

The Church of the Damascus Road

Flash!

Volume 6
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April 2003

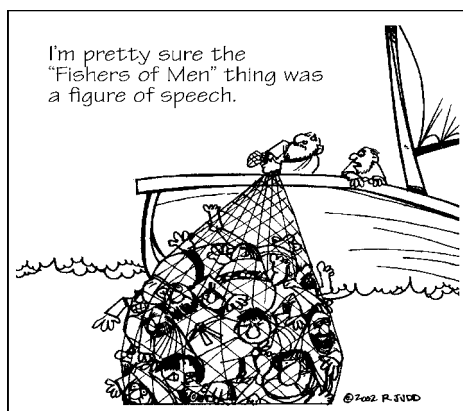
Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA



Sonshine Singers

The Sonshine Singers, an interdenominational group of area vocalists, presented a sample of their music ministry of contemporary anthems on Wednesday, March 19, 2003, at the Church of the Damascus Road at the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility.

The members of CoDR showed their appreciation with enthusiastic applause and rhythmic hand clapping. The members were invited to sing along on three numbers.



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Good Bye my Friends

When I came to NCCF I was Wiccan. I no longer accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I had seen all the liars, cheats, "false Christians," or so I thought they were. But you know, they are actually God's "patients" in the hospital called Church and their medicine is God's word.

Brothers, I've seen a lot of petty things get in the way of our Christian relationships with ourselves, others, and God. I would have continued to think that all Christians were the way I had seen them. So much for my will-power to stay away from God. He did something for me that I'll never, ever forget: he put a very dear Christian brother in my path, Shane Countryman. Some of you may know him, some may not. All that matters is he showed me that God loves us all, no matter how many times we messed up as long as we now accept responsibility for what we've done and make a change.

There are a lot of mature Christians at the Church of the Damascus Road, and Pastor Lang is very helpful and understanding. If you have questions or problems, make use of this source of help. God put these brothers and sisters in our paths to help us so we don't have to do this alone. Take advantage of Thursday night church (Wednesday nights in Fort Dodge); the visitors from the outside have much love and knowledge to share! And go to bible study on Tuesday nights, too (Friday nights in Fort Dodge).

Jesus says, "For where two or more are gathered in my name, there I am!" He'll never leave you. So, for my last words to the Church of the Damascus Road: God bless you. I can't stress this enough, if you "try" it you'll fail, so just do it!

With great sadness I say farewell to all my brothers and sisters of the Church of the Damascus Road, but with great happiness, too, because God has given me a wonderful path to follow. God is the Alpha and the Omega!

— Jeremy Lee, NCCF

Laughter

Laughter brightens the eye, increases the perspiration, expands the chest, forces the poisoned air from the least-used cells, and tends to restore that exquisite poise or balance which we call health.

— O. S. Marden

A Visit from Ron Sharp

Ron attended thursday worship service at NCCF on March 20, 2003 and will attend Wednesday worship service at FDCF on April 23, 2003 Ron is the author of the book "Reflections through the window."



Ron Sharp is now primarily involved with prison impact ministries, headquartered in Kalispell, Montana. He lives in Des Moines, Iowa - in the same neighborhood in which he grew up. Over the course of nearly three

decades, he has served as a prison chaplain and a key administrator for the well-known prison fellowship ministries. How he broke out of the cycle of drugs, crime, and prison to reach this point is truly a miracle of God's grace. Growing up in the inner city of Des Moines, Ron got involved with drugs and crime at the young age of thirteen. For the next dozen years, he was destined for prison as drugs controlled his life. They were the catalyst that turned him into a hardened criminal. He spent those years in and out of local jails in Iowa, somehow avoiding prison until 1973, when he was given twenty-five years and sent to Anamosa State Penitentiary. The miracle came in 1977, after Ron had been paroled from Anamosa. After release, he was invited to a church meeting and answered an alter call. His life has not been the same since. Ron continues to visit institutions and help men and women all over the country come to the knowledge that things can be different for them as well.

Brothers in Blue

Brothers in Blue will be held in both the North Central Correctional Facility April 3-6 and the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility June 12-15. If you are interested please contact either Pastor Lang or Darwin Van Hauen at NCCF or Tom Warner at FDCF to sign up for this event. Applications were being received at NCCF until March 27. At FDCF applications will be taken from April 30 - June 4, 2003. No further applications will be taken after that.

Support team volunteers (Palanca) must fill out an application as well, being sure to mark the appropriate box on the application.

Angels in Action: A Perspective on Punishment

4-year olds learn the meaning of the crucifixion

It was a normal devotion setting at the Student Development Center in Chesnee, SC. Once a month 22 little 4 year olds gather in our sanctuary at Open Door Wesleyan Church for songs, a Bible Story, and prayer. On this day the schedule was different; I was to meet them at the Center.

Almost immediately these precious faces began their usual swarming when "Pastor Paul" walks into the room. Their bright faces signal their eagerness to begin singing and to learn one more adventure from the Book.

