

The Church of the Damascus Road

Flash!

Volume 4
Issue No. 3
June 2001

Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA

Amazing forgiveness

Bradley C. Downing III was a student and athlete at the University of Arizona. Some months ago, Brad was home enjoying a break from studies, and being with his family and friends. Late one night Brad was driving home when a middle-aged woman named Rosemary Forker was trying to outrun a Chandler, Arizona, policeman. She had stolen a pickup truck and been spotted. Desperate, she ignored stop signs and red lights. Then the tragedy happened. Rosemary Hit 19 year-old Brad's car, killing him instantly.

She escaped injury, was put on trial, pled guilty and was sentenced to 12 years in prison. At the trial Brad's father, Bradley C. Downing Jr., was allowed to address Rosemary. He said, "I forgive you for this tragic, horrible crime and I no longer have a sense of anger."

He had a deep sorrow, of course. An inner pain which he and his wife will have to deal with, perhaps forever. But Mr. Downing had the good sense-and the Christian perspective-to know that anger often harms the one who bears it. Anger is destructive; forgiveness is therapeutic. St. Paul had the right

advice when he wrote: "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." (Eph. 4:26)



Taking a break

An older man was out taking his daily run with his dog. He decided to go up to the local High School to use the track. When he got there he saw that the football team was using the field inside of the track. He saw the young men practicing their moves, and thought, "I will run for as long as the guys practice." He looks down at his dog, and says, "Come on boy! We can do it!"

And off he ran. He ran and ran, and just kept running. After running for what seemed like a long time, his dog pattered out and went to lay down. Yet the man continued to run. Finally, after running for over two hours, he decided that these young men were obviously much more agile than he. So he sat by his dog and took a break. He had just sat down when one of the young men came up to him. "Wow," said the young man, "are we glad that you finally took a break. Our coach told us that as long as that old man keeps running, you will continue to practice your moves." We couldn't believe you lasted as long as you did."

Sent to Jeremy Halverson, from his friend Benjamin Bishop, as told by his Pastor.

Inside the Flash

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Story Tellers at Home

Here we have our first photo of the success of Story Tellers! At both Rockwell City, and Fort Dodge prisons we offer inmates the chance to choose a children's story to read to their child onto an audio cassette. They can greet the child, and then write a message in the book as well. The book and the tape are then set home for each child to enjoy.



At bedtime, Justin listens on a "boombox" to the voice his Dad reading a book to him.

Wooten's Korner — Thank you

Proverbs 3:5,6 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding: In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

On April 18th, 2001 I had the pleasure of experiencing the Humbolt Community Chorus or, at least most of them (due to reasons beyond me only 44 were allowed in). During their presentation a lady introduced the next songs, as she was doing so she mentioned how she didn't have anything prepared to say. She was just going to trust in the Spirit to produce the words, that stuck with me. It's amazing how freely we give something we value so highly, our trust. We trust the TV. News to give us the true accurate news when at times they do things for the sake of ratings. We trust Auto Mechanics with our vehicles to repair them correctly and when they say, "The throttle rod bearing is out of alignment", we who don't have a clue trust them completely, or when we read an article on the "New and Improved", Top of the line, Best of the Best, Lap Top that not only has a 5400 Mega Byte Memory, but can walk the dog and water the plants too. We trust the manufacturer is

being truthful and not just selling Lap Tops.

Now these examples I've listed, I have tried to exaggerate my point. Being as most of the people we trust completely we don't know that well. But the one we know, who has an Immaculate character, we can't seem to trust enough. Our trust as is His love for us is a precious commodity. Yet we can't or won't commit our trust to Him, Why not? What holds you back? For me, it's all of those years of telling myself that I was making or doing or owning, But in all reality it is God's Blessing and Grace and not anything I am or can be. Slowly but surely God's getting more and more of my trust. I am just glad He's as patient as He is loving. Otherwise I am sure He'd have moved on by now.

So, who do you trust? The guy on the infomercial with the Handy Dandy AB-Blaster, Juice Maker that also doubles as a VCR. Or God who is all we'll ever need or want and a whole lot more and He comes with a heck of a guarantee make sure to check out the fine print. John 3:16,17

Remember, Trust in Him and He shall make your path straight.

