

# The Church of the Damascus Road Flash!

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Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA

## How the Church of the Damascus Road got to Where We Are

Some of you readers have become concerned that this ministry may have to be terminated. We apologize for the alarmist approach in our letter and in the Messenger newspaper, but we needed to let people know that we needed help right away, and many of you have responded generously. We are truly grateful for your response. You have shown us that this ministry is important to you and that you want it to continue. Thank you and thank God for your support of The Church of the Damascus Road.

But, how did we get to this situation? A little history might help. In 1996, Fort Dodge began its second bid to have a prison located in its community. This time the bid committee included some of the clergy of Fort Dodge to participate on the bid committee. Every member of the committee provided a "component," offering services in the event the prison located in Fort Dodge. There were construction, education, sewer, electricity, food, and many other components. The clergy added a "Spiritual Component" to the bid. The Spiritual Component promised to put in place a prison congregation with an experienced parish pastor and to provide an aftercare ministry as well.

When the bid was accepted by the Iowa Department of Corrections, an ecumenical steering committee was formed to begin the process of forming the prison congregation. As planning got underway the question of denominational or non-denominational status was discussed and it was unanimous that the congregation be mainline denominational. But which denomination? The only mainline denomination willing to offer help at that time was the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which had plans to start three such ministries each year. They were willing to provide half the costs.

This actually ended up being half the salary and benefits package of the pastor *plus* the purchase of a parsonage.

After the plans were finalized to begin the congregation, a call committee was formed and a pastor was called, the Rev. Carroll Lang, and the ELCA put him on its Division for Outreach payroll as a mission developer pastor. In the agreement the congregation was to pay back half of the salary package to the ELCA. The original commitment from the ELCA was for 3 years. Near the end of three years, the congregation was being supported enough to pay back the ELCA three fourths of the salary package, but not all, so the Outside Church Council asked for an extension of one year and the Division for Outreach agreed. However, the Division for Outreach asked the congregation to pay the whole salary and benefits package and they gave the congregation a grant equaling one fourth of the salary and benefits package. The ELCA still owned the house.

Support continued to increase, so it was decided to charter the congregation and request the Western Iowa Synod of the ELCA to recognize The Church of the Damascus Road as a congregation. This happened on April 20, 2002, at the Western Iowa Synod Assembly in Sioux City.

According to the original agreement with the ELCA Division for Outreach, once the congregation was officially recognized as a congregation, the ownership of the parsonage was to be undertaken by the congregation. This had to happen within four months after the congregation was recognized. The Outside Church Council had three options: 1. give the house back to the ELCA and find another house; 2. rent a house or an apartment; 3. purchase the house from the ELCA for the price they paid for it in 1997. Since the value of the house had increased by

\$20,000, the Outside Church Council decided to provide a housing allowance for Pastor Lang so he and his wife, Judy, could purchase the house.

The reason for the present crunch came when support from individuals and congregations leveled off at the same time as the housing allowance of \$13,000 was added to the budget. Support did not increase to cover the expense of the housing allowance, causing us to dip into a previously accumulated account in the ELCA's Mission Plus Fund (used to start other missions) up to \$2,000 per month. The fund was depleting at an alarming rate and it was predicted that unless support increased significantly, we would be out of those funds by June of 2004 and operating at a deficit of up to \$2,000 per month. That was when we decided to write the letter and put our plight before the public.

And now you know the rest of the story. So, where do we go from here?

This congregation will never be self-supporting. It will always need perpetual support from congregations and individuals with a heart for this vital ministry to the imprisoned. We need a combination of one hundred congregations and individuals to put us on their budgets for one hundred dollars per month in order to meet our present needs *as well as* to carry out our *second* promise to provide aftercare. If you are not, or your congregation is not presently a member of our 'One Hundred Club,' please ask your church council/board/session or yourself to prayerfully place this item on your annual budget agenda. The door is always open to budgeted donations of any amount per month. This prison ministry is an extension both of an individual's or a congregation's ministry and is worthy of your support.

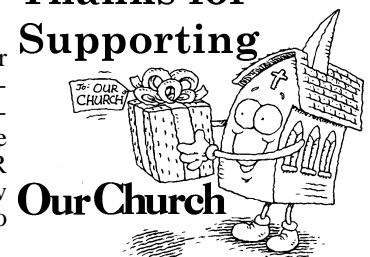
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### Simply Giving

Thrivent Financial is offering an electronic transfer giving program that provides donors the opportunity to make donations and have them automatically transferred from their personal accounts to The Church of the Damascus Road's. Just contact the CoDR office and we'll send you a Simply Giving form. Follow the instructions, fill in the information and mail it in to us at the address provided on the form.

