

The Church of the Damascus Road

Damascus Road

Flash!

Volume 3
Issue No. 3
June 2000
Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA

Aftercare News

Prison Congregations of America, the parent organization that organizes congregations like The Church of the Damascus Road, has received a grant to provide training for what is commonly called "Aftercare."

As we reported last issue, one way to ensure that inmates who are released to our communities stay in our communities and do not return to prison is for the Christian community to offer its support. When an ex-offender comes to your community and starts worshipping with you, how do you welcome him and offer support?

If you're not sure what to do, then we can help. Some time in July, a mailing will go out to all congregations on our mailing list to offer training in aftercare. You will be invited to send one to three members of your congregation to attend the training event and those persons will be able to help the rest of the congregation provide the kind of support that will get the ex-offender back on his feet and on his way to being a productive law-abiding citizen in your community.

Two opportunities are being offered at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Humboldt, Iowa. One is on:

Saturday, September 23, 2000
from 9am to 4pm

and an alternate time is on:
Sunday, September 24, 2000
from 2pm to 9pm

You may attend one or the other. Meanwhile, start thinking about who in your congregation might attend. To register, send names addresses and phone numbers to The Church of the Damascus Road, PO Box 834, Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834.

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My Disciple

I love you. I love you with a greater love than you can comprehend. I set aside the perfection and pleasures of heaven to offer myself as a sacrifice for your sins. I became a man so I could intimately understand your earthly battles with the flesh, the world and the evil forces that come at you day by day. I suffered as no person on earth will ever suffer. I was despised, spit upon and beaten beyond human recognition. I was nailed to a cross where I shed my divine blood as an atonement for your sins. I rose from the grave in three days victorious over every enemy of life you will ever face. I am your risen Savior!

When you are facing the trials and temptations of life, remember you are never alone. I have given the Holy Spirit to comfort, teach and guide you. He is in you and will empower you through every step of your spiritual journey.

Read my Word and pray at the beginning of each day. Be salt and light in a world of darkness and confusion. Boldly tell others of my love for them. Proclaim without shame the way of salvation trusting the Holy Spirit to draw hearts and souls unto me. Serve and worship me faithfully in the local body of believers I place you in. Do not expect the world to reward you for your obedience to me. I am storing your rewards in heaven where you will enjoy them throughout eternity. I am the Bread of Life and the Prince of Peace!

Satan will try to distract, discourage and defeat you. He will try to use difficult circumstances to plant seeds of hatred and bitterness in your heart. Resist him. Give me all the pain, persecutions and problems in your life. They are not yours to bear. They are mine. Bring me all the bitterness, bondage and brokenness of your past. I am not the author of the tragedies you have had to experience in life, but in my sovereignty I will work out all things to your good and my glory. Stand firm in the authority of my Word and trust me for the Victory! Through me you can triumph over every challenge and trial of life! I am your Counselor and Conquering King!

Never forget that I am continually interceding to our Father on your behalf. You will walk through many fires and trials in life. Expect them. But at the same time rest in the unwavering assurance of my power, my promises and my provision. I will lead you only where my grace will sustain you. You will not always understand my divine plan for your life. Trust me. In me and me alone lies your joy, your strength and your success in life!

Love, Jesus

by Kelly Martin

Some Things I've Learned

by Jeff Swearingen

When we talk about God's word some may ask, "Did God promise this or that?" I say, "If it says it, then it's a promise." God's word is true. God does not lie, so he doesn't have to say this is a promise or that is a promise. The mistake we make is reading the wrong thing into what he is saying. A lot of people turn to Matthew 7:7 and they read "Ask and you shall be given" and they automatically say "all right" and they sit down and ask God for something material, and get upset if they don't get what they prayed for. Well, that's not what that verse meant. If that were the case, there wouldn't be any poor people left in the world. What God was talking about is spiritual insight, knowledge and wisdom. If we go back to Matthew 6:33 we read, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, then all the other necessary things of life will be added." For it is with God that the true riches are!



An Interview with God

Last night, I dreamed I had an interview with God. Come in," God said. "So, what do you want to ask Me?" "What surprises you most about mankind?"

God answered: "That they get bored of being children, are in a rush to grow up, and then long to be children again. That they lose their health to make money and then lose their money trying to restore their health. That by thinking anxiously about the future, they forget the present, such that they live neither for the present nor the future. That they live as if they will never die, and they die as if they had never lived."

God's hands took mine and we were silent for while and then I asked, "What are some of life's lessons you want your children to learn?"

God replied with a smile: "To learn that you cannot make anyone love you. What you can do is to let yourself be loved. To learn that what is most valuable is not what you have in your life, but who you have in your life. To learn that it is not good to compare yourself to others. To learn that a rich person is not the one who has the most, but is one who needs the least. To learn that it only takes a few seconds to open profound wounds in people we love, and that it takes many years to heal them. To learn to forgive by practicing forgiveness. To learn that there are people who love you dearly, but don't know how to express or show their feelings. To learn that money can buy everything but happiness. To learn that two people can look at the same thing and see it totally differently. To learn that a true friend is someone who knows everything about you...and likes you anyway. To learn that it is not always enough that you be forgiven by others, but that it is most important to learn to forgive yourself." "Remember", God said, "People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. That will determine how you will be thought of on earth and in heaven."

