

The Church of the Damascus Road

Flash!

Volume 2
Issue No. 4
August 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.



Joseph Angstadt (FDCF) spent many hours of love refurbishing and decorating this guitar, which had been abandoned as useless. Now it provides music for members of The Church of the Damascus Road.

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.

Inside the Flash

- Page 2 - Prison Ministry Observations
- Page 2 - Self-Sufficiency
- Page 3 - Going Home
- Page 3 - Sharing the Faith
- Page 4 - Three Gifts

Some Things I've Learned

by Jeff Swearingen

Think first! Now this is a rare thing for us to do. When something is said or done, we usually react without giving it much thought, and often we react in the wrong way. For instance, when we first hear something it may not sound like what we wanted to hear. But after we take time to think about it, things look completely different. We should take the time to think of one question before we react: "What would Jesus Do?" If we take the time to answer that, I'm sure we'll find ourselves reacting in the right way. Because when we bring Jesus into every situation, we begin to see things in a different light. We might think, "How can I take the time to do this.?" Once we bring Jesus into our life and start looking to him in times like this, pretty soon we will be able to see him clearly in everything that we do. Jesus is there with us all the time. Just waiting for us to reach out to him!

Are we honest with ourselves? Do we lie to ourselves to justify the things we do? Do we do it to impress other people by bragging about stuff we don't have? Don't you know that if you have God in your heart you have all the riches there is? You don't have to lie about what you have, because you have the greatest treasure there is. You have the gift of eternal life! You don't need to lie to get things. If you ask God he will make sure you have everything you need. It may not be big houses and fancy cars, but it will be enough for you to be truly happy. Lying takes us away from God. God wants us to be honest in all that we do. If someone who doesn't believe sees us lying, it might turn that person away from a life with the Lord. Even a little white lie could cause a great deal of harm in another person's life. If your children see you lying and cheating, how do you think they are going to live their lives? Everything we do teaches them. There is one thing you should always remember: God is with us at all times.

It's the things we show others that they believe about us. If you claim to be a Christian then live your life as one. Don't say, in one voice, "I'm a Christian," then turn around and do something to prove different. For if a person who is young in the faith sees this, they may become discouraged and turn away from the Lord. You cannot be a follower of Jesus while holding on to hate and prejudice. It goes against everything that Jesus taught us. For what Jesus taught us was love for our fellowman. Christian love accepts people no matter what the color of their skin may be. In Christ we are all in the same family.

About our Board Members Rollen J. Swanson



My interest in Prison Coingregation began when Carroll first quoted from Matthew 25. I have attended CODR at Rockwell City a number of times and have found it to be very rewarding. My wife Cleo served on the CODR steering committee and has made presentations to women's groups at First Baptist Church in Fort Dodge, St. Paul Lutheran in Remsen, and Sons of Norway.

Prison Ministry Observations

It's pretty easy to think of people in prison as some kind of monster or at least somewhat less than human, especially in light of some of the crimes they commit. As I looked around the visitor's room at the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility as the room filled in preparation for the Wednesday evening worship service, I was struck by how ordinary everyone seemed. The chatting, laughing, greeting sounded familiar. Except for the denim shirts and jeans on every church member the scene could have been one in any church anywhere.

Nancy Bailey, Tim Bailey and I joined others as visitors to the Church of the Damascus Road on April 21, the one year anniversary of the prison. It is one of churches ministering with those in prison throughout the nation. A pastor comes and prisoners work with him as a church board, which helps with services, recruits volunteers, and establish church policies (as allowed).

Though the prisoners attend for various reasons (just as at any church). I could feel a sense of community and God's spirit as songs were sung, scripture was read, the word was preached, and prayers were offered for families in the Colorado shootings, the situation in Kosovo, and personal needs. There was even a baptism (one of ten that have happened in the prison's first year).

I am praying for a prisoner who has begun a 10 year sentence on meth charges. He has a 7-year-old child and a wife in Waukee. He feels his jail time has helped him find God. I know God can help him through his time, and my prayers are for his faith to grow and his family's life to be changed for the better.

I believe that the God of resurrection can change the life of any person. The Church of the Damascus Road offers prisoners a chance to know that resurrection faith.

-Rita Carter (From Faith/Kamrar United Methodist Newsletter May 1999)

Self-Sufficiency

I write today out of experience and out of observation. This, in my view, is a very profound aspect that we as Christians need to keep aware of constantly especially in our everyday lives. The subject is on what we as humans call our assets. The assets we say we possess are at times great liabilities to ourselves, to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to non-Christians as well. I'll explain: The most dangerous asset we have is self-sufficiency. Pride is another that comes from that self-sufficiency which is sometimes labeled as self-righteousness.

