

Christmas behind bars

by Joel Waltz

Joel and his wife, Tracy, live in Boone, Iowa, with their two children. They are commissioned members of New Life Prison Church.

Like most people, I never imagined I would spend a Christmas behind bars. Even if I could have imagined what it would be like, I am sure I would not have imagined anything good about it. Well, as it turns out, Christmas in the maximum-security state prison definitely lacks the shimmering tinsel, colorful lights, and stockings on the mantel. There are no gifts exchanged or parties to attend.

As I look back, perhaps our Christmas inside the prison was more like the very first one so long ago. On that special night, there was the light of Christ, the presence of God, the singing of angels, and humble reflection on the wonder of Jesus' birth. Not exactly the Christmas Day parade, and I am pretty sure most kids would be disappointed with the whole thing after about three minutes.

Christmas in prison was certainly void of the holiday festivities. But for the believers there, we were—in a sense—freed or protected from the illusion the world paints around this sacred occasion. Instead of the colorful lights and tinsel, the light of Christ was brought to us by Rick, Rose, and the other New Life Prison Church volunteers. Instead of store-bought gifts, we experienced the gifts of hope, joy, and love they brought to us all. Instead of entertaining ourselves with the latest Christmas movie, we sang songs together with our brothers and sisters in Christ and humbly reflected on God's goodness to us all. (I will admit I watched the movie *Elf* several times, though.)

In a sense, prison was a gift to me during the Christmas season. It stripped away all the meaningless things of this special occasion and left me the opportunity to experience the love God intended us all to soak in as we ponder the incarnation of Jesus, our Savior.

**"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."
(Luke 2:19)**

We pray each of you remembers that the God we serve is a "Merry Christmas." Blessings to all of you! Pastor Rick and Rose



Merry Christmas

by Rose Admiraal

Messiah
Everlasting Father
Redeemer
Rose of Sharon
Yeshua

Cornerstone
Holy Child
Resurrection and the Life
Incarnate God
Son of the Most High
True Vine
Mighty God
Alpha and Omega
Savior of the World



Pastor Rick Admiraal

PHONE: 641-204-1954

EMAIL: PastorRick@newlife-prison.org

WEBSITE: www.newlife-prison.org

BLOG: newlifeprisonchurch.blogspot.com

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Give your gifts to New Life

Contributions may be sent to: **New Life Prison Church, 408 Maple St., Pella, IA 50219**

I'd like to donate \$ _____ to New Life to support

New Life Prison Church.

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A COVID-19 update

by Pastor Rick

The pandemic has been very difficult for New Life Prison Church.

Volunteers and mentors have been “locked out” of the prison since early March, while the prison congregation has been “locked in” dealing with the virus.

At Newton Correctional Facility, all staff and inmates wear both a face mask and face shield. Still, Newton has had 42 inmates and 24 staff members test positive. Overall, the Iowa prison system has had over 3,000 inmates and over 500 staff test positive. (Data as of November 30, 2020, <https://doc.iowa.gov/COVID19>.) In addition, 10 inmates and 2 staff members in Iowa have passed away with COVID-19.

Our sister congregations have also experienced outbreaks. Cornerstone Prison Church of Sioux Falls is within the South Dakota State Penitentiary, where over 500 inmates have tested positive. Celebration Fellowship of Ionia, Michigan, is a multi-site prison church with congregations at the Bellamy Creek and Handlon Correctional Facilities. Bellamy Creek has approached 400 positives, while Handlon has had over 600 inmates test positive for COVID-19. The numbers are simply staggering!

Our national health crisis has been absolutely devastating for our prison population. It’s an extremely vulnerable population, which includes the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions (such as diabetes). Lift your prayers to God for both healing and protection. “We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield” (Psalm 33:20).

New Life receives \$5,000 grant from COVID-19 Church Engagement Fund

by Pastor Rick

Recently, the three prison congregations in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) had a virtual Zoom meeting with leaders of the denomination.

Celebration Fellowship (Ionia, Michigan) and Cornerstone Prison Church (Sioux Falls, South Dakota) took part in the meeting. I participated for New Life, with Deacon Jim Williams and Elder Dave Gritters.

Overall, we communicated that prison congregations are definitely unique. Our discussion was very beneficial; we received encouragement from each other and support from the denomination. At the end of the meeting, I asked about financial assistance in a challenging year. Colin Watson, the executive director of the CRC, pointed us to the COVID-19 Church Engagement Fund. A few days later, I filled out the application form and we were given a grant of \$5,000. Thanks be to God!

New Life Prison Church Outside Council

Dave Gritters
(Governing Elder)

Marv Goodyk
(Sully CRC)

Tim Franje
(Peoria CRC, represents the
Classis Missions Committee)

Jim Williams
(Administrative Deacon)

Duane Bruxvoort
(Federated Fellowship)

April Nieuwsma
(Treasurer)

Don Rouwenhorst
(First Reformed)

Pastor Rick Admiraal
(New Life)

What a great blessing is the Body of Christ

by Pastor Rick

I thank God for the Body of Christ.

I encourage you to read the entire twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians to get Paul’s thoughts on this matter. He compares the gathered group of believers (the Church) to a human body.

All of us have different gifts and abilities, but we’re still One in the Spirit. The Apostle Paul lets us know, “...there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet ‘I don’t need you!’” (1 Cor. 12:20–21).

Paul is correct. **We need each other**, so each person can fulfill his or her specific task. It’s certainly true that we’re better together! I was reminded of this when we gathered recently at Calvary Church in Pella to put together a Thanksgiving DVD to send to the prison chapel. While recording the service, I observed men and women with various gifts. Some drummed and others sang. Some prayed and others preached. Some played the keyboard or bass guitar, while others worked skillfully in audio, video, or the PowerPoint presentation. **We worked together** to bless the men in prison with a worship service. The worship service also included the Lord’s Supper; earlier, we sent 100 plastic communion cups (grape juice and wafer included) to the prison chapel. Lord willing, we will do something similar for Christmas. What a great blessing is the Body of Christ!