



Crossroads Connection Prison Ministries **2008 Annual Report**

2008 was a year of growth for Crossroads. We increased our worship and fellowship attendance, expanded our housing program, hired a full time LIFE Manager, and laid the foundation for future growth in worship, faith development, service, and opportunities for partner churches and individuals. Through God's grace, our transportation sponsors, volunteer pastors and worship leaders, meal providers, staff, board members, and the inmates and former inmates themselves all contributed to work of the ministry in 2008. We also have enjoyed outstanding support for our programs from Superintendent Ryan Mahr, of the Community Corrections Center-Omaha (CCC-O), and his staff.

Partnership Churches

We are extremely grateful for the support of our Partnership Churches. They provide direct financial support, gifts in kind (clothes for our clothes pantry, food for our food pantry, other supplies), meals for fellowship time after worship each Sunday, worship leaders and music providers for Sunday worship, and ongoing prayers for our ministry.

Partnership Churches

Beemer Mennonite Church
Benson Presbyterian Church
Central Presbyterian Church
Covenant Presbyterian Church
Faithful Shepherd Presbyterian Church
First Presbyterian Church of Bellevue
First Presbyterian Church of Omaha
Fort Calhoun Presbyterian Church
Mosher-Pilgrim Presbyterian Church
Northside Family Christian Center
Peace Presbyterian Church
Presbyterian Church of the Master
Presbytery of Missouri River Valley
St. Thomas Lutheran Church
St. Timothy Lutheran Church
Trinity Presbyterian Church, Clarinda, Iowa
Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Wheeler Memorial Presbyterian Church

Board of Directors

This year the Crossroads Board underwent some changes. Cindy and Mike Austin resigned from the Board after several years of dedicated service. Guy Shelton and Mike Brenner were appointed to the Board part way through the year. In April, the Board met for a retreat facilitated by The Rev. Becky Balestri (Killion). Some strategic planning was accomplished and good fellowship was enjoyed.

Board Members

The Rev. Roy Fox, President, (Missouri River Valley Presbytery)
James Carroll, Vice President (Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church)
Guy Shelton, Secretary (Presbyterian Church of the Master)
George Thompson, Treasurer (First Presbyterian Church-Bellevue)
Michael Brenner (St. Thomas Lutheran Church)
Anne Carroll (Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church)
Mary Ann Fox (Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church)
John Rohwer (Covenant Presbyterian Church)

Worship Ministry

Worship at Crossroads Connection has been blessed by an increase in average attendance this year to 72. Becky Balestri (Killion) coordinated ministers, worship music, and meal providers, and printed bulletins when not supplied by the minister of the week. Our worship services often included music or poetry by inmates or former inmates. Crossroads' praise band, Crossroads Worship Project, made up of sponsors, inmates and former inmates, performed at several worship services. Many pianists, organists, singers and music groups from sponsoring churches blessed our worship with music. Heartfelt testimonies and witnesses from worshippers and prayer requests helped make Crossroads a dynamic community of faith.

An integral part of the Crossroads ministry is the opportunity for fellowship during the meal following worship. Inmates have the opportunity to interact with their families, sponsors, and visitors and expand their support network. Presbyterian Church of the Master sponsored a Thanksgiving meal and invited inmates, former inmates, sponsors and families. Over 100 were served. Several inmates began attending weekly worship after this event.

Transportation of inmates from CCC-O to Crossroads continues to be a logistical challenge. Our 31 dedicated transportation sponsors, coordinated by Mary Ann Fox, did a marvelous job of getting between 40 and 45 inmates to

worship. Presbyterian Church of the Master has averaged transporting 20 inmates on their bus each Sunday. In addition, transportation sponsors help get inmates to counseling sessions, job interviews, and other events throughout the year.

Project LIFE

The transition from prison to life on the outside is often overwhelming for former inmates. The current system is a set up for failure. Many inmates exit incarceration with the clothes on their back and \$100 from the prison system. They often have difficulty with housing, employment, and cutting through the red tape to get started back in the community. The transition can be so difficult that they are highly vulnerable to recidivism during the first six to twelve months after release. Project Living in Freedom Eternally (LIFE) addresses this high rate of recidivism by providing transitional support for former inmates.

Participants in our Project LIFE Program are provided safe housing and utilities in a furnished home or apartment without need for an up-front deposit. Having safe housing is often a requirement for their release. Our program is available upon their release from incarceration and until they can transition to fully independent living. Participants are also provided a weekly counseling session, assistance with employment, and general support in returning to the community.

