

The Church of the Damascus Road

Flash!

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Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA

From a Woman at the Well

I have been in the midst of hell – or so it seemed. I wandered around feeling as if I didn't belong anywhere other than the dark, cold and lonely pit I had dug for myself with a drug addiction that had landed me in a place the world calls ugly: prison. There can't be anything good in a place like that, right? I want to tell you about the beauty behind the barbed wire.

Allow me to share a place that is the stepping-stone to the miracle that changed my life. I graced the gates of prison as a wounded, battered and beaten woman, in the spiritual and emotional state of hopelessness. Who could possibly love or even want a woman like me?

In hindsight, I see the start of the miracle beginning the moment I was sentenced to prison.



THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

As I was on my way to prison, God was planting a place I have come to know as my home away from home. This place is Women at the Well United Methodist Church. This congregation of believers consists of inmates of ICIW and outside community churches who join us in worship every Thursday evening. This treasure has brought the presence of God to the lives of women who never knew such extraordinary love existed. We are blessed with a pastor who mirrors the very character of Jesus, a pastor who has led and continues to lead us by example of what it means to live in the freedom of Christ.

Our Women at the Well congregation has taught me what praise and worship really mean. If you still yourself for but a moment you can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit fill the room as we lift up our hearts and hands to offer due thanks to our Lord. I get a glimpse of heaven inside these walls as I witness the lives of many who have been radically changed by the shining grace and favor of God.

Today I know I am loved and in turn I have learned to love and trust. Instead of fear leading me, faith in God leads me. I smile today, even in the midst of trials, because with Christ in me I am a conqueror. I have a relationship today with the Father that says, "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give her will never thirst. But the water that I shall give her will become in her a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." He called, I came and drank, and I confess that I thirst no more. Thank you, PCA, for allowing God to use you to touch the lives of women who know only defeat.

— Shelley B



A Lost Sheep Brought Home

All my life I have wanted nothing more than to fit in and be accepted. I found that the only way I would have friends was by acting reckless and living a life of drugs that brought me nothing but hurt and heartache. It led me to prison only because God spared my life. I was a ninety-six pound walking dead man. Once I got out it was not long and I was right back to the old way of living only seventeen days out of prison. I prayed to God who I knew was there somewhere, but I never thought he would help me. His answer was back to prison for me. I came to Fort Dodge a year ago; lost, broken, and afraid. I was tired of living this life of pain and I knew it was time for me to change. I attended church immediately and I buried myself in God's word. My life was changing, I was no longer the hurt lost kid that I used to be. I was a son of God and I was loved unconditionally. The more I did, the more blessings I was receiving. I am still me, but I now walk taller and with a confidence I never before had, because I know Jesus walks with me. I am leaving here in a couple days and I just want to say that if anyone is reading this and you are lost or afraid, turn to Jesus. He saved my life and he can save your life also. I know you'll hear people say "You come to prison and find God, yea right." Tell them "What better time than now." I am going to miss the people here and the Church of the Damascus Road. What I have gotten will never leave me and I give all the glory to God for putting the people in my path to change this life of mine, and for returning this lost sheep to the rest of God's flock. Jesus will never give up on any of us. May God bless you all.

Your Brother,
Dusty

—Dustin Lear FDCF 2006, Dustin has been gone from FDCF for several months now. He left this before he left.



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Our First Golf Tourney Fundraiser June 30 — Let's do it again!

About 25 participants came to enjoy ACoDR's first Golf Tourney Fundraiser at the Oakridge Golf course near Goldfield.



Paul Harrison, Kathy Hansel, and Judy Lang discuss last minute details at the registration table while Bub Gleason

with Bub Gleason starting at the 5th hole on a shotgun start, best shot tournament. Pastor Lang had not held a club for almost 40



years, but most of the time he could at least topple it off the tee(l). Thank goodness his partner was a better driver, so Pastor Lang was able to take ad-

vantage of Bub's good drives.

