

Gary Wyder
Prison Evangelist

The Florida Prison Evangelist

September, 2007

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

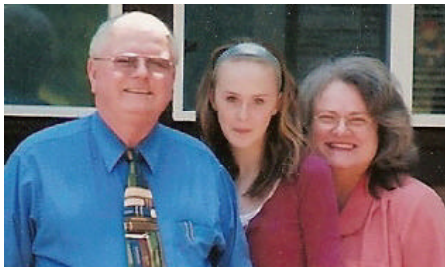
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LAKE BUTLER CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Where is Franklin County, Florida?

Most people in the State of Florida do not have any idea where Franklin County is and may wonder why they should know where it is. Usually the only time it is mentioned is when a hurricane is hitting the Big Bend area. Franklin County has never had a congregation of the Lord's church in it since it was created in 1832 and named for Benjamin Franklin, the famous scientist, printer and author from Pennsylvania. It is one of the largest counties in the state but with a population of only 12,000 so what? But there is something going on there that everyone needs to know about and help in anyway you can.



James and Susan Lee, of Perry, Florida had visited the area with their daughter Samantha and were appalled that there was no congregation anywhere in the county. James is a

1997 graduate of International Bible College (now Heritage Christian University) with a degree in Bible. He has a desire to evangelize and start new works, thus he became involved in stateside mission work mainly in Greene County, Georgia. Due to his zeal for evangelism, he received the Outstanding Christian Service Award.

In Franklin County, they saw an opportunity to take the Gospel where it was not on another man's foundation. (Romans 15:20). With very little support and a lot of faith they made the decision in 2005 to push out in faith and attempt what few would even consider today. They are in East Point, being about midway between the two municipalities: Apalachicola and Carrabelle. They are just North of St. George Island, a popular vacation destination for families.

In July 2006, he heard a presentation about prison ministry given by Tom Dugan of Crestview. With a county jail and state correctional institution (CI) close by, James decided to accept responsibility for 18 Bible Correspondence Courses (BCC) at Franklin CI and also contacted the Chaplain at the facility to become a Chapel Volunteer, teach a class, conduct a worship

service or do one-on-one counseling. Since there were few volunteers working in the facility, James soon was teaching a class at the facility. BCC's began to increase and in December of 2006, they received over 60 new enrollments and now have topped 500 enrolled. Since October 2006 he has baptized 59 inmates.

The community work has also grown. A house was rented and converted into a meeting place. Since then, CNN aired a program listing the top 10 places in the USA to live with Franklin County included on this list. This area of Florida is now known as the "forgotten coast." After hours of door knocking, talking to people on the street, hearing of what this small group was doing, 5 have returned to worshipping after becoming unfaithful to the Lord. Three have been baptized and their highest attendance has been 27, with an average of 16.

Now an opportunity has opened for this man of God to become involved the Franklin County Jail. This will be working with people who work and live in Franklin County and are in trouble. Most turn to the Lord when they get into trouble and unless taught the truth, jailhouse preachers will have them saying the "Sinner's Prayer" and believing the devil's lie that they are saved forever.

It has been a struggle, but with faith and some pretty supportive people, especially his wife, Susan, the work continues to grow and the Lord provides. But it is far from easy and they do a lot of praying, especially at the end of the month, as to whether the rent can be paid, or if they have enough to pay their own land taxes, are out of paper & toner, and need gas to travel to teach another soul.

If you can help these wonderful Christians, who are trying to harvest a field in full bloom, look at their website: <http://churchofchristfranklincy.org> or send monies to either the Franklin County Church of Christ, Post Office Box 456, East Point, FL 32328 or the Stewartville Church of Christ, Post Office Box 93, Cloverdale, AL 35617 and help this work. They are doing a great job and need our financial support as well as special prayers.

You are invited to their Gospel meeting with Parker Henderson on December 9-12.



Grace In A Prison Cell

Robert Smith was released from prison in 2000. His criminal record extended over 25 years. Robert became a Christian at Union Correctional and never looked back to his old ways. Robert was later approved as a volunteer and came back to Union, sharing with the brothers the mighty grace our Lord had bestowed upon him.

Robert just completed a book entitled, Grace In A Prison Cell. The book tells his life story, emphasizing how the love of Jesus mends broken lives. All proceeds from the book go to House of Grace a re-entry program Robert directs. The book is available in English and Spanish. While you can purchase it through Amazon, if you buy it directly from Robert, more will go to the ministry. The cost is \$9.95 + \$2.50 shipping; Robert Smith PO Box 883 Bonifay, FL 32425. Please order the book!

We are very proud of Robert. Through difficult circumstances, Robert always seeks prayer and advice from men of God. Our Lord does mighty works when we surrender our will to Him. The brothers Robert left at Union are greatly encouraged to know of his progress. It gives them hope and joy.

Damba Church of Christ, Zimbabwe

Gift Mhute is now preaching with the Damba congregation in the Mutare province of Zimbabwe. Their attendance has grown from 75 to 165 since his arrival in May, 2006. Last quarter they had 19 baptisms, seven of which were inmates. They go to the prisons and probation centres (for youth), but also are able to have studies with family members.

Their new meeting house that holds 200 is complete, the area chief attended the opening. We are very thankful to help regularly support this work and provide songbooks for them, yet there are additional needs. If you desire regular reports, contact Gary. Congratulations to brother and sister Mhute on the birth of their daughter; they now have three girls and one boy.

Mark Your Calendars

October 11,12 Dallas, Texas: *New Life Behavior Ministries* This will include the New Life and Christians Against Substance Abuse materials. They offer extremely practical and successful approaches to transformed lives through their curriculum. The materials are used internationally inside and outside of prison. The material is excellent for congregational Bible classes. Get details at www.nlbm.org

April 19, 2008 Fort Myers, Florida; *Statewide Workshop* The Gulfcoast Church of Christ will host Florida's Statewide Workshop. Please note the new date. More information and fliers will be sent. For information; contact Gary Wyder. We look forward to touring their re-entry program, Job's House.

June 11-13, 2008 Detroit Michigan: *35th National Workshop* The Wyoming Avenue congregation is the host. The theme is, *"Unlock The Mind and The Soul Will Follow"*. They desire program suggestions. Contact Al & Tina King, 20231 Wyoming Avenue Detroit, MI 48221; (313) 682-4824 or Sandra Thomas at Sandra_D_Thomas@comerica.com



Fields White For Harvest

Prisons and jails are crying out for religious volunteers. Florida's prison system alone has three faith based prisons, seven other prisons with faith based dormitories accounting for 3564 inmates.

There are plans to transform more beds into faith based facilities. A number of jails have faith based pods.

Life skill programs, Bible based 12 Step such as New Life Behavior and CASA are extremely well received. The Bible is **the** source book for practical, sober, crime free living! These classes give us additional opportunities to reach those that may not come to church of Christ services and they offer the brothers Bible based life skills they desperately need. We rejoice with the 94 who put on Christ in baptism in 2007. Come join us in these exciting classes. Training is provided.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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