We often cite one advantage after another of what we consider our unqualified assets. How many times have you trusted in your self-sufficiency, only to make things worse than they began? I can say for myself that it has happened to me. This self-sufficiency often tends to lead to an inflated ego (pride). We can do it by ourselves and that is that. Then when our project fails, and one becomes distraught, exclaiming "What happened?" What happened is very simple; we relied entirely upon ourselves. Not being humble and pushing to achieve our goal (will). Our pride in ourselves gave us that "Holier than thou" attitude. so we were very judgmental. Our assets had become liabilities. That happened when our profession did not correspond to our practice. This happens quite a bit, although we don't see it, others do. When Jesus, when allowed by you, is given the chance to lead you, lend you strength, and you put your trust in him, not yourself (self-sufficiency), then when things fail it isn't so hard to accept.

No, I'm not saying give up or not to be self-sufficient. In all things there is a natural balance to life and to life's attitudes. Self-Sufficiency is a good asset, but when that good asset causes damage, it becomes bad. For example: Morphine is good for alleviating pain, but when abused is bad and can become an addiction.

We as Christians need to find our balance in this world and more importantly in our inner beings. It is practically impossible to be peaceful and love others when a person is like a hurricane inside themselves. When working on ones self, self-sufficiency is and always will be a personal downfall. Trust in Christ and let him do some work too. It is not you against the world, let Christ help. Self-sufficiency will be your stumbling block.

If you are on of the select few that have never had this problem, I envy you. If not, I suggest a walk through the book of James and the book of Romans.

I promise you this, if you allow Christ to guide you, IT WILL SHOW! Then your self-sufficiency can be as asset and your correspondence between your profession and your practice will be a lighthouse in the fog. You will be happier and so will those around you. Chuck Swindle mad a good observation which I do believe to be very true, and it is this: "10% of life is what happens to you, the other 90% is how you react to that mere 10%". That means your attitude, and how you carry yourself is how people perceive you and the difference between happiness or misery. So smile, because smiles are contagious.

By Dominick Marcott



Michael Pritchett, FDCF, fills cups with grape juice in preparation for Holy Communion at a worship service,

The Church of the Damascus Road *Flash!*

Volume 2.3

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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515-955-3579

Going Home

by Arthur J. Greve III

The Time has come for me to go
 From this place, that I hate so.
 Why is it that I feel so sad?
 A time like this I should be glad.
 I've never felt like this before.
 What are the things inside I store?
 Could it be the friends I've made?
 Or could it be I've made the grade?
 I must reflect what I have learned.
 What happens when your ear is turned.
 I've opened up my heart, you see.
 A better person I've sought to be.
 I could not do this all alone.
 I've tried before, and it has shown
 My weakness was my foolish pride.
 My cares and fears I tried to hide.
 Wanting to leave and not return.
 It's God's own will that I will yearn.
 His many lessons I will not shrug.
 He'll fill the holes that I have dug.
 The people God has brought to me,
 Their gentle way taught me to see.
 It's all around, our saving grace,
 Can you believe it's in this place?
 It's not enough to just survive.
 If you choose God, you'll be alive.
 It's nice to know that I've been given,
 Love, Peace, Joy, I've been forgiven.

Sharing the Faith

Lost Island Lutheran Church of rural Ruthven, Iowa has made a financial, spiritual and personal commitment to the Church of the Damascus Road, Rockwell City. Each year we seek to find a way to impact local needs. This prison ministry came to our attention in several simultaneous ways and seemed to be "destined" as the project for this year. There is little doubt in my mind that we will continue this mission in years to come.

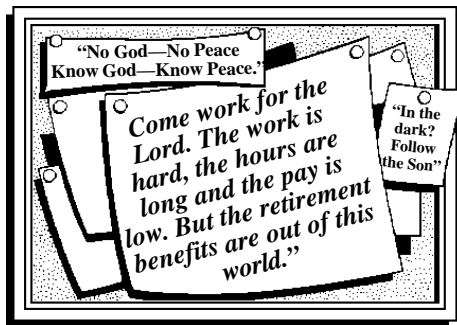
Financially, special offerings, personal contributions and budgeted funds are ongoing in the need for this ministry to be supported as an extension of our mission.

Spiritually, congregational and individual prayers are offered for continued energy in the leadership and in the participants in this ministry.

Personally, we plan to attend one Thursday evening worship service each month with a group of members and friends. Even though the distance is substantial, we are finding this experience to be a true "mission" awareness. Often when we give to "mission" it seems impersonal and unemotional. Sharing the faith and hope which God gives us with these men and other guests at Rockwell City has become just the opposite. We return because we find new depths in our own faith and have made new friends who we simply know we must visit with again.

We would encourage other churches to look prayerfully at this unique opportunity to make a difference through our faith. Make a visit; hear the joyous sound as the "roof is raised" in singing from the soul; look into each others eyes as the "peace" is shared; feel the genuine warmth and caring in a handshake and a greeting; and understand with new awareness what it means to be a Christian.

-Jan Graettinger - Council Chair
 Lost Island Lutheran Church



The Real Problem

In Colorado we had a very terrible tragedy and everybody has been crying out against guns. I can see that we have a problem with guns in this country. But that is not the big problem. Because making laws that stop law abiding citizens from buying guns is in no way going to stop anyone from getting on illegally. If you care to listen I'll tell you my opinion of the problem.

