



Gary Wyder
Prison Evangelist

December, 2008

The Florida Prison Evangelist

"...He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners..." Luke 4:18

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LAKE BUTLER CHURCH OF CHRIST

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"What Happens When They Get Out?"

That question is often asked of me. I often respond with this question; "Since the released is now a Christian, whose responsibility is it to help them?" We wish that all Christians would remain faithful. 113 have been baptized as of December 3rd. It is particularly difficult upon release for those converted in prison. Their old environment was often part of the problem. Returning there can bring overwhelming temptation and challenges they are not yet ready to face.

Transition housing provides an extremely beneficial bridge as "training wheels". While many of those converted in prison know the Bible very well, living it in the real world is vastly different. I am on the board of both House of Hope in Gainesville and Off The Chain in Middleburg. Timothy Nunez graduates today from House of Hope. I have written about that good work before; now more about Off The Chain.

Daryl Townsend, director of Off The Chain, myself and residents of the Transition House have been speaking at Jacksonville area congregations. It has given me precious time to spend with these brothers. The home can house five men, but they currently have six clients and another coming this month. We spoke to raise awareness of their needs, including expansion, mentors for the men, employment opportunities and financial support.



Melvin at release

I met Melvin at RMC (Lake Butler) five years ago. He was active in chapel programs, especially going with Chaplain Hill to minister to men in the hospital. We met weekly to study the Bible. As he got near release, he decided to transfer to Baker so that he could obtain his GED. He was known as an excellent worker in grounds maintenance, so

soon after his transfer, they moved him to the work camp, which had no GED class. Fortunately, Daryl Townsend was conducting a weekly Bible study at the work camp and continued study with Melvin, baptizing him in 06.



Melvin had been in four times previously, and while he has family in Jacksonville, he believed he needed Christian transitional housing. He was approved at Off The Chain, arriving in September 07. Melvin goes weekly for GED classes. He got employment through Mark Donley, a former resident and graduate. He is faithful in Bible studies and attendance. Shortly after I met Melvin, I was very concerned that he would "make it" due to his long history of addiction and prison. Now, I have confidence that he is grounded in the Lord and knows to have accountability and seek advice from Christian brothers.

Rob had a 31 year history of addiction. He violated probation (as addicts always do) and was sentenced to prison. They gave him more time than allowed by the law and he filed to remedy that. Meanwhile, he decided to use his time wisely and got involved in Christian programs at Lawtey. He worked mainly with Denny Freeman, and successfully completed all the New Life Behavior courses Denny taught.



Rob at the House

Rob's case came before the judge in Tampa. The judge was going to release him immediately. Rob did not want to get out in Tampa, knowing that he had no support system there and would return to using and selling drugs. Rob asked the judge for more time. The judge said that was a first and



granted Rob his request. Rob went back to Lawtey, was released from there and came directly to the Transition House this past June. Denny baptized Rob shortly thereafter. Another resident, Zach, helped Rob get employment in construction. Zach was young and headstrong. He left the program after one month. He is now in jail on old charges he never dealt with.

Melvin and Rob are just two of the men dedicated to serving Christ first. If you would like to help this fine work or just schedule a tour, contact Daryl Townsend; 904.631.0351, daryltown@aol.com You will be impressed!

Hope For a Hopeless World

Sam Long, former evangelist at Lake Butler and the one who really jump started the prison work in Florida, is now at Faulkner University. He asked us to conduct a workshop alongside Faulkner's annual lectureship on March 3-5, 09. Alabama has a large network of workers, most connected with the New Life Behavior (NLB) ministry.

John Gallagher, elder and president of Alabama's NLB ministry helped me compose the program. The schedule will be on our website and included in a future newsletter. This is a great opportunity to attract more Christians to the work.

**3rd Annual SE Region Prison/Jail Ministry Workshop
February 20-21, 09 Roebuck Parkway Birmingham, AL**

The Alabama Network of New Life Behavior is sponsoring their third annual workshop. While some classes deal with topics specific to their needs, almost all pertains to all

workers. I learned a lot from the workshop this past February. Check out their website <http://alabamanlbnetwork.homestead.com> October 08 issue, page four for motel info. More will be posted soon.

**Florida Annual Jail/Prison Workshop
Saturday, April 4, 2009**

University City Church of Christ Gainesville, FL

Mark the date on you calendar. More details will follow in upcoming newsletters and on our web page.

We have been helping support the prison ministry of the Sakubva congregation in Zimbabwe. They have done a spectacular job in very difficult circumstances. You have probably read about the dire conditions in their country; many are going hungry. We were able to send a little extra on our



last support
c h e c k .
There are
many ways
you can help
the church

there feed the hungry. If you want to earmark some funds and send to us; please do so. As you can see, they have many young people in the congregation.



Holiday greetings from the Wyders. We went to DC this past April (first time for me).

Many of the monuments speak about our creator and God. Some of the folks that work in DC ought to pay attention.

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