

The Church of the Damascus Road *Flash!*

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Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA

Dreaming of Golf

Here I sit, wrapped in a blanket, drinking hot chocolate and watching the snow fall. What a pretty sight. But all I can think about is the green. Yes, I am dreaming about the greens of the golf course during our annual golf tourney held for Church of the Damascus Road. We hold this golf tournament each year to help raise funds to help us spread the word of God to our fellow men who happen to be incarcerated. I am hoping that people are planning ahead to help us with this project. We ask for sponsors and people to offer gifts for the winners. I can just see me trying to hit that ball across the pond. Oooopppssss! In it went again.



Back to the reality of the weather outside. I would just like to ask that all who read this will plan to attend our annual tournament at 9:00am on June 27, 2009 at Oakridge Recreation in Goldfield, Iowa. I would like for anyone who would like to help us plan this event to give either Pastor Lang or me a call. Now, on with "whose turn is it to shovel the walks this time?"

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Inside the Flash!

- Page 2 - I Never Knew You
- Page 2 - Brothers in Blue
- Page 3 - Reentry Transition Director
- Page 3 - When I Get Out
- Page 4 - Artwork
- Page 4 - Worship Schedule
- Page 4 - Invite the NEW Pastor

From the Pastor

It was with joy, hope, and prayer-filled anticipation that I accepted the call of the councils to serve as the second pastor of the Church of the Damascus Road on 02/06/09. I completed my ministry with the 3 churches of Trinity



Pastor Paul E Stone

United Lutheran Ministries in Eagle Grove, Vincent, and Thor on March 8th. I began two weeks of training with the Iowa DOC in Des Moines on March 9th. I began my "internship" with Pastor Carroll Lang on March 26th. Thank God this faithful servant who has served as the congregation's only pastor for the last (and first) 11+ years agreed to show me the ropes (no pun intended) through April 10th.

I have learned a great deal, but I'll be learning for a long time to come, from Carroll, members, and supporters on the "outside".

This is a great ministry. I am honored to be its pastor, but I will continually pray for God's guidance and yours. May we grow in faith, hope, love, and faithfulness together.

With you on the journey,

—Pastor Paul

Pastor Lang Retirement

Pastor Lang retired April 11th, but he will be volunteering for Reentry Transition, so he will be around for awhile. The Langs will continue to live in the Fort Dodge area and be active in Fort Dodge community activities.

A retirement party is planned for Saturday, May 23, from 2-5pm with a short program at 3pm at St. Mark's Episcopal, 1007 1st Avenue South, Fort Dodge!

June 22 will mark the 40th Anniversary of ordination for Pastor Lang

Remember

Don't Forget Us

These are tough economic times and we all need to conserve, but this ministry to those who are in prison, in order to continue, will need supporters to go the extra mile by continuing their support during this recession.

The members of our congregation are paid 28¢ to 40¢ per hour working at jobs inside the prison, so they cannot support the congregation with their offerings.

Our new pastor, Paul Stone, needs assurance that CoDR will be supported, so he can concentrate fully on his ministry inside the two prisons.

We are truly thankful for the generous support we have been given and look forward to ministering on your behalf.

—The CoDR Outside Church Council



Reentry Transition teams from Northwest Iowa met at the Holstein United Methodist Church on March 29 to refresh themselves in skills needed and to reorganize for the future. Teams represented include Sioux City, Fort Dodge, Holstein, Lytton, Humboldt, Ames, and an interested potential team from Remsen. We will have these gatherings frequently. See page three for more on Reentry Transition.

I Never Knew You

Will the Lord say to you, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness”? Recently I was in fellowship with several members of the Lord’s Church. They were in a deep discussion about a former prison inmate who was recently released to begin his new life in Christ outside the confinement of 40-foot walls and razor wire. I specify new life in Christ, because during this particular individual’s confinement the Lord utilized that time for divine discipline and ordination, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-19).

The Lord’s discipline during this inmate’s incarceration was uniquely (paradoxically) used for divine edification: a much deeper understanding of the truth of God’s Word (I Corinthians 2:10-14). The inmate received a spiritual education provided by a seminary that was ordained by the Lord to educate inmates through an external degree program, “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18).