Now, you can only imagine the noise level at the Center. Probably 75 busy children are scattered in the brightly colored surroundings, all involved in supervised learning or playing. Tabletops have the names of the children laminated to help keep track of where everyone is supposed to be. I take my place beside Jordan, waiting for the right moment to begin the eight songs we have grown to love to sing.

As places are being found and tiny bodies are finding their chairs, one little girl noticed that I have chosen to sit by Jordan. She comes to me and announced that Jordan has been bad that morning; and that his name has been written on the black board... with a checkmark to boot! In 4 year old language, Jordan had been very, very bad, and I noticed his quieter than normal pose, as if still smarting from the punishment. We sang our songs: "Jesus Loves Me", "The B.I.B.L.E.", "The Wise Man and the Foolish Man," "The Lord's Army," "Zachaeus," and the others. Then it was time to begin the Easter devotions.

I knew this story would be harder to put into 4 year old words. Telling that Jesus had died for sins seems to work easier with the adult mind. Teaching the substitutionary death of the Savior for the sins of the world can be taxing to little minds. After all, in the mind of a 4 year old, what sins have been done to deserve the death of Jesus himself?

That's when Jordan came to mind. Standing him up in the chair beside me, he began to serve as a living object lesson for the Easter story. "Let's pretend that Jordan has done something very bad", I began, "and that he has even had his name written on the black

board," as all eyes glanced past us to the board directly behind us, "with a checkmark," I reminded for effect. They all nodded their agreement.

Then, selecting Kane from the back of the class, I asked for him to join us. "And let's pretend that Kane says that he will take the place of Jordan." Now two sets of eyes are wide, one with anticipation that his name might be removed from that dreadful place, and the other wondering if his name might indeed be placed there!

I reached for the eraser and chalk, removed the name of Jordan, and carefully printed in the new name: "Kane."

"Did Jordan deserve his punishment?" I asked the spell bound 4 year olds. "Yea" they all responded, surprisingly reverent! "Does Kane deserve to have his name placed here?" motioning to that dreaded place. "No" they said in unison.

"That's exactly what Jesus did on the cross. He took our place. He took our punishment. He didn't deserve any of it. We did."

"This is what Easter means, boys and girls. Jesus, God's perfect Son, took the punishment for the sins of the world on himself."

Feeling the moment was about at its limit for even the best-behaved 4 year olds, we closed our eyes and folded our hands for the final prayer.

When we opened our eyes, I glanced over at the two major players in this impromptu drama, ready to express my thanks for their help. The next moment is frozen into my memory. Jordan (the guilty boy whose name had been erased from the board) reached down to Kane (the boy whose name had replaced his) and hugged him! Without warning and without adult suggestion, the room came alive with swarming 4 year olds joining the boys in that hug!

The lesson had been heard. The meaning of Easter was, for the moment, more than candy and eggs and a bunny. Someone had come to take our punishment away from us.

When's the last time you remembered the spontaneous joy of sins forgiven? "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake" (I John 2:12).

Let us pray.

Lord, thank you for taking away my sins, for taking the punishment that I deserved and making it your own. This week when I am tempted to complain or be discouraged, remind me of the awesome gift that has been given to me—the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. No matter what happens to me this week—together we can handle it! May my life reflect the joy of someone whose sins have been forgiven. Thanks for writing your name in my place—yours is the only name that is sufficient! Amen

Can a Person Change?

Do you believe a person can change, really change, change his or her life, turn it around and become a new creature? People can change their hair style and the way they dress. Therapists and counselors believe they can change the way a person behaves. Legislators and prison officials believe they can change a person's acts by creating harsher and tougher laws, or by putting the fist down or the clamps on. They call this reforming. Mostly these are external, short-term changes. Many times these reforms cause more problems, resentment, smarter and tougher criminals, bulging prisons and higher costs.

Real change is spiritual. These changes are more subtle and surrounded by mysteries. With spiritual change, the other changes follow automatically: personality changes, behaviors, law-abiding behaviors, and we become caring, concerned individuals. Jesus acknowledges these mysteries when he speaks of rebirth, of being born again. He likens it to wind. You can't see the wind but you know it's there, you can feel it in your face, you can see what it can do, feel it's affects, but you still can't grasp it in your hand.

The answer, of course, is "yes," people can and do change. Sometimes the changes are hard to see, but you know they're there. Sometimes spiritual change is subtle—you can sense its presence, but you just can't grasp it. Over a period of time, however, if given the chance, a spiritually changed person will be as real and visible as touching and smelling a flower in new bloom. Many times, given spiritual training and alternatives, people only need the chance to bloom, and, given the right air speed and direction, they can soar.

—David Bern

Keep on Walking

If we are facing in the right direction, all we have to do is keep on walking. Buddhist proverb (*we believe can be applied to our Christian faith*).



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Flash!

Volume 6.2 April 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.

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.

