



Focus Group Prison Ministries/ 865-694-3837

F.O.C.U.S.

Following Our Choices Unto Success



As you look through this newsletter, I hope you'll join me in giving thanks to God for how He continues to reveal His vision and how He faithfully blesses this ministry. You will read about opportunities for service and find out about an upcoming special event. You will meet one of our students as interviewed and written by another of our students. You will enjoy God-inspired prison poetry and also see the inside perspective of a dedicated volunteer. We are called to be good stewards of our time, but I believe you will feel this has been time well spent. May God bless you and thanks for being a part of our family.

Steve Humphreys

and the FOCUS Staff (David, Elizabeth, Jeff, Scott and Tim)

SAVE THE DATE - NOV. 5TH - WALK-A-THON

The 3rd annual "Changing Lives" Walk-A-Thon will be held on Saturday, November 5th starting at 10am. A picnic and time of fellowship will follow a 1.5 mile fun walk at the beautiful Cove at Concord Park, off Northshore Drive. Students from our program will share what a difference FOCUS has made in their lives and K-LOVE (88.3FM) will be providing music via remote broadcast. We're asking you to get pledges from friends and family to support the various ministries of FOCUS. This is one of two yearly fundraisers and it provides operating capital for the following:

- Transition Program (men & women)
- FOCUS Christian Academy (inside prison)
- Back-to-work Program
- Living Free Friday Night support group
- Work with Knox County Sherriff's Office:
 - Men – Faith based unit
 - Women – Downtown Jail



It's easy to get pledges – 9 out of 10 people will say yes and there is not a minimum amount. Sponsor forms are at www.focusprisonministries.com and 11x17 posters can be picked up at the office for your church. Call Scott Parker for more information 865-466-8424.

EXODUS PROJECT GRADUATION

The first class of students from the Exodus Project graduated October 11th at the Knox County Detention Facility. 22 students completed 90 days of Christian study and life skills classes in this new faith-based pod that began in July. Jeff Hunter, Exodus Project Director, shares that, "God led the way for this first class and has opened the door for the fall semester through His provision." There is an on-going need for instructors and churches that can provide funds for materials and other needs. Contact Jeff at 865-321-5267.



L to R, David Elkins-FOCUS Transition Director, Ira Wishart-Exodus Project Facilitator (back row), Steve Humphreys-FOCUS Executive Director, Jeff Hunter-Exodus Project Director, and Chief Pete Garza-Knox County Sherriff's Office

NEW CREATIONS BY FCA STUDENT TODD GOOD

FOCUS Christian Academy provides a one year Christian Reentry Training Program that primarily serves men and women released from Tennessee prisons and jails. The program is designed to provide residential services for the first six months and support services for the following six months, with full graduation after one year of successful Christian living.

FOCUS students share a desire to break free from the chains of bondage that have inhibited happiness and peace in their lives. Only God has the Power to transform us into a "new creation," through the blood of Christ and deliver true freedom for those who seek Him.

This is the inception of a closer look into the lives of FCA students; into their pasts, their current situation and where they believe God may be leading them.

Charlie Bunder / Arrival: 08-02-2011

"Between the ages of 12-16, I was arrested twelve times for a long list of assorted crimes. At 16 I found myself without a father, mother and expected to take care of my younger brothers and sisters. I entered into the streets looking for something better and began selling drugs, committing robberies and prospered at both," Charlie says. After committing a robbery where two people were injured, Charlie was tried as an adult at the age of 16. After turning 18 he was sent to prison and two years later had to be placed in maximum security custody level at West Tennessee State Penitentiary due to disciplinary problems. He would spend the following 11 ½ years in a 12'x 8' cell by himself. After a year all correspondence from friends and family ceased.

Uneducated, Charlie spent most of his time watching TV and thinking about his life. "Dumbfounded and alone, I finally addressed my illiteracy and taught myself how to read with help from a dictionary and Bible. I didn't believe Scripture, but it was one of the only books I could keep in my cell." At 22 Charlie's ability to read had helped him retain the teachings from the Bible, but only used that knowledge to criticize and judge others, never himself. "I met an inmate who moved into the cell next to me and through the vent connecting us began teaching me what Scripture *really* said about grace, salvation, mercy and eternal life."

In 2003, after receiving word that his father had been killed in a car accident, Charlie was left confused and angry. Unable to understand how and why God would allow such a painful event to enter his life at a time he was making an effort to reach out, he turned his back on Him until 2010. Beginning on July 26 2010, Charlie cried for three days, fasted, and prayed for forgiveness and heard God say that he was forgiven. "I felt peace. I became very motivated and wanted to do better."