Participants must apply for the Project LIFE program. They agree to take care of the apartment, attend our weekly counseling sessions and worship services, maintain employment, pay their program fees in a timely manner, remain clean and sober, and meet the other conditions of their release.

In 2008 our housing capacity increased to eight participants (3 at the Lafayette house and 5 at the Park Avenue apartments). We had sixteen participants in our program throughout the year. Of these, one was returned to prison, four were removed from the program but did not return to prison, two moved into their own housing, and the rest remain in housing and are active in the program.

In April, 2008, Tim Locatis was hired as half-time Project LIFE Manager. In this role, Tim manages our housing program, provides transportation and support for former inmates, serves as a mentor to inmates and former inmates, and assists in daily decision making during the period of transition to day to day life in the

community. Because of an increase in demands for his time as LIFE Manager, Tim was hired on a full-time basis starting in November.

Tim has provided or coordinated transportation for former inmates for job interviews, meetings with parole officers, community services, medical and counseling appointments, support groups and service projects. He has helped guide former inmates through some of the red tape to facilitate their life in the community.

Every Sunday morning former inmates attend a support group led by volunteers Mike Rush and The Rev. Roy Fox. Project LIFE program participants are required to attend and several other former inmates continue to participate to receive ongoing support. Mike also provides former inmates with one-on-one counseling as needed.

Newly released former inmates and inmates often have limited access to warm clothing. Crossroads maintains a clothes closet where warm coats and other clothing items can be obtained. The clothes closet is stocked mostly by clothing contributions from participating churches. Carol Cherek organizes and coordinates our clothes closet.

Newly released former inmates often have limited funds to purchase food items until they receive their first paycheck. The Crossroads food pantry can help provide necessary food items until payday. In addition, the pantry provides some personal care items to former inmates and inmates. The pantry is stocked by gifts of food items and cash from sponsors, individuals and partnership churches. Mary Ann Fox coordinates our pantry.

Service

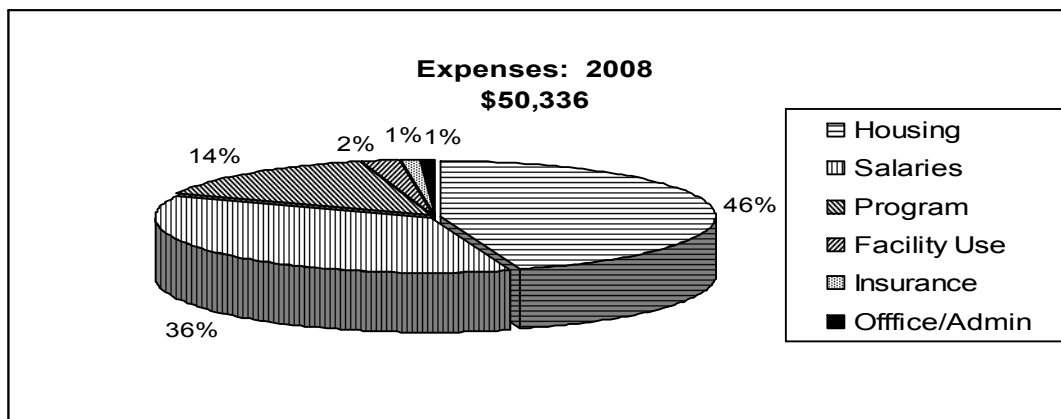
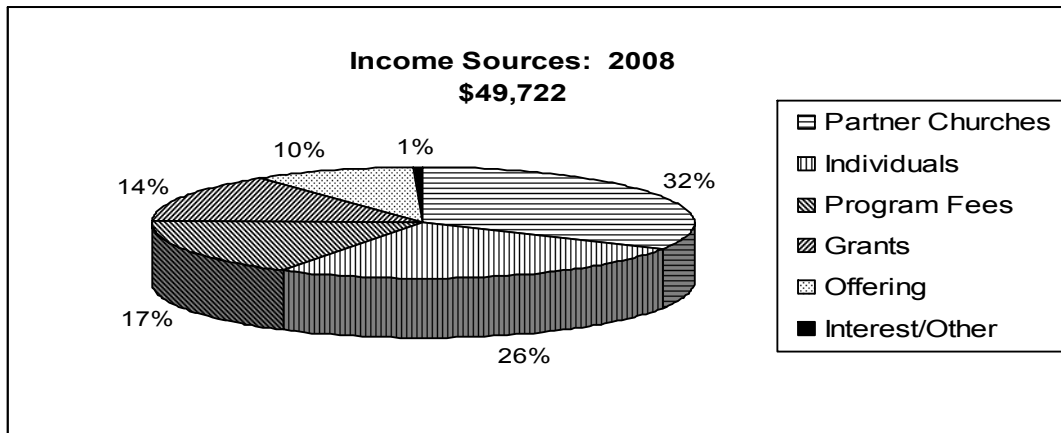
Serving humanity helps build individual character and provides inmates and former inmates with an opportunity to look beyond themselves. Our Project LIFE Manager and other sponsors encourage inmates and former inmates to participate in community service opportunities. The Crossroads Worship Project has played at the Salvation Army, Siena-Francis House, and at the Gene Leahy Mall. Periodic clean up days are held at Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church to help repay them for the opportunity to use their facilities for worship and fellowship. Some sponsors take inmates to work at Habitat for Humanity build sites.

