

The Church of the Damascus Road

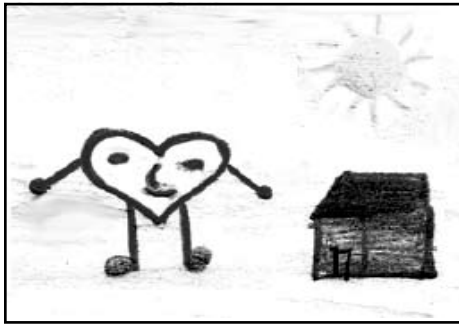
Flash!

Volume 8
Issue No. 3
June 2005
Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA

First Priority

The supreme task of the church is the evangelization of the world. No one has the right to hear the gospel twice until everyone has had an opportunity to hear it at least once.

— J. Oswald Smith



Letter from Stephanie

May 2005
Valparaiso, Chile
Dear Sponsor:

I hope that when you receive this letter, you are OK as well as your people. I am fine with all my family. I like to play with my brother and cousins, too. Well, I am doing fine in school, and I am above the passing grade, so I will be in the next grade.

I like to go to the park. My family is OK, and they support me a lot. I want to thank you for the help that you send me. It is very important to me.

I will say good bye to you. Kisses and hugs,
Stephanie Alejandra Reynalds Hernandez

Quit Gripping

Quit griping about your church; if it was perfect, you couldn't belong.

— Bernie Koerselman

Inside the Flash!

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Come, You Blessed of my Father



Matthew 25:36

Those who work in Corrections will tell you that many people who are subjected to jail and/or prison will find God. They call it "Jail House Religion" because it has been their experience that soon after one is no longer incarcerated, they leave that "religious experience" behind. For the most part they are right.

I, for one, do not doubt the sincerity of these jail house conversions. God will use a crisis situation in our lives to draw us near to Him. Very few would call out to Him with a broken and contrite spirit without some sort of crisis or hardship.

Spiritual transplants occur as people become Christians and receive a new heart. But to grow strong in the Lord they must receive intensive nurturing, renewing their minds with the Word of God. Their spirits are a new creation in Christ Jesus, but their souls (minds) and flesh (bodies) want to continue on in the things they are used to.

It is exciting to be a part of the birthing process by praying them into the Kingdom of God. However, it is also necessary to nurse new-born children of God on the Word, and to intercede for them until Christ be formed in them. The churches involved in prison ministry for the most part focus on prison services and Bible studies, which are a very important part of the process, but what has been lacking is the aftercare ministry which would continue the work when a prisoner is released.

No one is suggesting that coddling these people is the answer, but if we deal with them scripturally, we do not want "the cares of this world nor the deceitfulness of riches to choke the Word from their hearts." We must help provide fertile ground for the seed to grow and bear fruit (Mark 4:14-20).

Paul wrote to the new Christians at Galatia: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19 KJV). These were baby Christians to whom Paul wrote, ever careful to see that they receive the right teaching and grow to maturity. He prayed fervently, interceding for them, holding them before

the Throne of God.

Jesus told us that when we withhold from his children the things that they need, when it is within our power to provide it to them, we are in essence withholding it from Him. We will be held accountable for our actions on that great and terrible day of His coming!

Will you hear on that day; "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me...I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:34-36, 40 KJV).

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8 KJV).

Rather than question these conversions of those who are in prison because of the outcome once they are released, maybe we should question how the world describes "Jail House Religion."

Would there be a different result if the Church became accountable for these new converts, rather than release them into the same environment from which they came, and expect a different result?

Let us step back from the wisdom of the world and take a look at this issue in light of scripture:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17 KJV).

Bill had been a drug smuggler for years. He lived on both sides of the border between the U.S. and old Mexico. He was arrested this side of the border in New Mexico and ended up serving prison sentences in two states as a result of those convictions.

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Repentance

By Bill Denton

“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22).

“Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement; he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. This process of surrender—this movement fullspeed astern—is what Christians call repentance. Now repentance is no fun at all. It is something much harder than merely eating humble pie. It means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years. It means killing part of yourself, undergoing a kind of death.”

— C.S. Lewis (1898-1963).