Sunday School

A Sunday school teacher asked her little children, as they were on the way to the church services, "and why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" One bright little girl replied, "because people are sleeping."

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.

God's Spirit Went to Prison

On May 11th a strange thing happened to me. I attended my first Brothers in Blue. I wasn't sure of what it was, or what to expect, and to try and explain it to those of you who haven't attended one is difficult, to say the least.

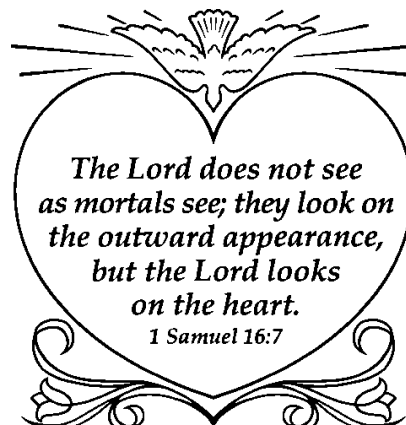
To put it in a nutshell, the Holy Spirit was sent to prison in Fort Dodge! I've seen it with my own eyes and felt it with my own heart.

I have had such a spiritual cleansing and renewal of commitment to God I can barely believe it myself. If somebody would have tried to tell me that I'd be alive to Christ after just a few short days. I'd have said "Hog Wash!" But it's true. It's funny how God knows what you need and gives it to you in spite of the fact that you don't deserve it.

What I walked away with is God's love in my heart. A **strong** commitment to do any and all things for his glory. An extended family, not only brothers and sisters from the outside, but also brothers in here. In just three short days, God moved through me and over thirty other brothers in blue; it was truly amazing!

I served in the Army for over thirteen years. I've received citations, medals, impact awards, promotions, too many things to list. But they're nothing compared to the cross I now wear, which is a constant reminder that Christ needs me and I him. It also reminds me of my brothers and sisters in blue who shared their love and commitment to God. If you haven't attended one, **do it!** If you have, and you haven't been in awhile, sign up to help and feel God's wonderful power, love, and mercy. To all those who prayed over us, thank you, it works! To those of you who worked the Brothers in Blue here in Fort Dodge, thanks again (even though we're not suppose to; I told you guys we're in here for breaking the rules not obeying them!) To Chuck Groe, thanks again, **Brother**, you're in my prayers **always**. To Pastor Lang, thanks for the nudge, I needed it! To those of you who haven't attended a Brothers in Blue do so, you won't regret it. God bless you all!

- Glenn Wooten



A Word of Thanks

I would like to say a few words of thanks. It was truly an honor for me to serve as Vice President of the Church council. I'm proud to have known each and everyone of you. I pray that you will continue with God's work and walk in His ways.

I would like to thank the visitors who came to share in the worship of Our Lord. Believe me when I say that your being there does make a difference. For it lets us know that there are people who care about us. Thank you all for being there. May the peace of the Lord be with you always.

Jeffery Swearingen



Wonderful Experience

Dear Pastor Lang

Enclosed please find a small donation for your offering fund.

What a wonderful experience it was to worship with you. All of us from St. Mark [Lutheran Church] in Sioux City were spiritually uplifted by your church service.

The participation of all the church members was sincere and enthusiastic. There was a real feeling of mutual love and caring. The Holy Spirit was with us there.

God bless you all.

Sincerely, Barbara

The Church of the Damascus Road *Flash!*

Volume 3.3

June 2000

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.

Jeff Swearingen, Editor.
Andrew Hellvig, Assistant
Dennis Beaman, Assistant

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

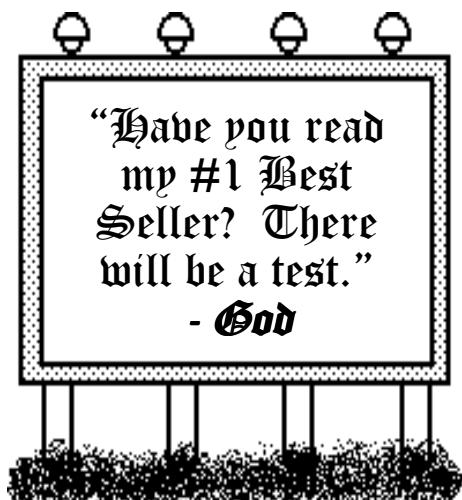
The Church of the Damascus Road
PO Box 834
Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834
Office at St. Olaf Lutheran Church
239 North 11th Street, Fort Dodge
515-955-3579



It's Working

For a long time now I've wondered if anything we did here was making a difference. That is until the other day. I was out on the yard talking to a friend when a young man came up and said something that opened my eyes. The first thing he said was "I heard that you are one of the Christians in here." Then he told me that he was asking for a friend of his. He told me that this friend of his read his Bible all the time. And was wondering what he had to do to join us. At which I told him that the Church of the Damascus Road was open to everyone. That all you had to do to join was to come to the worship service on Wednesday or the Bible Study on Friday. I just wanted to tell you that it's working. Even in this place God's work is getting done. We may not always be able to see it, but believe me, Our Lord can!