### Thanks for Supporting





## The Smell of Rain

A cold March wind danced around the dead of night in Dallas as the doctor walked into the small hospital room of Diana Blessing. Still groggy from surgery, her husband, David, held her hand as they braced themselves for the latest news. That afternoon of March 10, 1991, complications had forced Diana, only 24-weeks pregnant, to undergo an emergency cesarean to deliver the couple's new daughter, Dana Lu Blessing. At 12 inches long and weighing only one pound and nine ounces, they already knew she was perilously premature. Still, the doctor's soft words dropped like bombs. "I don't think she's going to make it," he said, as kindly as he could. "There's only a 10-percent chance she will live through the night, and even then, if by some slim chance she does make it, her future could be a very cruel one". Numb with disbelief, David and Diana listened as the doctor described the devastating problems Dana would likely face if she survived. She would never walk, she would never talk, she would probably be blind, and she would certainly be prone to other catastrophic conditions from cerebral palsy to complete mental retardation, and on and on.

"No! No!" was all Diana could say.

She and David, with their 5-year-old son, Dustin, had long dreamed of the day they would have a daughter to become a family of four. Now, within a matter of hours, that dream was slipping away. Through the dark hours of morning as Dana held onto life by the thinnest thread, Diana slipped in and out of sleep, growing more and more determined that their tiny daughter would live, and live to be a healthy, happy young girl. But David, fully awake and listening to additional dire details of their daughter's chances of ever leaving the hospital alive, much less healthy, knew he must confront his wife with the inevitable. David walked in and said that we needed to talk about making funeral arrangements. Diana remembers she felt so bad for him because he was doing everything and trying to include her in what was going on, but she just wouldn't listen. She *couldn't* listen. She said, "No, that's not going to happen, no way! I don't care what the doctors say. Dana is not going to die! One day she will be just fine and she will be coming home with us!"

As if willed to live by Diana's determination, Dana clung to life hour after hour with the help of every medical machine and marvel her miniature body could endure. But as those first days passed, a new agony set in for David and Diana. Because Dana's underdeveloped nervous system was essentially 'raw,'

the lightest kiss or caress only intensified her discomfort, so they couldn't even cradle their tiny baby girl against their chests to offer the strength of their love. All they could do, as Dana struggled alone beneath the ultraviolet light in the tangle of tubes and wires, was to pray that God would stay close to their precious little girl. As the weeks went by, she did slowly gain an ounce of weight here and an ounce of strength there. At last, when Dana turned two months old, her parents were able to hold her in their arms for the very first time. And two months later, though doctors continued to gently but grimly warn that her chances of surviving, much less living any kind of normal life, were next to zero. Dana went home from the hospital, just as her mother had predicted.

Today, five years later, Dana is a petite but feisty young girl with glittering gray eyes and an unquenchable zest or life. She shows no signs, whatsoever, of any mental or physical impairment. Simply, she is everything a little girl can be and more, but that happy ending is far from the end of her story.

One blistering afternoon in the summer of 1996 near her home in Irving, Texas, Dana was sitting on her mother's lap in the bleachers of a local ball park where her brother Dustin's baseball team was practicing. As always, Dana was chattering nonstop with her mother and several other adults sitting nearby when she suddenly fell silent. Hugging her arms across her chest, Dana asked, "Do you smell that?"

Smelling the air and detecting the approach of a thunderstorm, Diana replied, "Yes, it smells like rain."

Dana closed her eyes and again asked, "Do you smell that?"

Once again, her mother replied, "Yes, I think we're about to get wet, it smells like rain."

Still caught in the moment, Dana shook her head, patted her thin shoulders with her small hands and loudly announced, "No, it smells like Him. It smells like God when you lay your head on His chest."

Tears blurred Diana's eyes as Dana then happily hopped down to play with the other children. Before the rains came, her daughter's words confirmed what Diana and all the members of the extended Blessing family had known, at least in their hearts, all along. During those long days and nights of her first two months of her life, when her nerves were too sensitive for them to touch her, God was holding Dana on His chest and it is His loving scent that she remembered so well.

