

CONGREGATION + OFFENDER PARTNERSHIP ENTERPRISE

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Linda Schroeder
Project Director

SPRING - SUMMER 1989

NEW GRANT

The following good news was received in April:

"Congratulations! I am pleased to inform you that the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has awarded you a grant from the Fund for the Development of Human Resources for your project: Project COPE for \$800."

Project COPE rejoices greatly in accepting this gift and hopes for similar support from other such organizations, individuals and congregations. (Bonhomme Presbyterian recently sent another check for \$1000!) A congregational pledge campaign is currently underway. Please consider adding Project COPE to your benevolence budget. Funds are urgently needed to keep this ministry alive.

NEW PERMIT

Project COPE has acquired a nonprofit bulk mail permit which allows much greater circulation of this newsletter. Send more names and addresses! Articles and tidbits also are welcomed. Next deadline: September 1

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

The latest addition to Project COPE's group of partnering congregations is St. Bridget Catholic Church, an inner-city parish at Jefferson & Carr. Their COPE committee has begun a partnership with Art, an inmate who will not be released on parole until March 1990. Soon, however, he will be transferring to the Pre-Release Center and then to St. Mary's Honor Center in St. Louis. His partner group will be ready and waiting then to assist him with their friendship, guidance, encouragement, clothes, job search, and whatever else they agree to in the partnership covenant they are currently developing.

Other partnerships established in recent months include Unity Lutheran with Mamie, Society of Friends with Willie, Immanuel Lutheran with Robert, and Green Trails United Methodist with Lisa. **More partnership congregations are urgently needed** for inmates such as Sue who writes:

To whom it may concern, A friend of mine gave me your address and said that maybe you could help me. I am doing 10 years. I don't have no one to help me. I have a 5 year old daughter who stays with her grandmother. I don't get any visits and I am very lonely. I don't have any income, no clothes or anything. I hope you can help me in some kind of way."

Fifteen more congregational partnership groups are needed right now to match with the inmates already approved for Project COPE's waiting list.

EX-OFFENDERS TALK ABOUT LIFE IN PRISON . . .

"There I have seen the true madness of man."

"You can't get any lower but to die."

"You're in a pressure cooker."

"I've seen a man get stabbed 16, 17 times over having another man as his woman."

"Locking a man up is enough. There is no need to kick him and keep kicking him."

"There is no justice there."

"Only the strong survive. The weak will be destroyed."

"I didn't allow time to do me. I did the time."

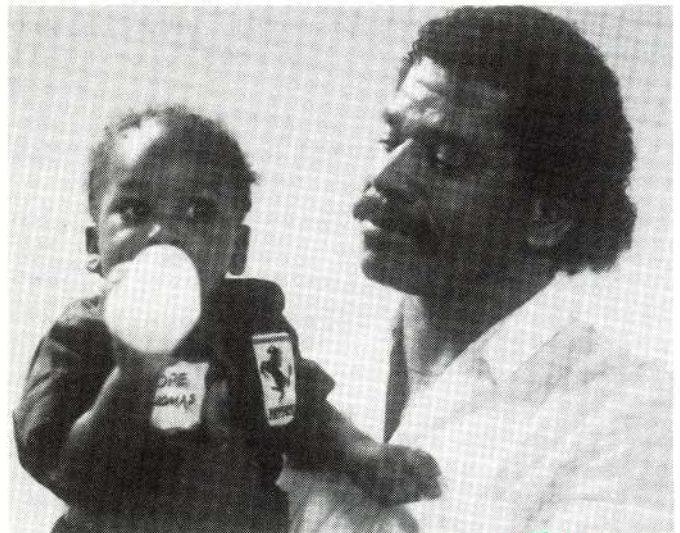
AND LIFE AFTER PRISON

"While you're in prison you build your world about what's going on inside and you close out the outside. Then you get out, and if you want to stay out you've got to change -- just like that!"

"Sometimes the closest people that you have, you can't talk to them about some things. They won't understand. You need someone else who will listen -- not tell you everything to do, but just listen."



On a bright and beautiful Saturday in April, about 30 dedicated Project COPE participants engaged in a nurture event that featured new resource materials, a video about prison life, sharing of stories, mutual encouragement and direction for the future. The one-hour video, Other Prisoners, is available from the COPE office. A contribution of \$5 will cover postage and handling costs.



PROJECT COPE PICNIC
SUNDAY JULY 9
1:30 — 5:00 P.M.
TILLES PARK
SITE #4

McKnight at Litsinger Road
Charcoal and meat provided. Pot-luck everything else.