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9) NIV
by Jeffrey Swearingen



God Can Work Through You!

Moses stuttered.
David's armor didn't fit.
John Mark was rejected by Paul.
Timothy had ulcers.
Hosea's wife was a prostitute.
Amos was only trained as fig-tree pruner.
Jacob was a liar.
David had an affair.
Solomon was too rich.
Jesus was too poor.
Abraham was too old.
David was too young.
Peter was afraid of death.
Lazarus was dead.
John was self-righteous.
Naomi was a widow.
Paul was a murderer.
So was Moses.
Jonah ran from God.
Miriam was a gossip.
Gideon and Thomas both doubted.
Jeremiah was a bullfrog (just kidding);
Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal.
Elijah was burned out.
John the Baptist was a loudmouth.
Martha was a worry-wart.
Mary may have been lazy.
Samson had long hair.
Noah got drunk.

Did I mention that Moses had a short fuse? So did Peter, Paul - well, lots of folks did.

But God doesn't require a job interview. He doesn't hire and fire like most bosses, because he's more our dad than our boss.

He doesn't look at financial gain or loss. He's not prejudiced or partial, not judging, grudging, sassy, or brassy, not deaf to our cry, not blind to our need.

As much as we try, God's gifts are free. We could do wonderful things for wonderful people and still not be wonderful.

Satan says, "You're not worthy."

Jesus says, "So what? I AM."

Satan looks back and sees our mistakes.

God looks back and sees the cross.

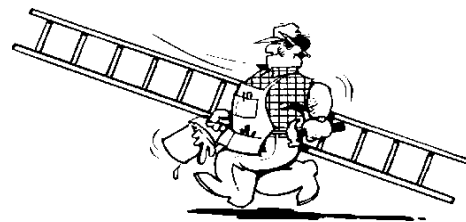
Sure, there are lots of reasons why God shouldn't have called us.

But if we are magically in love with him, if we hunger for him more than our next breath, he'll use us in spite of who we are, where we've been, or what we look like!

I pray that as Christians, we will step out of our limitations into the limitless nature of who God is.

Then our passion for God and our passion to communicate to Him will make mince-meat of our limitations.

- Author unknown



Mending Fences

Author unknown-

There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence. The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one.

You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry, the wound is still there. "A verbal wound is as bad as a physical one. Friends are very rare jewels indeed. They make you smile and encourage you to succeed. They lend an ear, they share words of praise and they always want to open their hearts to us."

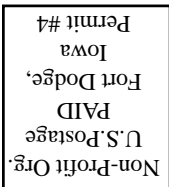
Please forgive me if I have ever left a hole in your fence....

Suspicious Minds

Sometimes women are overly suspicious of their husbands. When Adam stayed out very late for a few nights, Eve became upset. "You're running around with other women," She charged. "You're being unreasonable," Adam responded. "You're the only woman on earth." The quarrel continued until Adam fell asleep, only to be awakened by someone poking him in the chest. It was Eve. "What do you think you're doing?" Adam demanded. "Counting your ribs." Eve said.

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

The Church of the Damascus Road
PO Box 834
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Kill Them with Kindness

People usually resort to violence before they talk a problem through. God said to be kind to your brother. I have seen where a conversation will end in a person hitting another. Every time you hit another person, or get into a yelling match with another, God sees another scar appear on your spirit. Every time this happens the Holy Spirit cries out to God for God's forgiveness and unconditional love.

I have also seen many cases where somebody will be picking at another and all the other says is, "I love you brother." After a while the picker realizes: why am I doing this to this man/woman when I could work with him/her and get the job done twice as fast, make a new friend, and have God smile down on me. So I believe that the saying, "Kill them with kindness" is a good statement to live by. Kill their violent tendencies with love and kindness.

by John Hammers

The Signs of Life

There are three signs of old age. The first is loss of memory, the other two I forgot.

Contact us by E-Mail:
DamascusCh@aol.com

The Church of the Damascus Road now has a dedicated E-mail address which is checked every day. Just type your names, addresses, phones, Social Security numbers and birthdates right into the message box and we'll get right back to you and let you know whether there's enough space left for your visit.

Thought for the day- Always Valuable

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." "You are special - Don't ever forget it!"

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 your congregation.

Anyone who would like to be on our mailing list should send name, address, and phone numbers to The Church of the Damascus Road, PO Box 834, Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834, or E-Mail us at: DamascusCh@aol.com for faster communication.

-- Pastor Carroll Lang

Worship & Bible Study FDCF Fort Dodge

7:00pm WednesdaysHoly Communion
7:00pm FridaysBible Study

NCCF Rockwell City

6:30pm TuesdaysBible Study
6:30pm ThursdaysHoly 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 (see schedule above). 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 Cynthia at The Church of the Damascus Road office, 515-955-3579 or e-mail to "DamascusCh@aol.com" to schedule a time. The necessary forms and information will then be sent to you prior to your visit.