

The Church of the Damascus Road

Flash!

Volume 2
Issue No. 2
April 1999
Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA

Worship and Bible Study Schedules

FDCF Fort Dodge

7:00pm Wednesdays Holy Communion
7:00pm Fridays Bible Study

NCCF Rockwell City

6:30pm Tuesdays Bible Study
6:30pm Thursdays Holy Communion

Visitors Being Scheduled

Visitors for The Church of the Damascus Road worship services at the North Central Correctional Facility, Rockwell City, and at the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility, Fort Dodge, are being booked for future worship opportunities. Services are held Wednesdays at Fort Dodge, 6:30-8:30pm, and Thursdays at Rockwell City, 6-8pm. If you would like to make one or more visits to either the Fort Dodge or the Rockwell City services, reservations need to be made soon to ensure the date you would like. Contact Rosemarie at the Church of the Damascus Road office, 515-955-3579 to schedule a time. The necessary forms and information will then be sent to you prior to your visit.

From the Members

This issue features several contributions from inmates who are members of The Church of the Damascus Road. In the future we hope to have more such contributions of poetry, prose *and art*. If you would like to contribute, don't put it off, do so right away and submit your work to Pastor Lang for inclusion in the Flash.

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Paul Peterson

The Church of the Damascus Road Outside Church Council supports the ministry of the congregation by managing the financial affairs and generating support from surrounding faith communities.

Paul Peterson is a member of the Outside Council and a regular visitor at worship services at NCCF in Rockwell City. Paul and his wife, Arlien, are "retired" farmers in the Callender, Iowa area. Paul is very involved in the life and mission of not only Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Callender, but in the church at large. He is seen at men's gatherings, synodical events, conference assemblies and much, much more.

Lately Paul has been involved as a team member on Prison Via de Cristo weekends in Mount Pleasant Medium Security Unit and at Rockwell City North Central Correctional Facility. His love for God is apparent when you talk with him about his involvement in the ministry of Christ.



He Is Risen!

We are in the middle of Easter, so the appropriate greeting is "He Is Risen!" with the hail back, "He Is Risen indeed!" That is how we begin our worship services during Easter. We are Easter people who remember Jesus' resurrection every Sunday.

In the resurrection account in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, the original Greek reads, "at the dawn of the first sabbath, the women..." The beginning of the practice of observing the sabbath on Sunday rather than Saturday happened early on in the Christian community.

In prison we worship on Wednesdays and Thursdays, so we tend to think of those days as our sabbaths, but Sunday is really the closest to being a "day of rest" in the life of the prison community.

We invite you to share the joy of the resurrection with us. Guests are not the exception, they are the norm, and we look forward to having you in our midst. Call today to ask how you and the members of your community can worship with The Church of the Damascus Road in Rockwell City or Fort Dodge.

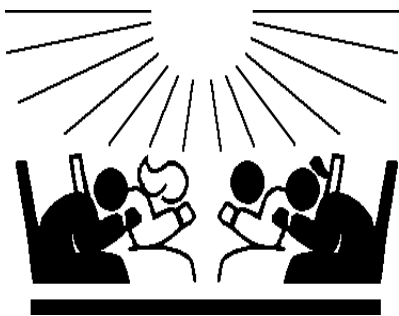
Pastor Carroll Lang

Some Things I've Learned

by Jeff Swearingen

I was getting upset because someone was imitating some of the things that I did until one day I realized that this was helping the other person. So we have to be careful in what we let others see us do. It would be just as easy to do something that would bring harm to this person. Our actions speak loudly of the person we are. Our children learn from what they see us do, as well as people we come into contact with. We could cause them to do wrong by the things they see us do, so we need to be very careful that we don't do something that will lead others astray.

In order to do this we must judge everything we do. We should gain control of our anger, and our mouth. We should have understanding and love in our hearts. If we do these things, others will see them. Some may learn from the way we act. They will see God at work in our lives, and we will bring glory to our Father in heaven! If God is in your heart, all things are possible if you give the Lord the control. Let him guide your thoughts and your actions. Just as you take your car to a mechanic to get it tuned up, you take yourself to God for a tune-up in your life. You can do this by reading the Bible, and by fellowship with other Christians. If we see ourselves doing something wrong, we should ask God to help correct this part of our life. In everything we do we should ask our heavenly Father to be our guide. He won't let you down or turn his back on you, as others might do. He is more true to us than we ever are to him. So go to him and say, "Father in heaven, my life is a mess. I need a tune up. Please come into my life and make it right. In Jesus' name. Amen."



The Blessing in "No"

I asked God to take away my pride. God said "No". It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up.

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole. God said "No". Her spirit was whole, her body was only temporary.

I asked God to grant me patience. God said "No". Patience is a byproduct of tribulations; it isn't granted, it is earned.

I asked God to give me happiness. God said "No". I give you blessings, happiness is up to you.

I asked God to spare me pain. God said "No". Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to me.

I asked God to make my spirit grow. God said "No". You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you fruitful.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. God said "No". I will give you life so that you may enjoy all things.

