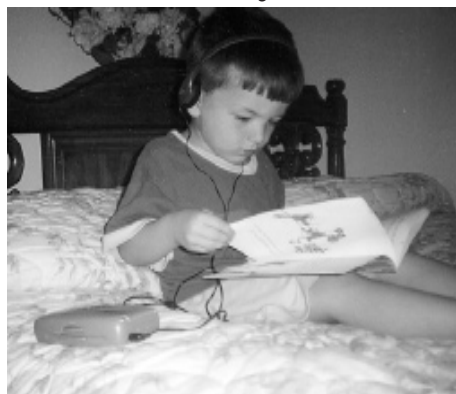


6. The envelope is addressed to the child or in care of parent of guard-

## Another Story



7. Book, tape and store order are stuffed in envelope and taken to mailroom.



Phillip Mericle, FDCF, shared this photo of his son, Adam, listening to a tape of Phil's voice reading the book he is holding. Phil has read books and sent them home several times and wanted to share how much his son enjoyed it.

Inmates at the Fort Dodge Correctional

Facility and the North Central Correctional Facility in Rockwell City have monthly opportunities to select books to read to their children, recording their voices on cassette tape, and sending the book and tape to their children. The child then puts the tape in a player and opens the book and turns the pages as his Dad reads to him.

Inmates who wish to participate in this project of the Church of the Damascus Road need to sign up ahead of time. At FDCF they can do this in the chapel on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. At NCCF they need to contact David Porter or Pastor Lang to be scheduled to read.

Recording sessions are on 3rd Fridays at FDCF and on 3rd Saturdays at NCCF.

## **North Central AfterCare (NCA)**

**Judy Gronbach**

**N**orth Central AfterCare is a group of concerned Christians in the Humboldt area that have formed a ministry to help those persons released from prison and to assist in their transition back into society. We were approved to become incorporated and have a nonprofit status as of 2004. We have a board of directors consisting of nine members and our officers are as follows: President Al Schmidke (515-332-1289); Vice-President Mary Fevold (515-332-2498); Secretary Judy Gronbach (515-332-1076) and Treasurer Sheri Peterson (515-332-1472). We continually look for new members to share in this unique ministry.

We recently concluded our year-long covenants with two former inmates and they are both doing extremely well. We signed on another man in November and that covenant is doing well also. We received gifts of money from several organizations and church groups throughout the year and hosted some coffees at a couple churches. We were able to go into the prison to conduct interviews with possible candidates, so that was a positive step with correctional facilities. We had speakers in that educated us on grant writing, chemical dependency and county services available. Overall, we had a very successful year and look forward to continuing this special ministry with God's loving and gracious blessings!

## **Fort Dodge AfterCare**

**Rollin J. Swanson**

**I**n 2004, our AfterCare team had a covenant with Brandon Walstrom which remained in effect until March, 2005. Brandon failed to keep his part of the covenant so we had to cancel it. In June 2005, he was arrested again with drug charges and was sentenced to the treatment center.

After meeting with Daniel Hicks twice at the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility, we decided to covenant with him. Dan was released to the treatment center on August 19, 2005 and is doing very well. He had to quit laying carpet because of a hernia and is now recovering from surgery.

Our team members include: Dorothy Zehr, Carol Etzel, Roger and Joyce Garton Natte, Jim McColley, Rollin Swanson and Carroll and Judy Lang.

## **Thoughts from a Former Member**

January 4, 2006

Dear Friends,

I am so very sorry I cannot attend (the Annual Meeting) at this time. However, I would like to share my thoughts about The Church of the Damascus Road.

The CoDR is vital to many men. When I attended the CoDR in Rockwell City, not only did I find a church, but I began a relationship that is life lasting. I found strangers that became my friends, and friends that became my family. They encouraged me to not only become a better person, but a man of Christ and that has changed my life. From their dedication in speaking the truth of the Word of God, their faithfulness in sharing the Word of God, and their love of God in serving as they do, is not only an encouragement, but an example of what Christ did for all.

Today I encourage everyone I meet to carry the truth of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, in their thoughts, talk and walk as they did for me and continue to do so for Christ.

It is written in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." The Rev. Carroll Lang, the volunteers, and many staff members do this daily, and by this many many men have changed lives by coming to Christ and Christ has changed their hearts.