Office at St. Olaf Lutheran Church
239 North 11th Street, Fort Dodge, IA



Holy Baptism

NCCF February 20, 2003
Danilo Zabala Artez

Prayer for Rest

Before I nod off to sleep
And close my weary eyes,
I say a thankful prayer
For love I can't deny.

By grace this love is given
Each and every day,
Always there, listening to me
Every time I pray.

May I dream of you, my Lord,
May my slumber be still
Visions of what's in store for me,
Visions of your will.

As I sleep I will know no harm.
May your angels watch over me,
Giving me the rest I need
To be who you want me to be.

Robert L. Johnson II

I Need You

My days are numbered, my hours few
what I have God I give to you
for you've seen me struggle
with alcohol and drugs,
but you held me tight
and showed me love.
You did not drop me, or let me down
like the people I knew
and hung around.
I've been sick
and gotten too high,
I used to think, I wanted to die
but you opened my eyes
and showed me truth.
You opened the door, and let me in.
You showed me Lord, the affects of sin.
When I get on my knees
to beg and plead.
Why Lord, Why would you help someone
like me?
I turned away, and you were there
I cursed your name, and you still cared
I hated you God
for making me.
Why God did you bring me here?
a hopeless sinner, full of fear.
You said "Stand up,
I have a job for you.
Listen my broken friend,
I have something I need you to do.
Be a leader, a tender warrior
do not give up,
you have come so far.
I need you to be an example
to those who know you.
I need you to show them there is hope,
I need you to show them
they cannot hide.
When you are lost,
and have Jesus as your guide."
—Daniel Skalla

The Real Saints

In a church gathering, the real saints are
always convinced that they are sinners,
and the real sinners are always convinced
that they are saints.

— James Nestingen

Outside Council Profile

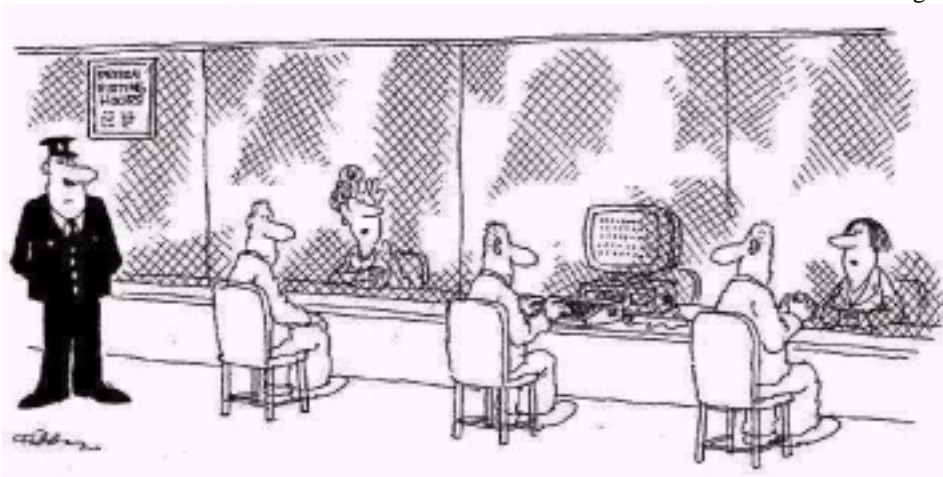


Rev. Danette Johns

I was born in Cook, NE, a small town of 300 people about 45 miles southeast of Lincoln. I graduated from Dana College in 1982 and moved to Minneapolis. After working at First Lutheran Church in Columbia Heights for six years, and in the admissions office at Luther Seminary in St. Paul for five years, I enrolled in the Master of Divinity program the fall of 1993. I interned in a two-point parish close to Worthington, MN. I graduated from Luther Seminary in May of 1997 and was ordained on August 23rd, 1997. From September 1997 to October 2001, I served as the pastor of Fremont Lutheran Church (Nyman) and Tabor Lutheran Church (Wallin), two small open country churches in the southwest corner of the synod.

I began my work in the Western Iowa Synod office in October of 2001. My areas of responsibility include working with the Board of Ministry, Candidacy, First Call Theological Education, Lay School of Ministry, Fall Convocation and other leadership events. I am also the shared staff person with the Division for Outreach, so I serve as the liaison with the Church of the Damascene Road and attend meetings of the Outside Church Council. I also share responsibilities for call process (how Lutherans find pastors to serve congregations) with my colleagues on the synod staff.

I live in Storm Lake with my mother Erna, who recently retired, and my cats Emma and Jake. When I am not working, I like to read, walk, travel and go out to eat.



The Church of the Damascus Road
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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

April 2003



<http://www.dodgenet.com/~cjang/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.

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.

Artists' Corner



by Rafael Cardenas(FDCF)



by Victorio DeLance(FDCF)

FDCF's Church Council

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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.

-- Pastor Carroll Lang

NCCF's Church Council

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 Nathan Sayre Michael Batten

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