

The Church of the Damascus Road

Flash!

Volume 6
Issue No. 1
February 2003
Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA



Cliff Anderson

Clifford Anderson, rural Duncombe, a member of Washington Lutheran Church and a former member of The Church of the Damascus Road Outside Church Council, passed away on Sunday, December 8, 2002. He died from Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS).



Cliff was a regular volunteer and attended many CoDR worship services at the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility. He was in attendance when the present CoDR video, "Prisoners for God," was taped. He appears briefly during fellowship following a worship service.

Cliff loved farming so much that he carved wooden tractors in such fine detail they looked like you could start them right up. But next to his wife, Carol, their children, Jeff, Tim and Amy, and farming, his time spent with the inmate members of the Church of the Damascus Road was his greatest love.

As his illness progressed, the FDCF CoDR Prayer Team remembered him in prayer throughout. He has been missed since his illness prevented his presence in prison, and we mourn his passing while celebrating his resurrection victory in Christ.

Inside the Flash!

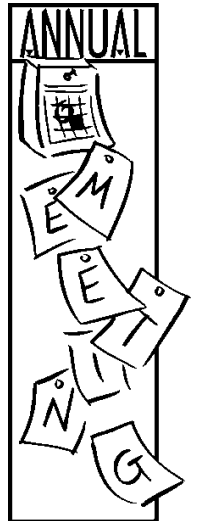
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First Annual Meeting

Now that we are a Congregation of the Western Iowa Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, it is necessary to have an annual meeting of the congregation. In our case, we had three meetings: one in each prison and one on the outside. At each of these meetings attendees we heard reports about how CoDR developed, where we are at, and where we would like to be in the future.

The Outside Annual Meeting of CoDR was held at 6pm on Saturday, January 25, 2003 at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Fort Dodge. A meal was served by the Human Needs Committee of St. Mark's, tokens of appreciation were given to all who attended, reports were received and a vision for the future in Aftercare was shared. Some former members of CoDR, now released, also attended and shared what CoDR has meant to them. Three congregations sent representatives. In all, 58 faithful people attended the event.

At the Fort Dodge facility, the Annual Meeting was held at the beginning of the worship service on January 29, 2003. At the Rockwell City facility, the Annual Meeting was held at the beginning of the worship service on January 30.



Christmas Drama Well Received

Christmas is a special time for remembering how God became a human being and lived among us. Waymond Tenny, FDCF, composed a brief drama about the events of the birth of Jesus, included some Christmas Carols, asked for volunteers and practiced several times. The drama was presented on Christmas Day at 8:30am at FDCF and at 6:30pm on Thursday, December 26, 2002 at NCCF.

This "home spun" tradition has become a regular part of our Christmas celebrations ever since a Jewish inmate challenged us to do something for Christmas. That's right, Doug Thompson, then at FDCF, enjoyed playing the piano so much that he challenged us to celebrate in some way that he could accompany us on the piano, so the first Christmas "pageant" was born, with Doug at the piano. Shalom, Doug!



One Thing I Learned

One thing I learned within the last few days is that tomorrow just might not come. I was lucky. I was given a chance to go on in life. Not all of us are given this opportunity. So now is the time to do something. Now is the time to take a look at your life. Make the changes you want to make. Sometimes the changes can be as little as spending more time with your loved ones. Life nowadays is just too fast-paced, and we often get so caught up in it, we don't see what we are missing out on. This is what I was doing by spending too much time at work. I guess what I would really like to say is stop and look at just how you are spending your time and remember: tomorrow may not come.

— Jeff Swearingen

FDCF's Church Council

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
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| Victorio DeLance | Secretary/Librarian |
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- | | |
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Glass of Milk

One day, a poor boy who was selling goods from door to door to pay his way through school, found he had only one thin dime left, and he was hungry. He decided he would ask for a meal at the next house. However, he lost his nerve when a lovely young woman opened the door. Instead of a meal he asked for a drink of water. She thought he looked hungry so she brought him a large glass of milk. He drank it slowly, and then asked, "How much do I owe you?"

"You don't owe me anything," she replied, "Mother has taught us never to accept pay for a kindness."

He said, "Then I thank you from my heart."

As Howard Kelly left that house, he not only felt stronger physically, but his faith in God and man was strong, also. He had been ready to give up and quit.

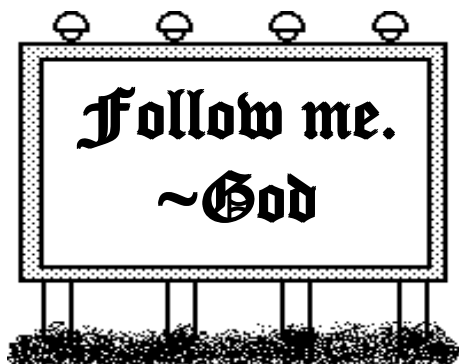
Years later that young woman became critically ill. The local doctors were baffled. They finally sent her to the big city, where they called in specialists to study her rare disease. Dr. Howard Kelly was called in for the consultation. When he heard the name of the town she came from, a strange light filled his eyes. Immediately he rose and went down the hall of the hospital to her room. Dressed in his doctor's gown he went in to see her. He recognized her at once. He went back to the consultation room determined to do his best to save her life. From that day he gave special attention to the case.