Following a transfer to Morgan County on July 24, Charlie found himself with only one

year remaining before his scheduled release. Anxious about the future, he began planning ahead. He tried reaching out to his family, but all letters were returned. Depressed, he sought God's help. He was provided with a list of 49 halfway houses and wrote all of them, but only heard from 32, all denials. In a Knoxville newspaper he read an article where Wayne Smith discussed a 10-year plan to end homelessness in Knoxville. On the verge of being homeless himself in a short time, he wrote Mr. Smith who recommended one transition house that had not been listed on the outdated directory. He also told Charlie God had plan for his life. Soon after, Pastor Bill Wolff paid a visit to Charlie and introduced him to FOCUS. He submitted an application to become a student and prayed for help. "Time was moving fast. With only two months remaining before my release, I still didn't know what was going to happen." It was about that time he received a letter from FOCUS requesting a copy of his disciplinary history. "I knew it was over right then," Charlie said, "But I sent it anyway."

When David Elkins came to the maximum custody unit for a visit to discuss the disciplinary record, Charlie expressed how he felt; "I just wanted an opportunity to prove what God had done in my life." He was accepted by Elkins and all anxieties disappeared. He thanked God for the opportunity and days later walked out of the prison doors. After 13 years of concrete, bars and fences without being able to touch the earth, he immediately fell to the ground and did so with a large smile. With a new appreciation for God's work in nature and in his life, he couldn't get enough of how the grass felt in his hands. Charlie has since entered FOCUS' "Back to Work" program with business partner "The Lawn Doctor" and is surrounded by God's grass on a daily basis.



(Continued next page)



“Since released God has blessed me beyond expectations...He’s reconciled relationships with family, and I’m now surrounded by my new Christian family. Opportunities are coming my way.” Following the completion of his temporary employment, Charlie will have the opportunity to continue working on God’s earth with an offer for

permanent employment at a landscaping company affiliated with “The Lawn Doctor.”

Charlie says God guides him daily and continually reveals his purpose. “God’s will is my plan for the future. I hope to stay involved with FOCUS for a very long time and be used as a vessel to share my testimony with others.”

IN JAIL WITH JESUS

BY DENNIS MCMILLAN

Alone one night
 In shame and despair,
 I looked for help
 But no one was there.
 No future but prison
 No past just pain,
 I looked in the mirror,
 My tears, like rain.
 But justice condemned
 To jail to die;
 My only hope God’s mercy
 For His grace I did cry.
 Then a seed that was planted
 Somewhere long ago,
 In the midst of my sorrow
 began to grow.
 That seed was Christ
 who died for me,
 In jail with Jesus
 I am set free.
 No longer in hell
 Of all my sinful ways
 He made me a new person
 Who loves and prays.
 When someone comes
 And days are passed
 In jail with Jesus
 My hope does last.



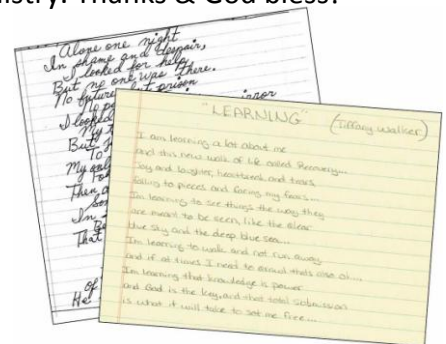
Dennis shared this poem and his story with Chuck Davis, the instructor of ‘Jobs For Life’ at Morgan County. Dennis is a gifted performer, having been the lead singer for *New Faith*, a prison-based Christian group that recorded for Warner Bros. Records in Nashville. Now serving his 33rd year behind bars, keep Dennis in your prayers as he walks hand in hand with our Lord.

LEARNING

BY TIFFANY WALKER

I am learning a lot about me and this new walk of life called recovery...
 Joy and laughter, heartbreak and tears,
 falling to pieces and facing my fears...
 I’m learning to see things
 The way they are meant to be seen, like the clear blue sky and the deep blue sea...
 I’m learning to walk and not run away and if at times I need to crawl that’s also ok...
 I’m learning that knowledge is power and God is the key and that total submission is what it will take to set me free...
 Learning that the life I chose before was a shortcut to my death and that it was only by God’s grace that I was allowed my next breath...
 I can now chase my dreams instead of chasing a high...
 Unsatisfied with just existing...
 I choose to live...
 Instead of choosing to die!