PROFILE OF AN INMATE: ROBERT'S STORY

In prison you see many things: stabbings on a nearly daily basis . . . homosexuality that literally makes you want to vomit . . . fear, hate, evil . . . sorrow, depression, guilt, regret . . . believe me, you must be strong! It's just an emotional roller coaster ride. Time stands still. There seems to be no end to the waiting and deep desire to see your loved ones again.

I saw a lot of men, women and children die in the bloody jungles of Vietnam. As a combat soldier I killed several of the enemy. It was my duty and also it was a circumstance of kill or be killed. After the war I came home to a country who hated me for the things I was trained to do, and so I became a street fighter and a biker. I felt respected by the bikers for what I did in Vietnam. I was considered tough. But to be prison tough, it takes a lot. How does one deal with it? I can only tell you how I have come to deal with it.

When my mother died in 1987 I was transferred to the new Farmington Correctional Center. I was at the end of my rope mentally and spiritually. I had prayed and prayed, yet no relief came. I was ready to say "to hell with it all." Then (I guess only by the help of God as I know him) I decided to try to start a Vietnam Veterans Organization here in the prison.

[Robert succeeded in doing so, and later helped establish substance abuse courses and peer counselor training for his fellow inmates.]

This victory was the beginning of a new outlook on life itself. It has pulled me through my bout with stress, depression and guilt over the loss of my mother. Don't get me wrong. There have been many nights when I have gone to bed with my eyes full of tears, hurting deep inside, fearful of my future and of being alone. But now I feel needed, even though I'm in prison. To help others and see them better themselves helps me to better myself.

If you are suffering from stress, anxiety, depression, fear and loneliness, here is some of the medicine you need:

1) Go to a neighbor or even a stranger in need or suffering from the same problems. Try to put that person's problems ahead of yours. Say that you care and want to help. You'll soon see that you are needed and wanted.

2) Look in the mirror and tell yourself you like what you see (even if you don't at that moment). Do something new for yourself; change your looks somehow. Anything different helps.

3) Don't stay closed up in your cell or home or apartment. If you have no friend to visit, go to a mental health center and ask to be involved in their programs.

4) Remember that you are not alone in this world. God's son died for us all. Get to a church or to someone who is strong in the word of God.

If you would like to know more about my story, or share your story and concerns, or receive our Vietnam Veterans in Prison Newsletter I would be happy to hear from you.

Robert Lee Horton #157720
Farmington Correctional Center, H.U. 9-D-3
1012 W. Columbia, Farmington, MO 63640

PROFILE OF AN EX-OFFENDER: BEN'S STORY

It's funny how reality comes upon one such as myself, "the gentleman that had all the answers to life's problems." This past week has made me realize that I am still a frightened little boy in many respects, especially as I begin to realize the damage I have done to myself and others.

But what is more frightening is to admit and begin to accept that I have a problem that is unmanageable, that I can't handle. We men have been taught certain myths concerning ourselves with respect to admitting weakness or admitting the need for others' help and God's help. I desperately need help.

Before up-to-date information was available concerning substance abuse and my disease, I thought perhaps there was no hope nor help available for me. I thought maybe I was destined to die as a worthless human being who didn't contribute anything to society, one who only took, giving nothing in return but misery.

There was a pain within me so devastating that it was indescribable in the English language. I am realizing that it is okay to feel this, provided that it is suffering with purpose. I am beginning to see "suffering, comeback and combat" as the means, with God's help, of maintaining my sobriety one day at a time.

What I have learned is that drugs themselves amount to only 10% of my problem. My fearful state plays the other 90%. My way of thinking, my destructive behavior patterns, my attitudes and responses to life -- these are the things I must learn to be responsible for. I am realizing that keeping straight is the beginning of a better life.

The Devil tells you he can make you powerful, but he never talks about responsibility and conscience, or "doing unto others as you would have them do unto you." God's vision for humanity is others-centered, not self-centered. When a man's whole thing revolves around clothes and jewelry and houses and cars and garages to store them in, he doesn't have time for other peoples' lives or concerns. He builds walls or limits to his way of thinking -- walls that don't let other people in but also don't allow him out. It becomes a very subtle but real form of imprisonment. Faith in Jesus can set a man free and keep him free. My goal and prayer is that God might keep me humble and dependent on him and obedient to what I know of God's will. I just want to turn my life over to its rightful owner.

-- Ben Collins

Project COPE

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