After a long struggle, the battle was won. Dr. Kelly requested the business office to pass the final bill to him for approval. He looked at it, then wrote something on the edge and the bill was sent to her room. She feared to open it, for she was sure it would take the rest of her life to pay for it all. Finally she looked, and something caught her attention on the side of the bill. She read these words:

*Paid in full with one glass of milk
Dr. Howard Kelly.*

Tears of joy flooded her eyes as her happy heart prayed: "Thank you, God, that your love has spread abroad through human hearts and hands."

—unknown



The Homeless Man

While I collect my thoughts in order to write, I am listening to the Fellowship Hall piano being played by a homeless man who wandered into the church looking for food. Earlier I spotted him outside of Casey's where I learned he had been offered a hamburger but said it was poison. Out of our food pantry he chose canned fruit, canned beans, tomato soup and some tuna fish. I was glad the church was able to help him. I asked him where he was heading but got no reply. He asked if the church would put him up and I was sorry to say no. His piano music is floating through my ears and mind right now. It is completely untrained but hauntingly beautiful.

His spirit comes out with his playing and the music is rolling up and down and changing rhythms while floating strings of notes linger in the air. When I look at his face I see a smallish man with a wispy beard and weathered, craggy face. He looks much older than 41. He wanted a place to pray so I sat with him in front of Jesus in the sanctuary. He said he didn't know what God has planned for him. He had tried many things but still was searching for what God had planned for him. His voice is quiet, subdued, and plaintive at the same time. He told me his name and wanted to pray to hear what God planned for him.

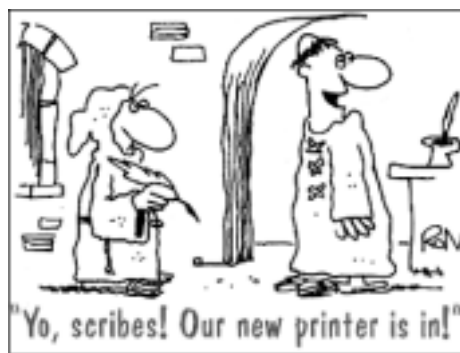
He excused himself to smoke a cigarette outside and came back to my office. With an unemotional voice he stood in the doorway and asked me if there was a Bible he could look at. Immediately I gave him one. He told me he was going to pray some more. I said I'd join him in a few minutes.

We sat in the peace of God awhile. Then he started his story. He lived with his grandmother in Massachussets until she died. He is tearing strips of denim and tying the strips on his coat. It makes a loud ripping noise. He says his grandfather would never stop drinking. Rip. He says he always faught with him. Rip. He says old people never change. Rip. And then his voice sticks with emotion as he chokes out parents are the boss of kids; the kids never get to tell the grandparents what to do. Rip. Rip. Rip.

He calms down as he shows me the shirt someone gave him and the pants that match. He rolls them out and smotheres and pats them lovingly down, over and over again. Almost inaudibly he mutters they are like his grandfather's pants.

I offer to take him to Marshalltown to the homeless shelter, the House of Compassion, for a hot meal and a bed for the night. He accepts and asks can he have some money. For cigarettes? I ask. He nods yes. So I buy him two packs and at the House of Compassion he asks for some cash and I fork over five bucks and remind him that God goes with him wherever he goes. He shakes my hand and waves good-bye.

— Pastor Lee Williamson, Colo UMC



Grace and Works

Good works are not a means of salvation because we are saved by grace through faith. But, our good works are an evidence of salvation; and if we do all the good we can, to all the people we can, at any time we can, by any means we can, we will hear "well done" at the judgment bar of God. *What does it profit, my bretheren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? (James 2:14 RSV)*

—unknown

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Damascus Road
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Volume 6.1

February 2003

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.

Richard G. Shiner, Editor.

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
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Office at St. Olaf Lutheran Church
239 North 11th Street, Fort Dodge
515-955-3579

It's in Your Power

You have it easily in your power to increase the sum total of this world's happiness now. How? By giving a few words of sincere appreciation to someone who is lonely or discouraged. Perhaps you will forget tomorrow the kind words you say today, but the recipient may cherish them over a lifetime.

—Dale Carnegie

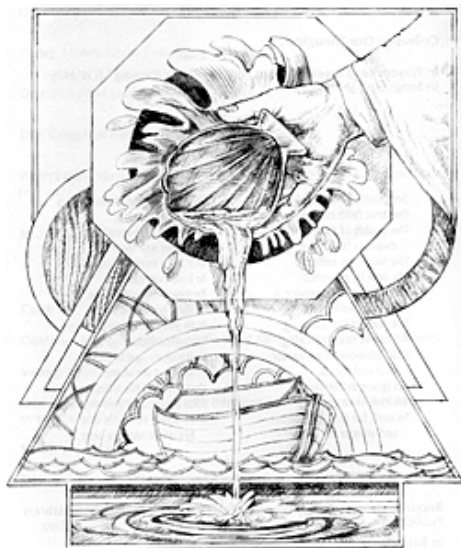
PCoA Contest

And the Winner Is...