I ask God to help me LOVE others, as much as he loves me. God said... Ahhhh, finally you have the idea!



A note to secretaries and pastors—

Copy Me, Please!

Although there are many individuals included, our database primarily lists congregations, to which a copy of our newsletter is sent. It is printed on white paper so that (all or portions of) it can be copied into your newsletter or bulletin, or simply copied and made available to the members of the congregation.

Please make this newsletter available to the members of your congregation. If any of the members would like to be on our mailing list, have them send names, addresses, and phone numbers to The Church of the Damascus Road, PO Box 834, Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834

What If?

What if, — GOD couldn't take the time to bless us today because we couldn't take the time to thank HIM yesterday?

What if, — GOD decided to stop leading us tomorrow because we didn't follow HIM today?

What if, — we never saw another flower bloom because we grumbled when GOD sent the rain?

What if, — GOD didn't walk with us today because we failed to recognize it as His day?

What if, — GOD took away His message because we failed to listen to the messenger?

What if, — GOD didn't send His only begotten Son because He wanted us to be prepared to pay the price for sin?

What if, — the door of the church was closed because we did not open the door of our heart?

What if, — GOD stopped loving and caring for us because we failed to love and care for others?

What if, — GOD would not hear us today because we would not listen to Him yesterday?

What if, — GOD answered our prayers the way we answer His call to service?

What if, — GOD met our needs the way we give Him our lives???

What if, — we failed to send this message on?



Thank you to all the people who come to visit our church and to let you know that it means a lot to us that you take time out of your day to spend time with us.

Thank you very much for giving of yourself to brighten our day.

Peace of the Lord be with you.

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

God is Positive

You Say: "It's Impossible."

God Says: "All things are Possible." (Luke 18:27)

You Say: "I'm too Tired."

God Says: "I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28-30)

You Say: "Nobody Really loves me."

God Says: "I love you." (John 3:16 - 13:34)

You Say: "I can't go on."

God Says: "My grace is sufficient." (11 Corin. 12:9 & Psalm 91:15)

You Say: "I can't figure things out"

God Says: "I will direct your steps." (Prov. 3:5-6)

You Say: "I can't do it."

God Says: "You can do all things." (Phillipians 4:13)

You Say: "I'm not able."

God Says: "I am able." (11 Corinth. 9:8)

You Say: "It's not worth it."

God Says: "It will be worth it." (Rom. 8:28)

You Say: "I can't forgive myself."

God Says: "I FORGIVE YOU." (1 John 1:9 & Romans 8:1)

You Say: "I can't manage."

God Says: "I will supply all your needs." (Phillipians 4:19)

You Say: "I'm afraid."

God Says: "I have not given you a spirit of fear." (11 Tim. 1:7)

You Say: "I'm always worried and frustrated."

God Says: "Cast all your cares on ME." (1 Peter 5:7)

You Say: "I don't have enough faith."

God Says: "I've given everyone a measure of faith." (Romans 12:3)

You Say: "I'm not smart enough."

God Says: "I give you wisdom." (1 Corin. 1:30)

You Say: "I feel alone."

God Says: "I will never leave you or forsake you." (Heb. 13:5)

The Church of the Damascus Road *Flash!*

Volume 2.2

April 1999

The official publication of The Church of the Damascus Road, a Christian Community of Reconciliation, serving the inmate population of the medium security units at Rockwell City and Fort Dodge, Iowa.

If you are reading a copy of this letter that is not yours, you can subscribe and receive your own copy by writing to:

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PO Box 834
Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834
Office at St. Olaf Lutheran Church
239 North 11th Street, Fort Dodge
515-955-3579

living by faith

What is Repentance?

Do you think you know the answer? If so, stop reading this now and write down what you believe it is. This done, finish reading this and see if your idea is the same as the answer here. If you don't have an idea as to what this word means, or even if you do have an idea, here is the meaning as stated in the Bible itself.

The first time the word repent is mentioned in the New Testament is in Matthew 3:2; John the Baptist was preaching in the desert of Judea and said "Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is near." Matthew 4:17 goes on to say "Jesus began to preach, 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" This was after John was imprisoned and after Jesus's temptation in the desert.

So what really is repentance? If we repent are we automatically saved? To answer the first question: Repentance is not just feeling sorry for ones sins. Repentance is more than a simple change of mind or feeling sorry for your sins. It is a radical and deliberate turning or returning to God that results in moral and ethical change and action. Is this what your idea of repentance means? If not, I humbly implore you to accept this as truth.

To answer the second question of - "If we repent are we automatically saved?" The answer is No, you are not automatically saved or granted salvation because you have repented. But repentance is the first step to become so. You are forgiven when you repent for sins that you have committed. Keep in mind though, if you do the same thing over and over again and keep saying your sorry, who will believe you? Do your actions reflect a change in your morals or ethics or that you have turned back to God?

Now what about being "Saved" or granted "Salvation" you ask? "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation, worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Cor. 7:10). We have to look at two things "Godly Sorrow" and "Worldly Sorrow". Godly sorrow manifests itself by repentance and the experience of divine grace; Worldly sorrow brings death because, instead of being God-centered sorrow over wickedness of sins; it is self-centered sorrow over the painful consequences of sin.

