

THE VOICE OF THE YOKE AND THE CROSS

The Voice of the Yokefellow Prison Ministry
in the Lehigh Valley

Yokefellow Prison Ministry
4931 Cypress Street
Allentown, PA 18106

November - December 2011, January 2012

VOL. 9 No. 16

MEET LARRY COLEMAN, NEW STATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE YOKE AND THE CROSS

Purpose: To bring the latest news and events of the Lehigh Valley Council of Yokefellow Prison Ministry to the volunteers, friends, and inmates involved with Yokefellow.

Council Director

Wayne Benjamin
yokefellowpa@juno.com

Council Chairperson

Charles Goodge

Treasurer

William Truckenmiller

www.yokefellowpa.org

Annual Business Meeting

December 15, 2011
7:00 PM

Bethany United Methodist
Church
Brookside Road
Wescosville, PA

AGENDA

Election of:

Council Vice Chairperson
Treasurer
2012 Banquet

Meeting open to council members for voting whose membership dues paid on or before meeting

NOTE

Needed:

New board and committee members. If interested, come to meeting or let us know

Charles Goodge
Council Chairperson Presiding

Wayne Benjamin has asked me to introduce myself to you through an article in this newsletter. That means I need to tell a bit of my story. I grew up on a cattle farm in North Central Nebraska, dubbed the sand hills area. Dad grew his farming operation from chickens and a couple of milk cows to 120 head of Hereford cows, a total operation of over 1000 acres of pasture and meadows including ½ section of irrigated farm group which he rotated with alfalfa and corn. I was a part of that operation practically before I could walk, riding a horse at 3 and driving a tractor at 10 quickly moving onto the hay crew to run the mowing side of the operation. That is where I started. I ended up spending 20 years in parish and 20 years in prison ministry.

You might ask how a young man who headed to college to study agricultural engineering and completing "state farmer status" in the Future Farmers of American would end up spending 20 years in prison ministry as a chaplain. When that was laid on my heart as a 2nd semester junior in college, I did not believe that could be either. Truth is, I had no business being in prison at that time, and I certainly did not look

like a likely candidate for such a thing either to myself or to others no matter what I might do to prepare for such a ministry. God does amazing things. I am sure he has done so with and for you as well. He has taken my naïveté, my lonely growing up years, my love of God and people and transformed that into a channel by which men and women find that they can be loved beyond the world they have known and that God loves them. I don't know this through some prideful understanding of myself. I only know it from those who were in prison who tell me that has taken place. I know that prison ministry, chaplaincy, re-entry and Yokefellowship have become my passion. I was introduced to small group ministry through pastoral care groups we were required to lead in Clinical Pastoral Education I completed working with juveniles who had been adjudicated delinquent. John Mostoller introduced me to Yokefellowship in the early 1970's and Yokefellowship Prison Ministry has changed my life and was an experience that became the stepping stone for pursuing prison chaplaincy. So, here I am 3 years into retirement truly excited that Yokefellowship has asked me to serve as your executive director. I humbly will stand

on the foundations those who have served before me have helped to build. The diverse and dedicated group of volunteers form our larger fellowship across Pennsylvania and into West Virginia and Ohio provide the basis for stepping up to the challenge before us—the challenge to grow this ministry, to double it, to expand it into the community so that Yokefellowship will be there for those returning to the community from their incarceration. We will do this one step at a time as God allows and provides.



Thank you for your involvement and ministry and for the model that your area council provides to us in Yokefellowship.

Larry Coleman,
State Executive Director

CHANGES

Look for changes in officers and board members being voted in with the October 20 and December 15 board meetings and reported in the next issue of the newsletter. With Wayne Benjamin resigning as Council Director and Nick Lovette as Council Chairperson. After 28 years a new Council Director will be announced and also the new Council Chairperson. Wayne will still serve as a volunteer for the Lehigh Valley Council, writing and publishing the newsletter, doing some of the training sessions from March 3 to May 19 plus Don Smarto's schedule in April. Thanks and appreciation go

to Nick Lovette for serving the Lehigh Valley Council for over 10 years. He served seven years as Council Chairperson also he was coordinator of housing units 1A, 4A and 4B with the Friday night Yokefellow meetings, course facilitator of the Directed Life Re-Entry Program, Prison Coordinator and YPM State Board Meeting. It will take several persons to take over and fill all these positions. Thanks again Nick for a fine job and commitment in serving Lehigh Valley Council and the Lord. In addition to Council Director, Council Chairperson, Prison Coordinator and State