There is a mistaken view running around in the minds of many Christians. It’s the view that repentance is being sorry for sin, apologizing for things done wrong, and seeking forgiveness. None of those things should be criticized, but none of them is repentance.

Repentance is a change of mind. It is an inner turning of thought, desires, and will away from sin and toward that which is godly. It is a turning away from the world, and turning to God, but it is a conscious, purposeful act. No one repents by accident, and no one repents who fails to change his mind.

But it is not enough to say that repentance is a change of mind, for an effective change of mind has an obvious and outward result. A man or woman who changes his or her mind about involvement in some sin, cannot continue to think about that sin in the old

way. That which did not seem to bother them before, now becomes an intense source of guilt. Behavior that previously was ignored, defended, excused, justified, now becomes behavior that simply will not do. People who repent are people who learn how to act differently.

It is this understanding of repentance that many in our modern world do not grasp. Too many who claim to wear the name of Jesus seem to think that such a claim has no practical claim on their lives. No wonder so many Christians are weak-kneed, struggling, and faithless people.

Repentance does not mean that a sin committed previously will never rear its ugly head again. It does mean that many of the practices of life are no longer acceptable. It means that the person has a whole new mindset about those things. It means that there is a conscious effort to change. It means there is a purposeful effort to live a different way, do different things.

John the Baptist put it bluntly to those who came to be baptized, but who didn’t understand exactly what it was he called them to. *“Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father, for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham’”* (Luke 3:8). Today’s analogy would be those who say, “But I’m a Christian,” only to continue behaving in unacceptable ways.

The call to repent is a call to change, beginning with the mind and ending with actions.

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Richard Davis NCCF

The Door of Resurrection

The idea of Jesus being the access door to a new world of living and being is something that people in different forms of bondage tend to appreciate most easily. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once-noted the advantage of celebrating Easter from a prison cell. You become entirely aware, he reasoned, that the door is the only way out. More than that: The door of a cell can be opened only from the outside. When Jesus speaks of saving those who pass through the door, he has rescue in mind. Those who find that door are saved not only from the pernicious activity of phony shepherds on the outside aggressively seeking their soul; they’re also saved from a potentially much worse enemy on the inside—themselves.

Abundant living isn’t hard to find. It’s a matter of walking through the right doors. The life of which Jesus is speaking—one that overflows at the boundaries—is a life that passes through the grace of God. Jesus cautions those who would sneak through other passageways. Phony grace and false security and make-believe shepherds abound, and so do misleading doorways.

Jesus’ Influence

This Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science, he shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, he spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, he set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.

— Philip Schaff

The Church of the
Damascus Road
Flash!

Volume 8.3

June 2005

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.

Rev. Carroll Lang, Pastor

Albert Cooper, 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

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for years, he rationalized that what he did was not so bad, because all he sold was marijuana. Over the years, seeing what narcotics did to people, ruining their lives, he would not be a part of that evil. He never realized that marijuana also has a lasting effect on people, just as alcohol and tobacco.

While in jail he got a chance to observe the church services held right on the cell-block every Sunday. He noticed that even the most hardened criminals were quiet and respectful when the pastor came and spoke about Jesus, and after about two months of asking questions he realized that Jesus Christ had to have been the Son of God. While reading the prayer on the back of a pamphlet, asking Jesus into his life, he felt as if warm oil had been poured out over his head, and he was at peace. He knew without a doubt that something had just happened to him. In his spirit, all things had just become new. That was in 1986.

For the next three years, while in prison, he studied the Bible, and it was evident to everyone he knew that something was different about Bill. He was very different, almost peculiar.

When he got out of prison in 1989, and moved back home with his family, (father/brother) he very soon found himself back in his old life style starting with alcohol, then pot, and on to narcotics, and within a year he was in worse condition than he had been before (Matthew 12:43-45).

With his brother who was an alcoholic and a drug addict, and a father who drank often, it was an easy and natural thing for him to do. With many cares of this world to contend with, and an ambition to reach a level of financial independence that he had once enjoyed, the Word took a back seat in Bill's program.

The parable of the sower, which Jesus gave to us in Mark 4, touches on this very subject. "The sower sows the Word...Now these are the ones sown among the thorns; they are the ones who hear the Word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the Word and it becomes unfruitful." But when He continues: "But these are the ones sown in good ground, those who hear the Word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.