— unknown

## Seeking You

I seek you with all my heart  
Every time I pray,  
To draw closer to you  
Each and every day.



Robert L. Johnson II

May what you desire, Lord,  
Be my heart's desire,  
For the love I have for you  
Sets my heart on fire.

The work that you began in  
me  
Grows stronger every day.  
How can I ever repay you, Jesus,  
For showing me the way?

For loving me enough  
To bear all my pain,  
To die upon the cross for me,  
To take away my shame.

I know nothing can ever harm me,  
For this I know is true.  
Everything will be all right, Lord,  
As long as I have you.

WONDERFUL • COUNSELOR • THE MIGHTY GOD • KING OF KINGS • MESSIAH



THE GREAT I AM • EVERLASTING FATHER • LORD OF LORDS • PRINCE OF PEACE

## Lord

I come before you, with a broken heart,  
Begging you, please, for a fresh start.  
I know I've sinned, done a lot of wrong,  
Did bad things, caused a lot of harm.  
Please, please, I'm down on my knees,  
Crying, "Lord, please forgive me,"  
Tears in my eyes, 'cause it hurts so bad,  
Take away the pain, it's making me sad,  
My life is a mess, it's not just a dream,  
It's scaring me, You are my love, my last hope,  
Take me in your arms and bless my soul,  
I'm begging you, Lord, please don't let go.  
— by Finus F. Atwood 3/12/04

The Church of the  
**Damascus Road**  
*Flash!*

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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.

Jeffrey D. Roberts, 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

## The U In JesUs

Before U were thought of or time had begun,  
God even put U in the name of His Son.  
And each time U pray, you'll see it's true  
You can't spell JesUs and not include U.  
You're a pretty big part of His wonderful name,  
For U, He was born; that's why He came.  
And His great love for U is the reason He died.  
It even takes U to spell crUcified.

Isn't it thrilling and splendidly grand  
He rose from the dead, with U in His plan?  
The stones split away, the gold trUmpet blew,  
and this word resUrrection is spelled with a U.  
When JesUs left earth at His Upward ascension,  
He felt there was one thing

He just had to mention.

"Go into the world and tell them it's true  
That I love them all - Just as I love U."

So many great people are spelled with a U,  
Don't they have a right to know JesUs too?

It all depends now on what U will do,  
He'd like them to know, But it all starts with U.  
Will yoU pass it on? "...He who is in you is  
greater than he who is in the world." I John 4:4

## Holy Baptism



FDCF  
April 11, 2004  
Nathan Bell

## A Minister's Joke

A minister parked his car in a no-parking zone in a large city because he was short of time and couldn't find a space with a meter. So he put a note under the windshield wiper that read: "I have circled the block 10 times. If I don't park here, I'll miss my appointment. FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES." When he returned, he found a citation from a police officer along with this note. "I've circled this block for 10 years. If I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION."

## My Love for You

You, my dear, are the sweet, the warm and beautiful. Ever busy, ever conscious of your love and responsibility to your family and friends. God smiles and touches your face ever so lightly. Lifts the corners of your mouth and hardened hearts melt.

He dips down into his bucket of sunshine and sprinkles it all over you. He massages your heart with his hand and brings it to a burning flame of love for everyone. You, you creature of God—you.

I'm sorry, I'm sorry I can't be there for you. I get heart broken, when I can't warm your pain. You, my dear, are the sweet, the warm and beautiful. Your love is my inspiration to surviving in life. When I cry, I cry your warmth for me. Your heart, Dear, is what makes mine complete for loving you. My arms are what will keep you warm, on the inside and outside. You, my dear, are the sweet, the warm and beautiful.

I'm sorry, I'm sorry I can't be there for you. Your pain, my dear, is what makes me hurt. My dear, my love is what heals your pains. When we put our hearts next to each other that is what will make us whole. Until then we have a broken heart.

I'm sorry, I'm sorry I can't be there for you. Please forgive me for not being there for you, my dear, to hold you in my arms for eternity. You, my dear, are the sweet, the warm and beautiful.