William Torrence, an inmate at the North Central Correctional Facility in Rockwell City, Iowa. His drawing of praying hands holding a cross in front of prison bars is included in this issue's Artist's Corner. Congratulations, William!

This is the third time a drawing from NCCF has won the competition. The first was W. J. Traywick, the second was by Jeff Briggs, and now by William Torrence.

There were 14 entries in this year's competition and 13 of those were from the Church of the Damascus Road. We regret that 12 of our members could not have won, but we hope they will try again.



Holy Baptism

FDCF December 18, 2002
Jeremiah Hemenway
FDCF January 15, 2003
Justin Gunter
NCCF January 16, 2003
Affirmation
Elshawn Dawson



Letter from Stephanie

Dear Sponsor: I hope you are in good health when you receive this letter. I practice lots of gym at school and I'm doing very well. I'm in San Damian school and I'm doing very well. I have very good marks in Math and Spanish. I have a score of 6. I have many friends at school. Thank you for all the benefits that I have received and many other things. God bless you and your family.

—Stephanie Alejandra Reynalds Hernandez

In Praise of RIVERS

My life was heading nowhere fast on a road to destruction, everything I had was taken from me and I was left with completely nothing. The little hope I had for a future vanished from my aching head. Finally I came to a conclusion: I would do the RIVERS program instead.

Rivers has changed the way I feel and how to handle situations in different ways, but it does seem like I've been here for three hundred and sixty five days. I learn something new day by day, but you know, in the long run, this program will definitely pay. It will keep me from coming back, because I do not want to have to run that rocky track. I'll tune my ears and change my heart, because I really think that would be smart.

COs, Counselors, fellow inmates, barbed wire fences and high silver gates. When I first got here I didn't know what to think. I was trying to decide if I dared to blink, it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be, I just wished it wasn't me.

As I leave I'm leaving my old self behind, because if I don't, someday I'll have to do my time. It's time for me to have a new start, because, like I said earlier, it will be smart. As I was in class the other day listening to a tune, I just knew that I would be graduating soon with the rest of the best 24th platoon. "Congratulations!"

—Cody Bingham

Sand & Stone

A story tells that two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "*Today my best friend slapped me in the face.*"

They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone: "*Today my best friend saved my life.*"

The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?" The other friend replied: "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

Learn to write your hurts in the sand and to carve your benefits in stone.



Enter to win!

CoDR Art Contest

The Church of the Damascus Road is soliciting art entries for this year's Donor-Partner Print. Entries need to be submitted to Pastor Lang by April 1, 2003. The Outside Church Council will choose one to use and make arrangements with the winning artist to publish his artwork (unused artwork will be returned). The winner will receive a study bible.

Artists should develop their artwork to depict what The Church of the Damascus Road has meant to them or what CoDR can mean for others

The winning artwork will be distributed as prints to donors who give \$100 or more to CoDR. It's a wonderful way for inmates to have an impact on how the people in Iowa view prison ministry.

The Church of the Damascus Road
PO Box 834
Fort Dodge, IA 50501-0834

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February 2003

Artists' Corner

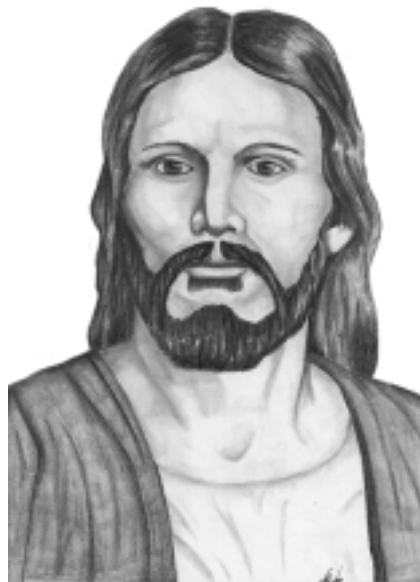


<http://www.dodgenet.com/~cjlant/index.html>

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, a sermon, a children's sermon, an adult forum, a children's Sunday school opening, a cross-generational class session, or any or all of the above, and 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, or by e-mail at <DamascusCh@aol.com> to arrange for a visit to your congregation. The pastor speaks Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptist, United Church of Christ, Covenant, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, Evangelical, Reformed, Assembly of God, Nazarene, and a host of other denominations, independent, and non-denominational as well.



by Dana Woolison (FDCF)



by William Torrence (NCCF)
(PCoA Contest Winner)

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 may 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. The Flash will be sent directly to your home.

-- Pastor Carroll Lang

Worship & Bible Study

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

All Readers: Send Contributions

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.