To support them and encourage them is to be faithful in our calling. To love others as they have is truly God's calling in their lives. John 13:34 says "...As I have loved you, love one another." I urge you to support the CoDR and the volunteers of the body of Christ. They do make a difference to the glory of God.

I look forward to sharing and worshipping with you all soon. Grace and peace in the joyful service of Christ.

Henry Poteet

## Testimony

You may or may not know me but my name is Andrew Hellvig and if you've seen the video, now you have a name to go with the face at the beginning! Obviously, I am an ex-inmate of the Iowa prison system. I was released in April of 2000 after spending 2.5 years in the system. I first met Pastor Lang at the Rockwell City Correctional Facility and, if you've ever been to one of his services, then I don't have to tell you why I kept returning. Pastor Lang as well as his wife Judy have a dedication and sincerity to the Church of the Damascus Road and to the inmates that is so readily apparent from the moment you walk into a service that it softens even the hardest heart. The visitors from the outside that attend the services truly touch the hearts, minds, and souls of the inmates. In short, The Church of the Damascus Road is truly a unique ministry and is invaluable to the inmates whom it serves.

Now, I could spend a lot of time telling you about how I come from a broken home, the abuse that I endured, the poverty that I grew up in or many other unpleasant circumstances of my past. I won't do that simply because I feel that every inmates story, regardless of the details, is the same—each of us has a hole in our hearts and souls. Many of us, myself included, have tried drugs, alcohol, and a variety of other methods to fill this hole. However, what I have learned is that only God, through his Son, Jesus Christ, can fill the void in our lives and that as the void begins filling, the natural reaction is to want to help others find Jesus and begin filling the lonely places in their hearts and souls with his love as well. The Church of the Damascus Road and all those involved with it taught me this lesson.

As an inmate the church services gave me hope for a better future as well as teaching me about the love of God. The visitors showed me that I was not worthless and that there are people who care. In short, this ministry began laying a solid foundation on which I could build my faith.

None of this is to say that life has been perfect since my release 5.5 years ago. The good news is that I have not been in trouble with the law since my release. I'm also married to a wonderful Christian woman who, by the way, I met through the Church of the Damascus Road. The past 3 months have been a time of renewal for me and my faith is growing stronger every day. The bad news is that we live in a fallen world and that Satan is very much alive and well. You see, shortly after my release, I began to depend on myself again rather than the strength of God and I did not take full advantage of the help that the Church of the Damascus Road and many of its visitors had offered me. I began to drink again which, incidentally, was the reason for my incarceration in the first place. I believed at the time that I had everything under control. I had a well-paying job and was accumulating all of the "things" that are supposed to make us happy. I had my new girlfriend and a home of my own. And, best of all, I was free—or so I thought. Even though I was no longer behind bars I was still in prison—a prison of isolation as I was no longer keeping in touch with family members, the church, or anyone else who had been and would be a positive influence in my life. Things got so bad that I was hospitalized several times because of my drinking and was placed in an intensive care for detoxification. I was literally killing myself. I couldn't work because of my drinking and was losing everything that God had blessed me with including my home and my wife. It was only after reaching this lowest point of my life that I returned to the foundation given to me by the Church of the Damascus Road and surrendered my life to the care of Jesus Christ.

I pray that any inmate or ex-inmate who is reading or hearing this will not make the same mistake that I made. Don't waste the time that's been given to you! You see, the 2.5 years I spent in prison were not wasted because without the Church of the Damascus Road, I would not have had a solid foundation to return to at that lowest point. The time that I DID waste was the time that I spent not being involved with the church and in developing my faith. And to any visitors, outside council members, or other friends of The Church of the Damascus Road who may be reading or hearing this, thank you for believing, not only in Jesus, but also in those of us who may seem unreachable. All of you—Pastor Lang, Judy, visitors, inmates, ex-inmates, council members, and the church itself, are making a difference.

In closing, please remember that a seed planted today may not bear fruit for years to come. But I believe that the important thing is to plant the seed and have faith that God will bring forth the fruit in His time. Lastly, if I could give some advice to any inmate, previous or current, never be afraid to ask for help. And to everyone, please continue to be involved with and support the Church of the Damascus Road, for it is truly a blessing from above.

Andrew Hellvig  
Matthew 25:31-40