The problem in this country right now is we've turned away from God and family. We no longer have God as a active part in our life. Oh we talk a good talk in Church. But when we go back home it's a different story. It's time followers of our Lord Jesus stand up and be counted. We have to reach out to our friends and neighbors Let them know that Jesus is alive.

Another part of the problem is family. The government had taken ways the parents right to correct their children. All a child has to do is call and say they are being abused, and the parent is in trouble. But you let some kid do something wrong and they want to hold the parent responsible. It's time we wake up to the fact we can't have it both ways. Either the parents can correct their children, or the state has to stand up and carry their share of the blame. I'm not saying that parents should be allowed to mistreat their children. If you want to blame the parent and hold them responsible for the things the children do then give them back the right to control their children. Without the fear of being punished. Which takes us back to God. If we raise our children to know God on a personal level. Then we will cure some of the problems in this country. We can no longer sit and wait for someone else to do something. Its up to each and everyone of us. Pray to god and ask him for his guidance in this. Then stand up for your Lord and your family. We are the ones who can make a difference in this world. We can let the world know that our Lord and Savior is still alive and well. He lives in each and everyone of us.

I want to share something with you that I'm not very proud of. I haven't always had the fortitude to admit that God was apart of my life. In fact it was such a well kept secret. that my wife, the woman who means the world to me did not know. That doesn't say very much for me now does it but another wonderful woman put it in terms that even I could understand. I was talking to my sister-in-law and I asked her how I should help my wife to see I had always had these beliefs. That's when she told me "Don't talk it. Live it." These are words we can all take to heart.

by Jeff Swearingen

Past - Present - Future

Was is a word that's past tense and is better off left behind. I some times get caught up in the thought of old memories and it complicates my state of mind. I worry about childhood tragedies and some of the bad things I had done, but none of that really concerns me any longer it has all been forgiven through the Blood of God's only son.

Now here I am today still not in a very promising situation. I sit in a 6 X 9 cell crying to myself inside because I'm stuck here for the duration. I read, I write I sleep, I eat same routine, nothing changes, I'm so full of sorrow, I pick up the Black Book and have a sense of direction, because I realize my struggles today are just making me stronger for what lies ahead of me tomorrow.

Then that is my future, a time that is to come for me to do things right and be the man I'm supposed to be. I will no longer live so stubborn and mean, but like a loving honest Christian, because on the inside God has set me free!

by Stanley R. Davis, Jr.



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Three Gifts

By Ryan Thomas Reece

When I was a child, I never went without presents on birthdays, at Christmas time, or just because I was a good kid. Our lives have all seen plenty of good times, and I'm sure plenty of not so good times.

Most of us here in the correctional system made the decision to do wrong, and these decisions are obviously why we are here in prison. Some of us, however, might not be guilty of the crimes we were convicted of. No matter how we look at it we are all guilty of one sin or another. Maybe the law of man will never find out about our worst sins.

One thing is most definitely for sure, God knows about every sin we've ever committed and we do, too. Unless we repent of our sins we will always, in one form or another, be punished for these sins. Unless we repent of our sins we are promised one thing after our time is over on earth that is death. A death that will last for an eternity.

How is this possible to avoid? How do we repent? The answer to both is faith. Faith in Jesus Christ, as our Savior. Jesus is God's only son, given to us to die upon the cross, thus saving us from our sins. Our faith in Jesus when used in conjunction with our confession of sin, and our confession of Jesus' purpose will allow us to enter into this kingdom of heaven within the Holy Spirit.

If you've noticed I have now mentioned God - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. How do they all tie together? I can only explain it as I understand it. God is our father. Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary with his seed, to present himself to us in the form of a man. The Holy Spirit is how God can be everywhere as well as a part of everything.

What does any of this have to do with presents you ask? When we open up our hearts to God confessing our sins, and showing our faith in Jesus' purpose, we will be set free of our sins. Our gift to God is our renewed faith in Jesus Christ. God's gift to us is his son. But the best gift of all time, anytime, is Jesus' gift of eternal salvation.

Let's join together in giving our gifts to God. Remember, Jesus is waiting for us to open the door, so he can give us his gifts. After all, God has already presented us with his gift of Jesus.

Can any of us afford to keep Jesus waiting outside in the cold, when all he wants is to enter into our hearts, and give us a gift that will last forever? We are the ones who will lose in the long run — eternity.

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

-- Pastor Carroll Lang

A word from the wise



I try to watch the words I say,
And keep them soft and sweet;
For I don't know from day to day,
Which ones I'll have to eat.

- Anonymous

Value

A well known speaker started off his seminar by holding up a \$20 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, "Who would like this \$20 bill?" Hands started going up. He said, "I am going to give this \$20 to one of you but first, let me do this." He proceeded to crumple the dollar bill up. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air. "Well," he replied, "what if I do this?" And he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now all crumpled and dirty. "Now who still wants it?" Still the hands went into the air.

"My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20. Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value in God's eyes.

Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless to him.

Psalm 17:8 states that God will keep us, "as the apple of his eye."

Thought: The worth of our lives come not in what we do or who we are but by **whose we are!**

You are special - Don't ever forget it!