

CELEBRATION FELLOWSHIP

bound but free

Inside Member Testimony

by Rick Carpenter

"I was a straight up LOSER! For over 40 years I have not really been a FREE MAN. I've been in and out of jails and prisons or on parole. I was filled with hatred, I was vindictive, and I had no respect for anyone, especially the law. I was anti-social to say the least. I only care about ME! I've been married three times and it was me that destroyed each marriage by cheating, lying, or the use of alcohol and drugs. The only time I ever went to church was when I broke into one to steal what I could. I've currently been incarcerated since October of 1989 for a crime I did not commit. I became even harder and colder towards others when these charges were originally dismissed yet they found me guilty!

In about December 2011 I met a guy named Jim in my housing unit. He was a member of Celebration Fellowship prison congregation and he spoke to me in love and respect. He explained to me that we are all born with a sin nature. Wow, that sure made me think. I began to wonder how in the world a man like me could get into heaven. I know when people die they end up some place, and hell was not a place I wanted to be. Jim explained how Jesus Christ paid the price for my sins. 'But,' I responded, 'I have even stolen from churches!' Jim again reminded me that, 'Jesus paid for your sins.'

I cried out to God to forgive me. I was not sure I was forgiven for a while, but the more I read the

Bible, the more I saw the truth: I was saved and forgiven!

In June of 2012, Pastor Andy of Celebration Fellowship, a real church we have in prison, baptized me. He literally dumped jugs of water on me. Somehow, being baptized in front of all those people made me feel I was a new man and now dozens of people knew it too.

Since I became a Christian I can't wait for church services. Hearing the Bible being preached recharges my batteries. My vulgar language is now sweet with God's Word. I've written some Christian songs, I play my guitar and I smile a lot.

I hope my true story will touch your heart enough to let Jesus into your heart!"

praise & prayer

see our website to access the weekly prayer update

We give thanks to the Lord for:

- establishing a new prison congregation at Handlon Correctional Facility (MTU).
- the opportunity to provide pastoral care at Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility (IBC).
- the five recent baptisms and one profession of faith at IBC.
- continued growth in the Servant Leadership teams (church councils).
- the many volunteers who give of themselves for the kingdom within prison.
- the support of many individuals, partnering churches, and West Michigan CRC Classes.

We ask the Lord to:

- protect and bless brother Carl as he deals with cancer treatments. May his request for early release be endorsed.
- guide Pastor Andy, the Steering Team, and the Servant Leadership Teams as they seek God's will.
- care for several brothers who have been released or moved to other facilities.
- provide more volunteers for worship at IBC.
- provide support, encouragement, and peace for CF members who are struggling in their walk.
- provide wisdom and grace for CF members who are working to repair relationship with their loved ones.



Outside Member Corner

by Glen Van Andel

In his book *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby writes:

“Knowing God does not come through a program, a study, or a method. Knowing God comes through a relationship with a Person. This is an intimate love relationship with God. Through this relationship, God reveals himself, His purposes, and His ways; and he invites you to join him where he is already at work. When you obey, God accomplishes through you something only he can do. Then you come to know God in a more intimate way by experiencing God at work through you.” (p. 2)

God is at work in the Celebration Fellowship prison congregation and when I responded to his call to join him in this work he began to reveal himself in some surprising ways. Most significantly, I began to understand more clearly my own need for God’s grace and forgiveness. A very poignant moment for me was during a Communion Service at Bellamy Creek several months ago. I was sitting between a couple of inmate brothers who had done some significant crimes and I realized that our standing before God was all the same. Guilty as charged. Although my crimes are not as public, they are just as condemning before a holy God.

Ps. 103: 8-12 is just as applicable for me as it is for my inmate brothers.

The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions
from us.

I am grateful that God is using this ministry to reveal himself to me and draw me closer to himself.

Ministry Update

by Andy Hanson



Prison is a place of constant personal crisis including struggles with guilt, addiction, family conflict, money, fear of violence from others within the prison, or simply chronic loneliness. But, given the limited access to our inside members, I wondered how I as pastor could support, encourage and respond to the constant needs for spiritual guidance and care.

After participating in a Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLT), I realized that we could use this program to train and equip the inside members of Celebration Fellowship to minister to one another. With the help of the Vanden Bosch Gospel Foundation we were able to implement TLT last month.

A group of inside members at Handlon Correctional Facility successfully launched TLT, the first module of which equips members to use Biblical truths to provide basic pastoral care to each other. Men are reaching out to one another, listening, and helping other inmates deal with crisis situations. Given this pilot effort, we plan to introduce TLT to the entire congregation at Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility next month. Please pray for the continued success of this program, that it might bring about real kingdom change inside these prisons.



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