Tiffany, a student in the *Going For The Gold* Pre-release class at Knox County Jail writes, “I really am thankful for the FOCUS program. I am learning so much and growing in Christ. I feel that the FOCUS Program has been and will be vital to my spiritual growth. Please pray for me and for the opportunity to stay connected to this ministry. Thanks & God bless!”



FOCUS GROUP PRISON MINISTRIES

PHONE: 865-694-3837

FAX: 865-675-2744

MAILING ADDRESS:
6300 DEANE HILL DRIVE
KNOXVILLE, TN 37919

PHYSICAL ADDRESS:
11043 TERRAPIN STATION LN.
KNOXVILLE, TN 37932

WEB:
FOCUSPRISONMINISTRIES.COM

E-MAIL:
INFOCUS@TDS.NET



FOCUS PRISON MINISTRIES

Ministry Needs:

1. Donated vehicles for 'Wheels For Success' – a program for FCA graduates
2. Vans to transport our FCA student employees to work
3. Employment Partners for our temp-to-hire program
4. Volunteer drivers, instructors and administrative assistants for FCA transition program
5. Consider becoming a monthly donor, no amount is too small. You can set it up through your bank or with PayPal at our website.

TO LISTEN AND TO LOVE

BY RON CONLEY

Shortly after going to prison with the ministry I was asked if I would go into the maximum security unit at Brushy Mountain. My thoughts on doing that were varied. My first thought was that I was not equipped to go there. I was not "a minister" and what could I say to men that were locked in a box for the rest of their life? What could I offer a man on death row? I was a Christian - what could I say to a Muslim or a member of the Arian Nation? I was not excited about this path God was leading me down. I was having a lot of Moses moments. But I went.

Sometime later someone asked me about why I went into the max unit to minister to "those hopelessly lost". I pondered that question and answered, "I don't know". And today I still don't know, but I do know that I belong there. I used to think that I was going to go there and minister to them, but the more I went, I believe that God sent me there so that they could minister to me. You see, God does not give up on anyone. He has not given up on them, He has not given up on me. We are the ones that give up on each other. So why do I go? I don't know, but God does.

I also am convinced that there is one person God wants to hear me...or more likely for me

to hear him. I will continue to go - God has not given up on them or me.

Am I qualified to minister (are you qualified)? Yes. Do I "know" the Bible and have all the right answers. No. I have walked into prison knowing that I am not equipped to argue all the points of Biblical truths. But God does not call the equipped, he equips the qualified. I am qualified because I have accepted God's love in my life. Christ gave the commandment to love our Lord and God and to love one another. That's all I need to know. Most men in prison have been preached to their whole lives and so I leave the preaching to others. Many have never been loved nor listened to. There is a prison ministry that says listen, listen, love, love. Sounds like a Christian thing to me. I am a good listener. I am qualified for that, God will do the rest.

Yes, you, too, are qualified to go to prison. If you have accepted the love of God and the forgiveness through Christ, then you're ready. Come join us in FOCUS - your life will never be the same.

Ron serves on the FOCUS Board of Directors and started the CEOs Program

UPDATES – WORK PROGRAM/FCA CAMPUS

Our collaboration with Lighthouse Missions and the new Temp-to-hire labor program began in August with our first employment partner, "The Lawn Doctor of East TN." Our students are blessed to have steady work and learn new skills. Our partners know that our workers will arrive together, on time and with a great attitude. We are always searching for more potential employment partners to hire our students. If you can connect us to HR managers or owners, please call David Elkins at 865-661-2236.

God has graciously provided a new home for FOCUS Christian Academy in Knoxville. We will be closing October 21st on 826 Broadway, a three-level apartment building with 4 apartments, 17 bedrooms and approximately 8,000 square feet of space for a church and ministry training area. We are looking for furniture, appliances and for church groups to 'adopt-a-room' as this is a huge facility that will be able to house up to thirty FOCUS Christian Academy students. If you interested in helping, call Steve Humphreys at 865-257-2493.

FOCUS PRISON MINISTRIES

Focus Group Prison Ministries is a nonprofit, 501c(3) organization founded in 1992 to help build a bridge to the community for a segment of society that is often forgotten. We seek to help inmates and their families to know Jesus as their Savior, to mature in their faith, and to help ex-offenders to transition back into society as good citizens through Focus Christian Academy. Our efforts at providing support, hope and encouragement have been recognized by the Tennessee Department of Corrections, twice naming Focus Group Prison Ministries the 'Best Non-Profit of East Tennessee.'