As this conversation continued it took a turn from one of mercy and grace by the Lord, to one of sinful disobedience by numerous members of church congregations who ostracized the former inmate as he came before them seeking a position as a preacher; a minister of reconciliation for the Lord. These congregation members turned this man of sincere repentance and righteousness away with contempt and disdain. These self-proclaimed children of God did not provide this reconciled prodigal son the same love and compassion that Christ provided them

when he sacrificed himself on the Cross to eradicate the sins that condemned them to an eternity in the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:14-15). This reconciled child of God sought to minister reconciliation to these self-righteous church members, as a Preacher ordained by the providence of God, yet they turned him away considering him to be socially unacceptable: an unwelcomed minister of reconciliation for the Lord!

Rather than become involved in the conversation I chose to sit and listen; feeling extremely sorry for the man who was continuing to be condemned, even though he had been released from the Department of Corrections. This is a very real problem in our society today, one reason that former prison inmates (male and female) feel so alienated by society, choosing to return to criminal behavior, living down to the social stigma placed upon them by members of society who consider themselves righteous in the eyes of God.

I felt frustration, even anger toward those who condemned this man for sins that Christ died to redeem him from when he came to repentance and belief in the sovereignty of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10).

It was then that the Spirit of the Lord placed it upon my heart that those who held this spiritually and physically liberated man in contempt were in a prison of their own; a spiritual prison of self-righteousness and self-exaltation. Those who consider themselves superior to others have a very distinct message from the Lord, “for if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing he deceives himself” (Galatians 6:3).

These words were God breathed and penned by the Apostle Paul; formerly Saul of Tarsus. Saul was a Hellenistic Jew who persecuted Christians. Saul vehemently condemned Christianity and all who served the Lord through faith and obedience. It was Saul who stood by while one of God’s most outspoken advocates, Stephen, was stoned for his faith and support of the “Good News” of Jesus Christ (Acts 7:54-60).

However, God raised Saul of Tarsus from the spiritual tomb of eternal death and

damnation to become a mighty messenger for Christ, penning 13 Epistles in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul tells us, after his transformation on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3-9), and subsequent conversion (Acts 9:17-20), that, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24).

Paul’s words are not to be misconstrued — “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” — yet, there are those self-righteous men and women who consider their sins to be “less sinful” before God. Unfortunately, so few get the message that, “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15).

Who will the Lord look upon as being justified, the church members who gather weekly to praise and worship the Lord in vain (holding a man of sincere repentance in contempt of forgiven sins by the Lord Jesus Christ); or the former prison inmate who now proclaims the “Good News” as a reconciled son of God seeking to minister reconciliation to those bound by sin?

To whom will the Lord say, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Seek the righteousness of God’s beloved Son Jesus Christ, “those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2). For Jesus tells us, “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matthew 7:2).

In his service,

—Matt Hayes



Brothers in Blue

Brothers in Blue is scheduled for June 11-14 at FDCF. The teams are being assembled, and will be ready to conduct the weekends.

To attend the weekend, see Pastor Stone for an application. The deadline is May 28 at FDCF, no exceptions.

The next Brothers in Blue at NCCF will be October 8-11. Applications will begin in June, and the deadline will be October 1.

The Church of the Damascus Road Flash!

Issue 12.3

May 2009

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. Paul Stone, Pastor
Micheal Feldpausch, Editor
Carroll Lang, Editor

Anyone wishing to be on our mailing list may send name, address, and phone numbers to The Church of the Damascus Road, Fort Dodge, IA 50501, 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 50501

Only the Name's Changed

Now that Pastor Lang is retired, he will spend more time with reentry aftercare, especially in NW Iowa. We are changing our focus to the transitional aspect of our ministry. As you can see on the right, we call it Reentry Transition, since our Mission Statement is: **"We, the faith community, assisting ex-offenders to make a successful transition into society."**



The ministry has the same focus, only the name has changed. We will provide training for teams of 4-7 persons in a community to form a covenant of friendship with an ex offender for up to a year to help him or her make a new life. If you and your community have not formed such a team, talk it over with your friends and give Pastor Lang a call at 515-571-6566 or email at CDLNg@aol.com.