God Bless You All

PRISON



Reform

Experiencing Prison

by Gerhard Fischer

Gerhard Fischer, a long time member of LHRA, served a sentence of three months at the Oxford Federal Prison Camp, Oxford, Wisconsin, as a prisoner of conscience. August 7 to November 3, 2000.

Before departing for my incarceration, a friend who had already served her time as a prisoner of conscience used the word scum to describe how I would be treated in prison. One definition of scum is, 11 a low, worthless, or evil person." I would agree that the word worthless best describes how prison staffs seem to think of prisoners. If a person is defined as worthless, then there is no requirement to give him any semblance of respect or decent, humane care. In sharing a few of my experiences I will intersperse comments from my prison journal.

Retribution begins the moment one is locked in prison. It comes through separation, family breakdowns, job loss, loneliness, empty hours and, without exaggeration, the vindictive malevolence which taints all the facets of life in prison. You're here. Now suspend all logic and reasoning. Don't question anything. Accept.

[9-24 It hurts when an uninformed society declares, "Lock them up and throw away the key." Three strikes and you're out."



"Truth in sentencing." Then, society builds Supermaxes (super maximum security prisons) to seek revenge ...]

[10-8 ... Can you really have a friend? Possible but difficult, I would imagine. Everyone does put a wall around himself to protect himself. It must be even more necessary in maximum security prisons. The movie "Hurricane" shows how one innocent man tried to do that for 22 years. I guess if you haven't been locked up, you can't understand all this. After all, inmates are provided with food, clothes and bed. Why is it so difficult? ... Never minimize the torments of long term incarcerations God bless all who reside in prison. God give them strength to make time go by in some manner of order]

[10-30 ... The continual change in rules to make life more difficult. This morning a new memorandum. No showers can be taken between 11:30 and 5:30 a.m. What about the kitchen workers who work the early shift? ... So many little rules to keep you in check. It kind of deadens the spirit ... and perhaps that is supposed to be part of the punishment ...

[10-11 ... Then the stories started about which prison they had been in was the worst. Graphic descriptions.... It revealed again this need to be a tough guy, to be independent. Never get too close to another ... The stories included some very inhuman treatment. . . he and others were stripped down to shorts, shackled, hands and legs, and stood out in the cold while they were lectured to. Most of the glass was out of the windows to their cells and no heat. It was intolerably cold. These are the kind of tales they related... There were other brutalities mentioned. It's obvious that the guards in a maximum security prison are much more likely to treat you like scum...]

What are the chances of experiencing a spiritual life while in prison? If it is a priority, if you are willing to work to achieve it, if you jump, at the opportunities when they occur, if the hard life does not overcome you, if you are not too concerned about what other inmates think, you can find a worthwhile spiritual life in prison. Many men refined their faith and spirituality and often in a much more deepened way. Will they keep it?

There were many examples of men reaching out to men, as brothers in faith. A group of men came every night at 10 p.m. for what was called "The Power of Prayer." We formed a circle, held hands, and prayed. After everyone had a chance to share in

prayer, we hugged, passed the peace, and returned to our rooms for the evening. A wonderful way to end the day.

[9-22 ... It's hard to explain how one can become so close to these brothers. There really are some very nice guys here, and moments together in prayer mean a lot to these men. One wishes one had the power to cut some of their long sentences so that men could go home sooner ...]

[9-3 ... The service was an extraordinary experience. Gino, after four years here, is going home. What I didn't know is that he has this marvelous voice ... I'm assuming he sings opera. ... He began with "Amazing Grace"... toward the end he completely broke down at "that saved a wretch like me." He put his head down on the rostrum and cried. He recovered when one of the men went up and rubbed his back ... He thanked all his brothers and wished them well.... It was a moving moment ...]



Racism is alive in prison. In my first days white guys gave me an understanding nudge when talking about "them," assuming that I thought like they did.

[9-13 ... There really are no deep relationships and rarely between the races. Perhaps a few but even these seem shallow ... I get absolutely no sense of a coming together of inmates of differing races ... I now am recognizing even more the danger to our society — this rift — unless it is some way solved.

The Church of the Damascus Road *Flash!*

Volume 4.3

June 2001

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

Jeremy Halverson, Editor.

Glenn Wooten, Chief Helper Guy:) Who will always bail the Editor out of trouble

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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(I'm not optimistic but still a person of hope. With God all things are indeed possible. But humans are God's instruments.) ...]