What would be conducive to good grounding for a newly-born Christian who's mind and body still need to be renewed?

I believe that an aftercare ministry is imperative to the successful transition from prison (and learning about the things of God) to the community (putting them into practice) "And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

The Word of God says that Satan is the god of this world. So why would we ever

leave these newly-born Christians in the hands of secular authorities when it is within our means to provide a viable alternative through the Church?

"I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

If you wish to hear on that great and terrible day of Jesus second coming; "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..." then support aftercare ministry in your community by contacting any of the following programs. They are a non-profit, privately funded ministries to ex offenders that work scripturally.

Don Payer

535 Main Street

Ames, IA 50010

515-232-4115

Cornerstone Family Church

Home Missions: Jon Jennings

3114 SW 61st Street

Des Moines, IA 50321

Rev. David Schroeder

Abundant Life Ministries

404 West State Street

Jefferson, IA 50129

515-386-2805

Freedom House

Joel Thoreson

2701 College ave.

Des Moines, IA. 50319

And, of course,

The Church of the Damascus Road

— William E. Bell

Pessimism—Not!

There is not a single pessimistic note anywhere in the New Testament after the resurrection. — Andrew Blackwood

How Much Do I Love Thee

Jesus is great, he is never late. His blood was in my heart, right from the start. When Jesus knocked on my heart's door, I was sure that he was coming in to take my sin. Now I am at peace with God, and I know in my heart that he is not a fraud. Amen.

**WORRY IS
INTEREST PAID
ON TROUBLE BEFORE
IT'S DUE.**

One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village, the son of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He made friends among the poor and weak, and associated with outcasts and criminals. He never traveled more than 30 miles from his hometown.

He didn't go to college. He had no credentials, but himself. He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends and associates ran away. He was turned over to his enemies, and went through the mockery or a trial.

He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying he became our sinless substitute. He even prayed for his executioners as soldiers gambled for his clothing, his only property on earth. He was laid in a borrowed grave. It's a historical fact that three days later he was raised from the dead.

In the 2000 years that have since come and gone, he remains the central figure of the human race—the leader of countless millions; our hope and salvation.

All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, have not affected the life of man as much as that One Solitary Life.

— Author unknown

Editor's Note

I apologize that in last month's issue of the ECHO I put duplicate copies of articles, "Works in Progress," "To" and "A Blessed Look" are the same thing. Once again thank you for not being so harsh.

— Albert Cooper

Hold Them While You

Can

Just a little thought I would like to share with everybody. I was sitting here today when my grandson came crawling up to me. Two years ago I wouldn't have thought about this. But after I had a stroke, things like this are very dear to me. I thank God everyday for giving me the chance to spend time with my grandchildren.

Too many of us take this for granted. So I think we should all take the time to look closely at all that God has given to us. So often when our children come up to us we put them off because we are too busy. But we should never be that busy. This not only goes for our children, but for anyone who needs us. I know that I'm guilty of this. It took almost dying for me to see this. You may not be as lucky as I was. So please, **hold**

The Church of the Damascus Road
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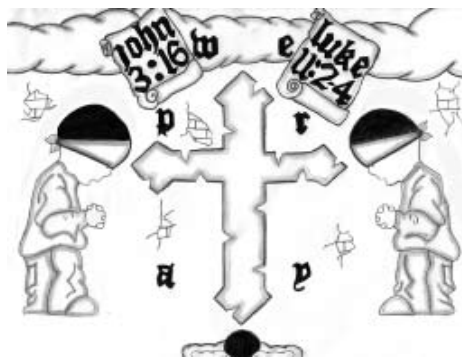
June 2005

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.

Artists' Corner



Demetrice Gosa FDCF '05



Winston Halstead FDCF



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

All Readers: Send Contributions

The editor of this newsletter is inviting ALL READERS, inside and outside

NCCF's Church Council

Marc Leonard..... President
 Jasper Young Vice President
 Todd Yaw Secretary
 David Porter Anthony Bone
 Robert Blau Lyle Harris
 Daniel Skalla

FDCF's Church Council

Albert Cooper..... President
 Randy Elliott Vice President
 Tony Halsrud..... Secretary

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