This Fort Dodge team(r) putted their way to second place behind a team from Swea City's First United Methodist Church. First, Second and Third plac-



es received checks, while all other players could choose from Old Iron prints of farm tractors (donated by artist Paul Harrison), baskets of goodies and other prizes.

After a hard round of golf (those carts can be rough riding, you know), a delicious meal was served to good conversation and fellowship. Everyone seemed to have a great time, so maybe we'll do it again in 2008. We'll let you know in future Flash! newsletters so you can join in the fun! About \$800 was raised which will be matched by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.



—Pastor Lang

posts Reentry After-Care stories on four of the hole markers, so players can read about the success of the Reentry AfterCare Ministry of CoDR.



Pastor Carroll Lang got his arm twisted by event organizer, Kathy Hansel, so he paired up

Blessings Beyond Belief

Since I arrived at FDCF in 2004, God has blessed me beyond belief. I've prayed to God and have seen my prayers answered right in front of my own eyes. James 4:2 says you do not have, because you do not ask God. I know that all things are possible with God (Mark 10:27).

He continues to bless me in ways that He sees fit for me. Since He is in charge, I don't question Him when I know that He is trying to get my attention, and tell me something.

My most recent blessing was when I was the Rector for our latest Brothers in Blue weekend June 7-10, 2007. As Rector, I was in charge of keeping us on the timed schedule, and making sure nothing on the schedule was overlooked. This was the first time that an inmate has been Rector for the weekend here at FDCF.

Usually in the past, we've had more than one Pastor available for the section in our worship service that calls for laying on of hands by the pastors, and declaring forgiveness for all of our sins. However this weekend Pastor Lang was the only pastor available. Pastor Lang reminded us that it is only God Himself who forgives our sins, but He told us all as His followers to forgive them all their sins. Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." As President of our inside church council, I was blessed and honored to stand on the opposite side of our altar to lay my hands on the heads of those wishing for God's forgiveness, and proclaim "In obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins."

In John 19:11 Jesus said, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."

Remember, it is God alone who forgives. As it says in the Lord's Prayer, (Luke 11:4) Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

—Tony Halsrud, FDCF Inside Church Council President



Welcome!
The Church of the Damascus Road

Try our Sundays.
They're better than
Baskin-Robbins.

Memory Verses July

But whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm (Proverbs 1:33).
For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self discipline (2Timothy 1:7).
God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).
Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe (Proverbs 29:25).

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Damascus Road
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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.

Rev. Carroll Lang, Pastor
Kyle W. McMenemy, 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.

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239 North 11th Street
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Reentry AFTERCARE!

It's a Ministry, Not a Program

AfterCare Observation

Over this past weekend I was blessed to be able to attend an AfterCare training in Pleasant Hill, Iowa. Pastor Arnette Pint from Women at the Well Hosted and organized Training on Reentry AfterCare, supported by Prison Congregations of America and Facilitated by Paul Harrison representing The Church of the Damascus Road, the church that I was blessed to be a member of while at the Fort Dodge Correctional Facility. It did my heart good to see diverse people from different walks of life come to this meeting with a desire to reach out to the incarcerated, an often forgotten and misunderstood group. They are not all to be placed in one category, since they are all as different as night and day. They are of every age group, some rich, some poor, white collar crimes, drugs, violent crimes, and of all race and creed. Just because they made a mistake that placed them in prison, society has deemed them undesirable and many have chosen to label them unacceptable and unworthy to ever receive forgiveness.

I can attest from experience how hard it is for those who are released from prison to make it on the outside and receive the opportunity to make a living. Many doors have been slammed in my face when I sought employment, and are still being closed as I seek out a job that will provide me the opportunity to give my wife and daughter only what other families take for granted. Even though it has been almost 8 years since my arrest and I have proven that I am a changed man it makes no difference, once a felon always a felon. I can only thank God that He will never leave me nor forsake me and I shall never be alone. No matter how hard it seems or how frustrated I may get, what Jesus gave me shall never be taken away.