Board Member change will take place in Council Vice Chairperson and Secretary. Please pray for Godly wisdom in having the right persons to serve in each of these equally important positions. It will be interesting to say the least, to see who God has in mind to continue the ministry of the Lehigh Valley Council.

All volunteer members are invited to attend and vote at the October and December meetings, 7:00 PM, Bethany Church, 1208 Brookside Road in the parsonage fire-side room.

DID YOU KNOW...?

- On any given day, 2.5 million children have a parent in prison or jail
- One in 15 African American children and 1 in 42 Latino children has a parent in prison, compared to 1 in 111 white children
- 75% of women and 65% of men in prison are parents
- Most prisons are not accessible by any form of public transportation, restricting child-parent visits. In some cases this means children will never visit their parents
- 25% of people in prison in state and local jails have mental illness
- People returning home from prison who have access to family support fare better than those who do not

Source: National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, 2009 Fact Sheet
<http://fcnetwork.org>

BIBLES FOR INMATES

Word has come from Steve Miller, Treatment Supervisor, that the Bibles at Lehigh County Prison for inmates have been depleted. Since the supply of Bibles to be replenished will not be

funded by the county, help is needed. Your donations with new or used Bibles can now be donated and will be accepted. We invite you, your church, or neighborhood to help meet this important need.

Bring new or used Bibles to the office at Bethany Church, 1208 Brookside Road, Wescosville Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 4 PM at the church office and we will take them to the prison.

TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU

MY FAITH PROMISE for YOKEFELLOW PRISON MINISTRY

- Mr.
- Mrs.
- Ms.
- Mr. & Mrs.

(Name)

I (We) will be a "Faith Promise" Partner with YOKEFELLOW PRISON MINISTRY
With dependence upon God, beginning _____ I (we) will give
each month \$100 \$75 \$50 \$25 \$10 \$ _____ Total Gift \$ _____

Instead of sending my gift in monthly payments, I prefer to send it

- Quarterly Annually

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

(Return this portion)

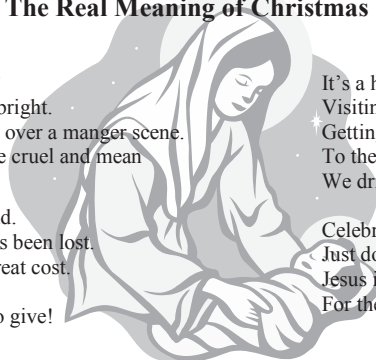
Once a year we invite you to be yoked with us in ministry by way of a Faith Promise commitment. Under conviction of Jesus' question, "When did we see you sick or in prison?" and his stunning reply, "To the extent what you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me," you step out in faith. By trusting the Lord to provide the amount you send as an offering, this will enable the Lehigh Valley Council to reach its goal in ministry to help those discharged from prison with their financial needs.

By establishing a pattern of giving based on faith, you take an active part in reaching souls for Jesus Christ that results in changed lives.

We challenge you to show your trust in the Lord to provide by filling out the form and mailing it to Yokefellow. We wish to thank those who have supported us faithfully in the past this way. God bless you with your faith promise and remember . . . We do it all . . . "Because He Lives."

The Real Meaning of Christmas

Look in the nighttime sky tonight!
There is a star that shines ever so bright.
'Tis the star of Bethlehem shining over a manger scene.
The conditions of the manger were cruel and mean
A Savior is born for all mankind.
Man is lost without a Savior to find.
The true meaning of Christmas has been lost.
Jesus died for our sins at such a great cost.
Jesus died so that we may live.
So on Christmas day, remember to give!



It's a happy time of year.
Visiting friends and relatives far and near.
Getting busy exchanging gifts is fine.
To the Lord - a toast!
We drink our wine.