## To Realize

- To realize the value of a sister: ask someone who doesn't have one.
- To realize the value of ten years: ask a newly divorced couple.
- To realize the value of four years: ask a graduate.
- To realize the value of one year: ask a student who has failed a final exam.
- To realize the value of nine months: ask a mother who gave birth to a still born.
- To realize the value of one month: ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby.
- To realize the value of one week: ask an editor of a weekly newspaper.
- To realize the value of one hour: ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.
- To realize the value of one minute: ask a person who has missed the train, bus or plane.
- To realize the value of one-second: ask a person who has survived an accident.
- To realize the value of one millisecond: ask the person who has won a silver medal in the Olympics.
- To realize the value of a friend: lose one.
- Time waits For no one. Treasure every moment you have. You will treasure it even more when you can share it with someone special.

## Fully Equipped

Throughout the Bible, when God asked a man to do something, the methods, means, materials and specific directions were always provided. The man had one thing to do: obey.

— Elisabeth Elliot



## Visiting Day

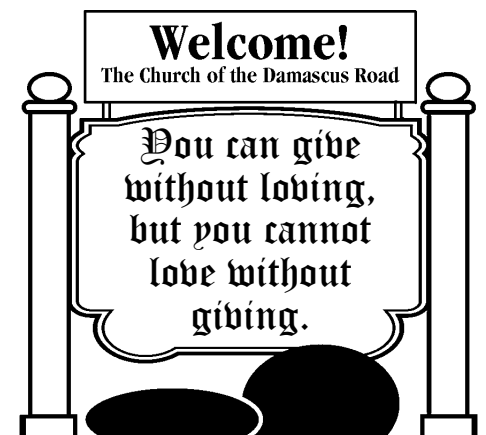
He was looking forward to this moment all day long, after 6 days of labor, and it finally arrived - Visiting Day! The man with the keys arrived to swing open the large, heavy doors. The cold gray hall springs to life in the warm glow of light. He could hardly control His emotions.

The families began to arrive. He peers from the corner of the room longing for the first glimpse of His loved one. He lives for the weekends. He lives for these visits. As the cars arrive, He watches intently. Then, finally, they arrive, those for whom He would do anything. They embrace, eat a light lunch and reminisce how things used to be. At one point, they break into singing, with interruptions of laughter and applause. But all too soon it is over. A tear comes to His eyes as they depart.

Then the man with the keys closes the heavy doors. He hears the key turn in the lock marking the end of a special day. There He stands, alone again. He knows that most of His visitors will not contact Him again till next week. As the last car pulls away from the parking lot, Jesus retreats into loneliness as He waits until next Sunday - Visiting Day.

Is the time that we spend with Jesus an everyday thing, or do we just visit Him on Sunday?

— Author Unknown



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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

June 2004

### 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, Mennonite, Nazarene, and a host of other denominations, independent, and non-denominational, too.

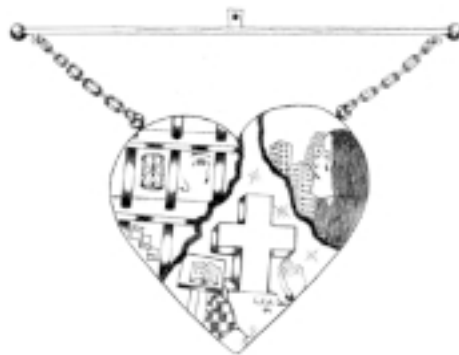


<http://www.dodgenet.com/~cjang/index.html>

### 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



Luis Andrade FDCF 2004



Jaime Gonzalez Hurtado 5-4-04 FDCF

### Brothers in Blue

The next Brothers in Blue weekend will be June 10-13, 2004 at the Fort Dodge Facility. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work renewal in the participants. The next Brothers in Blue weekend will be October 14-17 at the Rockwell City facility.

### NCCF's Church Council

Marc Leonard ..... President  
Seth Vredenburg Vice President/Secretary  
Gary LeCompte ..... Terry Halvin  
Robert Barr ..... John Bothwell  
Billy Lacy

### FDCF's Church Council

Terry Schoon, Pres ..... Nathan Bell, VP  
Brandon Walstrom ..... Librarian  
Ronald C. Oliver ..... Prayer Team  
Larry Armstrong ..... Brian Underwood  
Ryan Lingford ..... Randy Elliott  
Brandon Wickett ..... Steve Houghton

### Worship & Bible Study

#### FDCF Fort Dodge

7:00pm Wednesdays ..... Holy Communion  
6:30pm Fridays ..... Prayer Team  
7:00pm Fridays ..... Bible Study

#### NCCF Rockwell City

6:30pm Tuesdays ..... Bible Study  
6:30pm Thursdays ..... Holy Communion

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