I was blessed to meet Rev. Ed Nesselhuf, the director of Prison Congregations of America, a man that I had heard so much about while I attended The Church of the Damascus Road and never had the pleasure to meet. He used a scripture reading and applied it to the aftercare ministry in a way that I felt was quite applicable. This is what he read.

Leviticus 16:20-22

²⁰ "When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹ He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

This is how the Israelites dealt with their sins, they placed them on the goat and the goat carried them away. This is where the term "scapegoat" originated. After this they sacrificed a bull and a goat and then proceed to burn the offerings. Then Aaron and the man who released the goat bathed and changed their clothes. This was all done to completely eliminate the presence of any sin.

Reverend Nesselhuf made the statement that if the goat would have returned the people would begin to panic. As a society we send our goats (offenders) off to prison and after doing this we feel cleansed but the thing is that between 95 and 98% of them will return, and how will society deal with them? Society's reaction is to separate themselves from those that have been released so as not to let themselves be 'contaminated.' In Iowa alone there are just under 9000 people in the prison system not counting how many are sitting in the county jails, and around 29,000 who are on parole or probation.

The problem is that too many will come back bitter instead of better because they have so little to come back to except un-forgive-



ness, job discrimination, stereotyping, and persons who consider those who made mistakes and went to prison as not worthy of a second chance. Temptations and re-acclimating oneself back into an environment that is foreign to you, especially if you have been gone for a number of years, is hard enough without having the deck stacked against you, ultimately setting you up for failure. If you continue to repeatedly tell someone that they are no good then they will feel that way and give up trying to change.

It is very important that society addresses this problem or else everyone will end up paying in the long run; increased prison population due to repeat offenders, housing costs (it costs about \$30,000 a year to house an inmate), crime will increase, children will be separated from their parents and are often destined to follow in the parents' footsteps. Let's face it there are a great deal of talented people who have a lot to contribute to the world if they only are given the chance. Sure, there are those that choose never to change, but what about those who have changed — don't they deserve a chance? Having someone there to show you a better way, and model another way to live other than what you have been taught, can make a difference. Education is often an obstacle that can be overcome with the help of people willing to guide an ex-offender through the red tape involved in getting the help they need. Sometimes letting someone know that they are valued and that you care may prevent them from giving up before they even get started.

I hope that you will have it in your heart to forgive and give those that have made mistakes a second chance rather than label them unworthy of the opportunity to prove that they have changed and are worth something to themselves, their families and to society. We know how much they mean to God because God does not show favoritism (Acts 10:34) and Jesus died for all. I know where my heart is now, compared to what it used to be, and how hard it is to overcome the obstacles that are in my path due to something I already did my time for, and something that God has already forgiven me. I will close with this observation "God forgives but unfortunately society does not."

—Robert L. Johnson II

The Church of the Damascus Road
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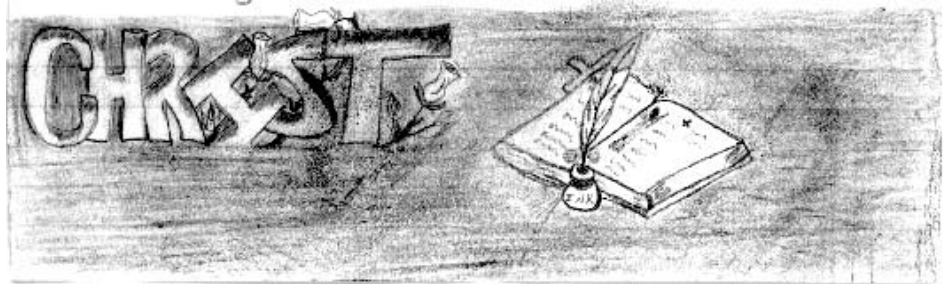
July 2007

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



Drawings by Stanley Richard Davis, Jr., FDCF



<http://www.frontiernet.net/~codr/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.

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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

Worship & Bible Study

FDCF Fort Dodge

6:45pm 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