

The Church of the Damascus Road Flash!

Volume 21
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Fort Dodge & Rockwell City, IA

Angels in Action

A Perspective on Punishment, July 4, 2000

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)

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



Lonely?

Are you lonely? Has your family deserted you? Have those old friends from the streets left you high and dry? If there's one thing in this world we can count on it's this: people will let us down. No matter how good our intentions are, we always end up disappointed with each other. It isn't on purpose, it just happens. Sooner or later someone ends up alone and forgotten. Maybe that someone is us.

Good news is, the Bible talks about this in Proverbs 18:24 – "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Someone who never leaves or forsakes us. This friend is someone who is faithful and true and always has our best interest in mind. This friend is Jesus Christ. Having a relationship with him will change our whole outlook on life and will give us confidence and peace we have never known. He is not only a friend who can help us with our problems, but he is a friend who died for us. He even has the power to change who we are.

1 John 1:9 states, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Do we need a friend who will love us, help us, and never leave us?

Dear Lord, we are sinners and all alone. We turn from our past loneliness and reach toward a life-changing relationship with you. Please come into our hearts, clean us up, and make us the people you planned for us to be. I thank you, God, for your blood that makes us new. We invite you, O God, to be our friend and savior. In Jesus' name. Amen

—Tony Steece, NCCF 5-28-10

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CoDR Foundation

The Church of the Damascus Road has ministered to inmates in prisons in Rockwell City and Fort Dodge for 20 years. Even though several churches, community members, and some corporations have been generous supporters over the years, the Outside Church Council of CoDR has consistently faced financial challenges. In order to prepare for the future, a new Foundation has been established. Five members of the Board of Directors of the Foundation have been designated by the outside council: Rev. Paul Stone, Pastor of CoDR; Rev. Jim Davis, Pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Gowrie; Diane Vavak, Vice President of the Outside Church Council of CoDR, a member of St. Paul Lutheran and Presbyterian Church, Rockwell City; Connie Gustafson, a member of Grace Lutheran, Fort Dodge; and Jim Willis, member of Emanuel St. John Lutheran Church, Lytton. The directors are currently holding monthly meetings, developing Bylaws, and plans for a fund raising campaign. The fund will be held 'in perpetuity' and no distributions will be made until at least \$50,000 has been raised. As in the case of an Endowment Fund, distributions will be made from a percentage of the value of the total fund, and distributions will be made to support the financial needs of CoDR.

—Jim Willis

Foundation Board of Directors

Positions approved by the CoDR Outside Church Council on August 21, 2017:

Ongoing TermCoDR Vice President (presently Diane Vavak)

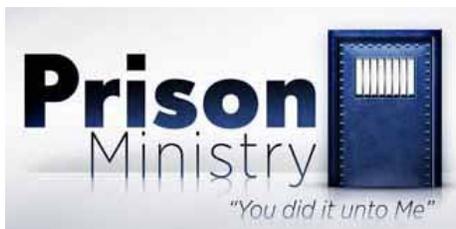
4 year termJames Willis

3 year termPastor Jim Davis

2 year termConnie Gustafson

1 year termPastor Paul E. Stone

Henceforth, terms will be for four years, one Board Member elected each year.



I'm for Prison Ministry

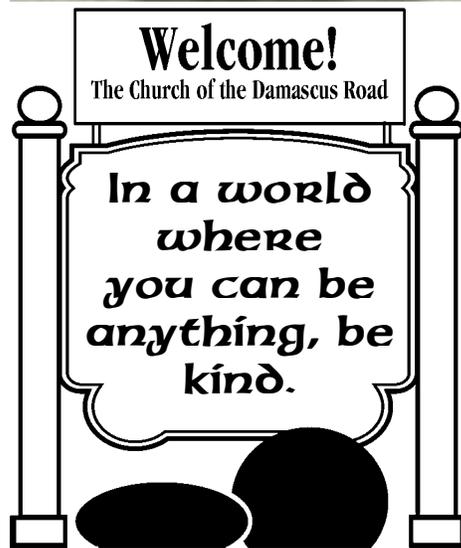
Here's why I'm committed to prison ministry. In the hook of Titus Chapter 3:3-7 it reads. *At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of any righteous thing that we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of re-birth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life."*

Whenever I read this passage of Scripture I am reminded of my former life style as a career criminal. But all that has changed dramatically since Jesus has come and taken abode within my heart. I am grateful to know him as my Lord and Savior. I hear from many regarding their disbelief in the degree of changes they now witness in my life. They question how someone who has demonstrated such an unholy and unloving heart as I have in the past can become so humble and compassionate towards others, especially those who are often looked upon as society's outcast. I give all the credit to the one true and great God the Father in Heaven.

God has told us in His Word, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is His purpose for all of us. What he has done for me he will do for you!

One of the most gratifying aspects of prison ministry is having the opportunity to work with other inmates and ex inmates who have undergone the same type of life changing transformation. I know first hand of the many who feel they have no worth. They believe that the lack of verbal and literary skills prevents them from being effective witnesses for Jesus and productive members within the communities where they live. To these individuals I say, "It's not your ability to speak eloquently or to quote numerous Bible verses that will make you effective in your life and walk with Christ. It is the evidence of a God-changed life. A life that proves a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit has occurred." It is for this purpose that I am committed to this ministry to the prisoner. **To God Be the Glory!!!**

—Eric L. Jones FDCF



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Thanks!