Some inmates can maintain an amazing upbeat attitude. When I commented to one man who always kept the sinks clean, he said simply, "Well, it's my home."

[9-14 ... It is important that I do not lose who I was and who I am just because I am incarcerated. There are things which prisoners should not allow prison to take from them ...]

There were many inmates who had committed fraud - lawyers, bankers, real estate agents - all here because they admittedly were greedy and though they had much, they wanted more. It's a tragic irony that the system itself committed fraud.

[8-23 ... Time cards for GED tutors: we actually work 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. (Three hours a day/15 hours a week). But we are told to add four hours every day, so that we will reach a total of the required 35 hours of work a week ... It -s an accepted sham. I find it difficult to put my name on such a time card ...]

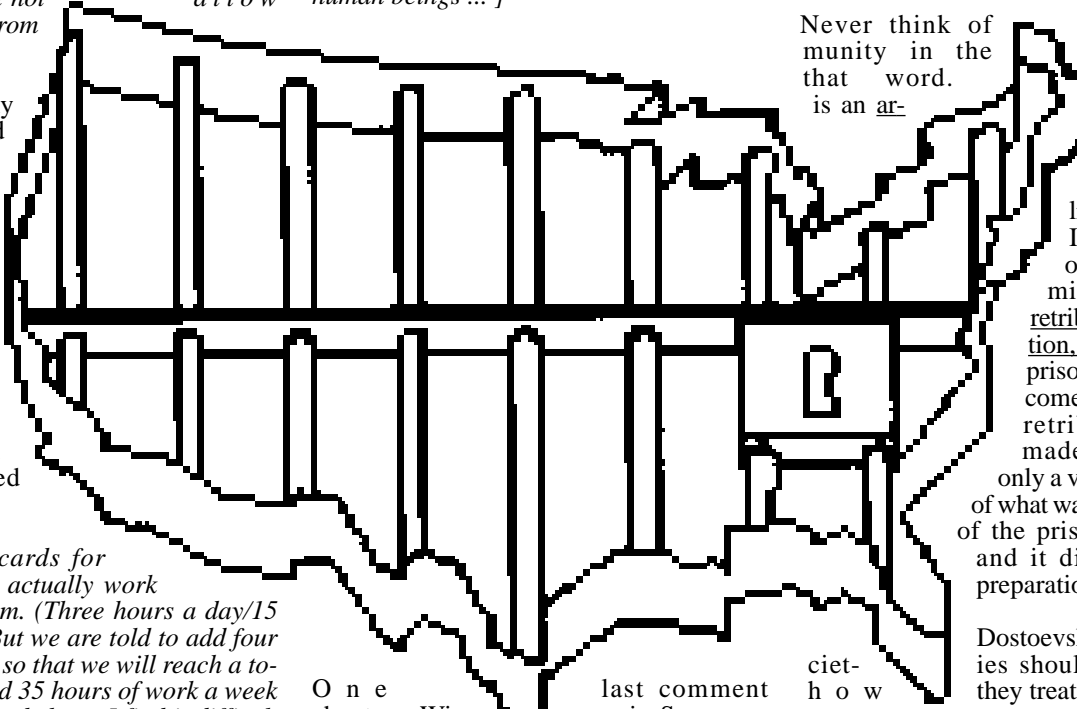
There is so much more to describe the horror of prison health care, the incessant noise, the idleness, the smutty language. But as my time at Oxford came to an end, it was surprising how nostalgic I felt about the brothers I was leaving.

[11-1 ... Intercessory prayer. About 30 inmates come to send me home with prayers. They do this for any inmate who wishes it.... The inmate gives a little talk and then the other inmates say nice things about him. (you hope) I started my own talk saying, last Tuesday we said good-bye to an inmate who has been in prison for nine years. So as a 90-day wonder, I should be embarrassed. But I'm not. I was sentenced to three months and I served my three months and tried to do it with grace and dignity. But I also told them that I saw, a great deal of intelligence, friendliness, and generosity from most of the brothers. I was saddened by the unimaginably long sentences some of them had... I had a few other anecdotes and then wished them all well and asked God to bless them.... I was deeply moved by the prayer service ... with guys surrounding me, laying

on hands and praying. All done by "hardened" fellows. I have a lot to live up to....]

[11-2 ... I did have some interesting and humorous times.... I had time to meditate and study Scripture; for this I am very thankful ...]