Celebrate Christmas day
Just don't forget along the way;
Jesus is the real reason
For the busy holiday season.

Gary L. Benjamin
August 16, 1954 - September 19, 2004

CHRISTMAS AT PRISON

Every Christmas we ask you to get cards together for the men and women at Lehigh County Prison

Every year at Christmas, we give Christmas cards to inmates at Lehigh County Prison. We wish to thank you for letting your light shine as a witness to show others the reason for the season as you so faithfully provided cards throughout the many years in the past.

For anyone not familiar with our mission, let me

explain. Every Christmas, we ask you to get cards together for the men and women at Lehigh County Prison. You can buy them or make them. Children can participate in contributing and Sunday School classes can make this a fun project.

Sign your first name only on the card (one or one hundred-one cards). Place them in an envelope (do not seal) and mail to our

address: 4931 Cypress Street, Allentown, PA 18106.

Cards will be distributed the week of Christmas to those attending Yokefellow meetings. Extra cards will be given to those in prison who do not attend. Deadline for cards to be received is December 15. Thanks again for your help.

DON'T FORGET

Beginning with the last issue of the newsletter, you received it by first class mail in a Yokefellow envelope, or by email.

We mentioned the reason for this change is bulk mailing prices keep changing more than once a year with another recent increase in price. This new method will now save the ministry money plus the hassle of

driving to the main post office in Bethlehem to redo the mailing.

Remember if you receive this issue of the newsletter by first class mail but would prefer your next newsletter by email please let us know your email. If you receive this newsletter by email and would

rather be getting it mailed to you by first class mail, please let us know so we can make the change for the next newsletter.

Thanks for your assistance in getting the newsletter to you the easiest and best way you wish. We welcome ideas for articles or questions for Don Smarto.

THE RIGHT DOORS OPEN

You try one door after another, yet no one responds to your resume. No university accepts your application. No doctor has a solution for your illness. No buyers look at your house. Obstacles pack your path. Road, barricaded. Doorway, padlocked. Do you know the frustration of a blocked door? God uses closed doors to advance His cause.

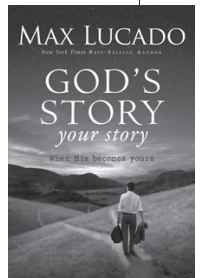
He closed the womb of a young Sarah so He could display His power to the elderly one. He shut the palace door on Moses the prince so He could open shackles through Moses the liberator.

He marched Daniel out of Jerusalem so He could use Daniel in Babylon.

And Jesus. Yes, even Jesus knew the challenge of a blocked door. When He requested a path that bypassed the cross, God said no. He said no to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane so He could say yes to us at the gates of heaven. It's not that our plans are bad but that God's plans are better. "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord.

"And My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:8-9 NLT)

Your blocked door doesn't mean God doesn't love you. Quite the opposite. It's proof that He does.



(From God's Story Your Story by Max Lucado)

AFTERCARE

While evangelism and the "harvest moment" is very important to an offender, Jesus taught us about discipleship and growth. Ex-offenders need several factors to become stable upon release and when the factors missing, they often go back to the patterns and crimes that send them back to jail and prison.

I am currently working with a former meth addict as his mentor. Sadly, he strikes me as someone who will be in and out of jail most of his adult life. Why?

First, God gave him free will and he continues to make bad choices.

1. He spends time with "old friends"

who got him into trouble.

2. He refuses to join a church because as he says "They are all hypocrites"

3. He is bitter about people he says he has forgiven.

4. He is not afraid to go back to jail. As he says, "That's where my real friends are."

Now, do you see my point? When a person loses their fear of jail or prison, they become institutionalized in their thinking.

This man needs the support and accountability of the local church but makes excuses for not going. Ex-offenders need to avoid old

friends and visiting old places. Without genuine repentance and forgiveness, the root of bitterness takes over. I can only give advice as a mentor and pray for him. He was arrested the first week he was released.

You can probably guess he was drinking with an old friend and they made a bad decision. Aftercare is all about accountability and there is no better place for the ex-offender than a support group in the local church.

Don Smarto,
President Youth Direct, Inc.
Dallas, Texas

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