—Carroll Lang, Editor

The Church of the Damascus Road Flash! Issue 21.1 January 2018 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 Carroll Lang, Editor Judy Lang, Proofreader Anyone wishing to be on our mailing list may send name, address, and phone numbers to the address below, or by e-mail at: DamascusCh@aol.com. The Flash can also be sent to your email address. Our office is at St. Olaf Lutheran Church. The Church of the Damascus Road 239 North 11th Street Fort Dodge, IA 50501 Phone: 515-955-3579

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Thank You
FOR YOUR HELP

REentry
integration

“It’s a Ministry,
Not a Program”

Enabling or Helping?

How do we know when we have crossed the line between helping someone reintegrate into our communities and instead have enabled them to fall back into old habits, and/or using drugs or other substances? It’s a fine line and can be very deceptive. Paul Abbott, at a recent team meeting, handed out 20 questions to ask ourselves. Among them are the following examples: Have you repeatedly loaned your returning citizen money which has never been repaid? Have you avoided talking about negative issues because you feared his response? Have you given him “one more chance” and then another and another?



Rev. Carroll Lang

As disciples of Christ, we want to help and be loving, knowing that many who have been incarcerated have never experienced the kind of love we show them, but it’s pretty easy to “cross the line” between loving and enabling.

Christ modeled forgiveness for us when Peter asked: “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” In other words, don’t keep counting, just forgive. But even though we forgive, we need to be ready with “tough love” as well, or the returning citizen will not be helped to make changes in his life. There need to be consequences or no lesson will be learned: “If you continue to do this action, then this is the action we will do or not do.”

Remember, it’s not failure on the part of the team. As long as you are loving the returning citizen you are fulfilling the command of Christ to “love one another as I have loved you.” The real “failure” is that our society is woefully short of effective recovery programs or programs that prepare returning citizens for reentry before they are released. I guess that means we need to pray about that lack of recovery and educational programs, and then plead that cause to medical institutions and officials in our communities.

God bless your ministry of Reentry Reintegration,

—Pastor Carroll Lang, Reentry Reintegration Coordinator



Covenant of Grace

Has been made for all of us
So that every race
Could be blessed from God above.

This is what He’s planned for us
A never-ending love
Compassion from the beginning
For once and for all.

So don’t believe for hardship
And don’t believe for pain
Just speak unto the mountains
And believe in what you say.

In our words there is power
Over sin and death
That’s how God ordained it
So enter in His rest.

—William E Bell

No Regrets

Don’t cry for me
for I have no regrets
the pleasures of my youth
I cannot forget

Fond memories
of days gone by
always there behind me
this I can not deny

It is through the grace of God
I know I shall endure
cleansed of worldly sin
this I know for sure

When all is said and done
I know where I will be
in the arms of Jesus
throughout all eternity

—Robert L. Johnson II

Invite the Pastor

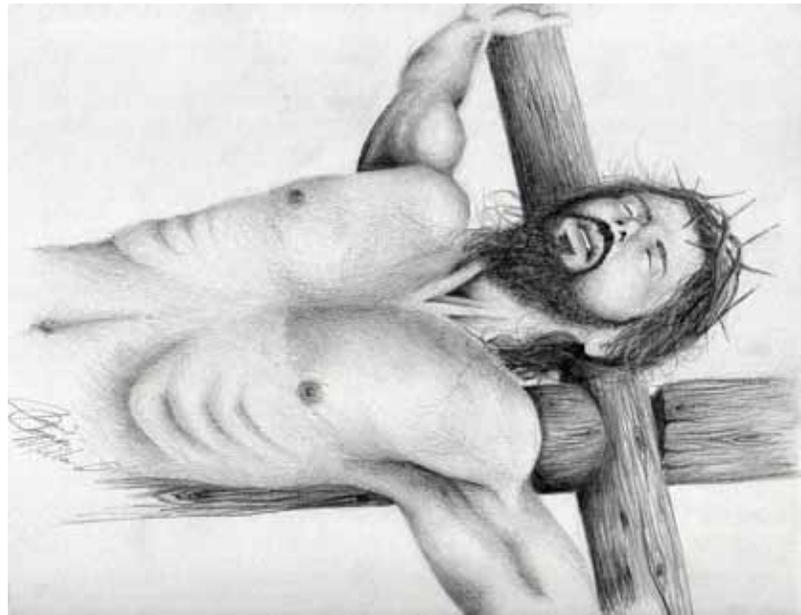
Our worship services are on weeknights so that people on the outside can worship with the inmates and not miss worship in their own congregations. And this enables the pastor to visit congregations on Sundays. He can give a brief update on the ministry, a sermon, a children's sermon, an adult forum, a cross-generational class session, or any or all of the above, and is open to suggestions. Just needs time to prepare.

Call 515-955-3579 or write to The Church of the Damascus Road, 239 N 11th St, Fort Dodge, IA 50501 or email <DamascusCh@aol.com> to arrange for a visit.

Inmates:

You can have your original artwork in this space in the Flash; simply hand your art to Pastor Stone. It will be scanned and then returned to you.

Jessie Willard 2017



Artists' Corner

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January 2018

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.



www.codrcare.org

CoDR on FaceBook

The Church of Damascus Road is now on Facebook. There are currently a few videos and pictures and will be updated when more are available. Also check for updates for upcoming events. To LIKE us, log into Facebook with the link <https://www.facebook.com/thechurchofthedamascusroad>

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David Wesley...Terence Walker-ST/VP/P&W
Josh Alfredson-P&W.....James Rainer-Lib
Charles Foster

Weekly Schedule

6:30pm TuesdaysBible Study
6:30pm Thursdays.....Holy Communion

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Michael GoehringKelton Houts
Lamont Prince.....Richard Dodd
Jeffrey Littrel

Weekly Schedule

6:30pm WednesdaysHoly Communion
6:30pm FridaysBible Study

A note to secretaries and pastors –

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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.

Thank you for your support.

— Pastor Paul Stone