[11-3 ... I believe I was called to be here and God used me for several causes and as a witness of faith. No regrets. Will try to stay in touch with some of the brothers. Great human beings ...]



One last comment about our Wisconsin Supermax (a super maximum security prison, which provides for total isolation of each prisoner).

[9-24 ... Only an evil force can advocate for such a hell hole. Civilized nations, much less states, which feel the necessity to build such atrocities, should be condemned by society and the world. It smells of Nazi Germany. Psychiatrists have already warned of making human beings insane by living in such isolated conditions. And there is already talk of putting less dangerous prisoners there because they have extra bed space. I do not believe that our merciful God is pleased when her sons are treated this way ..]

Three months of incarceration does not make one an expert, but I spent the three months as an intentional eye witness, observing everything, discretely inquiring and zealously recording what I was experiencing. Since my incarceration, prison reform has become an even greater focus for me. (It is important to note that I am not naive and clearly understand that punishment is a necessary answer to criminal behavior. Likewise, prison security is absolutely necessary to provide protection to society, staff and prisoners themselves.)

At present 2 million men and women are incarcerated. At the rate we are proceeding there will be 6 million in prison by 2010. It should alarm us. This war on the poor, especially on poor people of color, may well be the preeminent problem of the new millennium. Unless we are willing to commit major financial resources and our most creative and passionate minds to solving this explosive matter, we are setting up our society to destructive forces which we may not be able to curb.

Never think of community in the that word. is an ar-

prison as a com- good sense of Rather prison tificial con- struct which has very little semblance to life on the outside. I believe the 3 Rs of a model prison's mission should be retribution, rehabilitation, and release. The prison system has become very efficient at retribution but has made rehabilitation only a vestigial reminder of what was once a vital part of the prison expectations and it dismally falls at preparation for release.

Dostoevsky wrote that societies should be judged on they treat their prisoners.

"Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them." Hebrews 13:3

[Reprinted with permission from the January/February issue of Vanguard, the newsletter of the Luthern Human Relations Association of America.]

Volunteers Needed
A new Bible study is being started at the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility. It is produced by CFS, whose staff trains the volunteers. It is to be part of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) program at the Newton Correctional Facility sponsored by Prison Fellowship. These studies are part of the preparation for inmate participation in IFI. If you are interested in volunteering to help with this bible study, please see Pastor Lang or use any method on page four of this issue to contact the office. Both outside volunteers and inmate volunteers will be needed.

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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.

A note to secretaries and pastors—

Copy Me, Please!

We send our newsletter primarily to congregations. It's printed on white paper so it can be copied to include all or portions of it in your newsletter or bulletin, or simply made available to members of your congregation.

Anyone wishing 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 by e-mail at: DamascusCh@aol.com.

-- Pastor Carroll Lang

Letter to the Editor

March, 12, 2001

Dear Sirs;

I really enjoyed your news letter The Flash, and so I am asking you to share with me and my friends on a regular basis.

It is a wonderful uplifting paper and really helps. I work in a nursing home in Whitney, Iowa. I myself through an old church goer- haven't gone regularly since I started working 14 years ago.

I don't feel like I fit in anymore. The article on the front of this volume 4, "Opening Doors"- Invites me in, but, I can't get out of this routine to get into the church again. I work every other weekend. I'll just have to pray about it.

Looking forward to your next News letter.

God bless your work,
Reta Warren

Ms. Warren,

Thank you so much for letter we are glad you enjoyed The Flash, it's nice to know that our work is enjoyed by others.

Now about your church attendance, Shame, Shame! Don't lock yourself out of Gods House. If you can't or don't feel comfortable where you're at, I know two churches that worship on Wednesday and Thursday nights. One in Rockwell and one in Ft. Dodge. You are welcome to come to our church and worship with us, infact I am asking you now to make time to come worship God with us. Remember anything or anyone who keeps you from God, is SIN.

*Ms. Warren, I do thank you for writing, and I expect to see you in service soon!
God bless you*

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 (limit of 9), and at the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility, Fort Dodge (limit of 15), are being booked for future worship opportunities (see schedule above). If you would like to visit 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.



Contributions invited from All Readers

The editor of this newsletter is inviting ALL READERS, inside and outside to send in articles, poetry, art work, and opinions for the newsletter. So don't be bashful.