—Rev. Carroll Lang, NWI Director



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Reentry Transition

When I Get Out

My first time down, I was young and did what I thought I had to do to fit in. I ended up stretching it out for four and a half years. I knew I was doing wrong, but I told myself I would change when I get out.

To make a long story short, I didn't. Worse yet, when I came back, I continued to do the only way I knew how.

It is so easy to get stuck in the cycle, when you are always gonna do something. I'm gonna change. I'm gonna settle down. I'm gonna start a family. I'm gonna go to college.

I used to tell people that I was just a boy when I went to prison and that I was forced to grow up fast. The truth is, I never really grew up. I just got older. I got stuck in the prison mentality. I was institutionalized and coming back wasn't as much punishment as it was intended to be. I knew how to do time. Doing time was easy. I didn't know how to live free. Prison, like drugs, was just another escape from life, from having to deal with anything that was too much for me, which was about everything, because in order to do time, you remove emotions from the equation. So when I was out, I didn't know how to be a man. I was still incarcerated, just not in a cell. I could rationalize anything and I had an excuse for everything. When things were going good, I would self-destruct. I would start plenty of things, but I finished very little. I started school a few times. I started a family. I started going to church.

I got tired of the fast life, the drugs, the disappointments, and the betrayals. I made some positive friends and started to make some changes in my life.

I was going to church twice a week, Bible study, and I was helping to remodel the church I was going to. The pastor there has a past and he gave me hope, but I was stubborn. He told me I had to surrender my life to God. I guess to me that made me think of God as an authority figure and I was tired of someone else always having control of my life. I wanted control. Only, I'm not good at that and I was back in prison once again.

Still that wasn't enough. It's kind of funny to me to look back at my past and see how much it actually took for me to quit putting off changing and to actually do it. How many people I had to hurt. How much time I had to be away from my family, my children. All of the broken hearts and love lost. All of the burned bridges.

I don't really know what changed this time to make me want to change. I lost someone that I thought I would spend the rest of my life with. Not lost as in died, lost as in she got smart and got out when she had the chance. I don't blame her, there was no future with the man that I was, because I was a man only because I was old, not because I was grown. But I was used to losing people.

I've been locked up for more than a dozen years out of the last fifteen, so it wasn't just the time.

My fears were: 1) Growing old in prison. 2) Not caring about growing old in prison. I am only 32, but I can count on one hand the roommates I've had that are older than me, since I've been locked up this time. So to be honest with myself, I've already grown old in prison.

I don't know why I "wrestled with God,"¹ but now that I have surrendered everything to him, I am actually living life. Which may sound crazy to some, since I am still in a cell, but to those who know the Lord, they know what I mean by living life.² I'm in a cell, but I am free. I have finally become the man that my body has grown into by the grace of God. I gave it all to him and I keep giving everything to him. All my problems. All my decisions. All my praise. They're all his. I have finally become someone the people in my life can be proud of, but I take no credit. My Savior is responsible, all I did was surrender. I had made that out to be such a hard thing to do, but in reality it was the easiest thing I have ever done. Jesus didn't put off dying for me, so I stopped putting off living for him.

When I get out, I will live the life I've started living in this prison. The changes came easy, because my faith gave me the will and God answered my prayers. That's what he does. What we do is wrestle with him, until we surrender, and then we can live life instead of merely existing and we can walk down the path he has set for us instead of getting stuck in the cycle.

—by Chad Bechtel

1. Genesis 32:22-32 – Jacob wrestled with a man (God) all night.

2. Genesis 28:16 – "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."

The Church of the Damascus Road
 239 North 11th Street
 Fort Dodge, IA 50501

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Thanks for
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May 2009

Invite the NEW Pastor

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, Fort Dodge, IA 50501, 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



John Reynolds FDCF 2009



And now these remain:
 faith, hope and love.
 But the greatest of
 these is ...
 Chad
 2-27-09

Chad Bechtel FDCF 2009



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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 Paul Stone

Worship & Bible Study

FDCF Fort Dodge

6:30pm WednesdaysHoly Communion
 6:30pm FridaysPrayer Team
 7:00pm FridaysBible Study

NCCF Rockwell City

6:30pm TuesdaysBible Study
 6:30pm ThursdaysHoly 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.