Salvation is a gift of grace from God to you, it is free. It is experienced as you repent and then (Rom 10:9) confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord" and believe in your

heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. All it takes is faith. Oh no! there's that "faith" word again.

What is faith? Faith was explained to me by a preacher when I was about 14 years old like this: He pointed at the chair I was sitting on and said "you didn't check to see if that chair would break when you sat down, that is faith." It was easy to see his point. Then again when we apply that to something that is not visible, touchable, seeable and is totally spiritual: it is often hard to comprehend and thus requires a "leap of Faith." By that I mean you accept it on its own merits. The merits are as plain as the nose on your face. Don't believe me? Look around, Look at you, the trees, the sky, and then go to church. Can so many people be deceived? There are millions of Christians who by "Faith" trust in God. Millions of people world-wide offer their personal testimony every day.

One thing I will say is this (from experience mind you): at first it is kind of hard to accept these edicts as truth. One year ago today I was a devout atheist, now I provide my testimony to you, as to my firm belief in Christ, and that God is real and is there for you. You more than likely won't change overnight, but miracles are not always big, some are small and unfold over a period of time. I know! But any journey can only begin once you take that first step. If you don't take that step you are not going to grow into what you feel you want to be, who you want to be, or how you want others to perceive and respect you, as a person.

In Summary, life is full of choices. Some choices are not what we hoped they would turn out to be. But this is one choice that you can make in full assurance that things will get better for you spiritually, emotionally, and personally, whether you're locked up, or whether you're free; who you are on the inside makes your life either secure and joyful, or insecure and miserable, not only for you but for others around you, also. By putting your trust in the sovereignty of God and his Son, you will be happier, wiser, more secure and most of all you will be walking alive and not dead spiritually.

Today I ask that you look at what is written and think about it. I promise you this, if your choice is to be happy, then choose God. If your choice is to remain or be miserable and empty-feeling, rip this up. It is your choice. Shakespeare said it best "To be or not to be, that is the question" Remember this: God is only a prayer away. WOW! That's pretty close. God Bless!

by Dominick Marcott

Editor's note: Dominick welcomes any comments you may have. Please send them as as "letter to the editor" to the address on page two.



Drawing of the empty tomb by Ryan Reece

He is Risen Everyday!

To practicing Christians: "Why is it that we acknowledge the death, and celebrate the resurrection of our Savior Jesus, just one time per year?"

Jesus is God's Son, born of the Virgin Mary, and given to mankind as a token of his goodwill. He was born with the knowledge of what he was destined to do. Hatred, persecution, disloyalty, and imprisonment were all dealt to him by many nonbelievers.

Jesus died, just once, a brutal death upon a cross on Calvary. In doing so, he paid for our wages of sin...all of us!

There are but two responses to being saved, and being cleansed of our many iniquities. Being mere humans we sin daily, in turn forcing us to repent of our sins when we say our prayers.

Since we are sinners (all of us, in our own ways) and repent so often, my only question is, "Why?" "Why don't we acknowledge his death and celebrate his resurrection on a daily basis?" Is it because "We aren't good Christians?" Is it because "Our sins are too great in size?" How about because we feel "we are unworthy of Gods Love?"

None of these are a suitable answer to my question. It is because he died on Good Friday, and was resurrected on Easter Sunday, thus yielding the final burden of proof to all, including the nonbeliever. These days are only observed annually, but we participate in religious services, on average, one day per week.

We receive our blessings when we wish them on others. We are forever in Christ when we partake of this Holy Communion, which is the celebration of Jesus' Last Supper.

Just remember, "He is Risen everyday!"

by Ryan Thomas Reece
with assistance from Earl T. Carrie

Bit of Knowledge...

Happiness arises as a byproduct of our getting absorbed in something worthwhile outside ourselves.

Eugene Kennedy

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The Church of the Damascus Road

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Inmate Art

The drawing below, by Ryan Thomas Reece was submitted to Prison Congregations of America in their annual art logo competition. The work is based on Matthew 25. The drawing to the right is by the winner of that competition and it appears on the front of the 1999 brochure produced by Prison Congregations of America. The hands are at one and the same time reaching out and reaching in for the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper.



Invite the Pastor to Worship

The worship services at The Church of the Damascus Road are scheduled on week-nights for two reasons. One is to enable people on the outside to worship with the inmates and not miss worship in their own congregations. The second is to make the pastor of Damascus Road available to visit area congregations on Sunday mornings. The pastor can give a brief update on the ministry, sermon, children's sermon, adult forum, children's Sunday school opening or cross-generational class session, any or all of the above, and/or is open to suggestions. All that is asked is that there be time to prepare.

Call 515-955-3579 or write to: The Church of the Damascus Road, PO Box 834, Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834 to arrange for a visit to your congregation. The pastor speaks Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptist, United Church of Christ, Covenant, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Reorganized Latter Day Saints, Catholic, Evangelical, Reformed, Assembly of God, Nazarene, and a host of other denominations, independent, and non-denominational as well.