In 2008, inmates, former inmates and sponsors planted and tended a garden at the Big Garden with some proceeds donated to charity. A sewing group, organized by Anne Carroll, met intermittently through the year. These women sewed blankets, baby clothes and other items for Direct Relief and enjoyed each other's fellowship. Small groups of participants also helped with various moving and clean up projects. Tim Locatis coordinates most of these service opportunities.

Financial

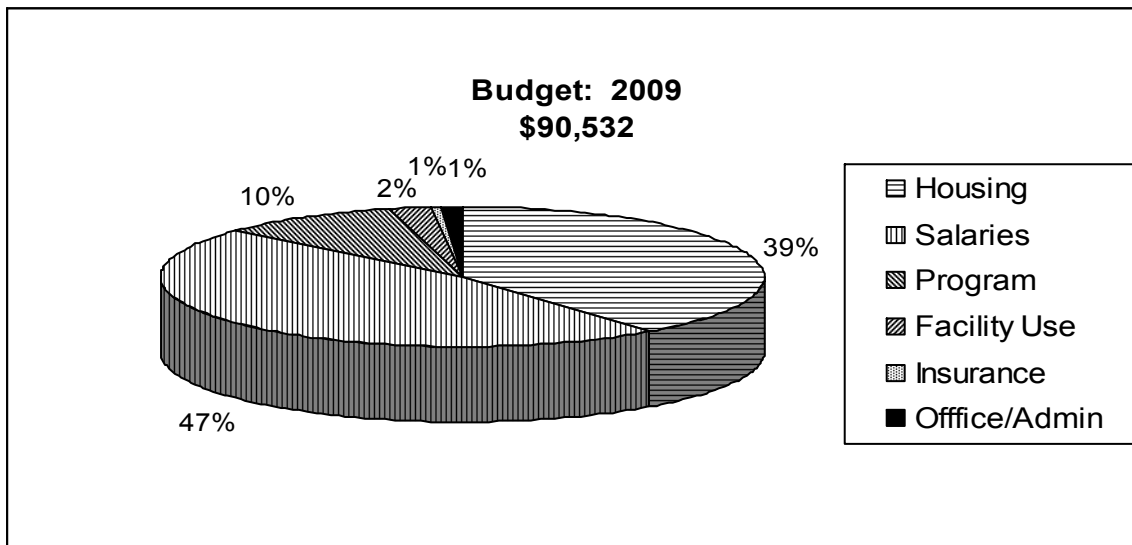
Crossroads is blessed to have generous contributors to support its ministry. We have also applied for a Sherwood Foundation grant to help support Project LIFE. Darst and Associates, PC, compiled a statement of financial position for Crossroads Connection. Crossroads Connection is a Nebraska Nonprofit Organization and is exempt from federal income taxes under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

A graphic summary of 2008 income and expenses is included below.



During 2008, the Crossroads Board established a Financial Committee to coordinate and implement an action plan to increase financial support from individuals, partnership churches, grants, and other sources. John Rohwer chairs this committee.

Crossroads Connection's commitment to a full time Project LIFE Manager and an increase in program housing capacity has resulted in an ambitious budget for 2009 (see below).



Goals for 2008

The following goals that were established for 2008 were met:

1. Transport an average of 40 inmates from CCC-O to Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church each week for worship and fellowship.
2. Increase housing capacity to 7 participants (we had housing capacity of 8 at the end of 2008).
3. Hire a full time Project LIFE Manager.

Goals for 2009

The following goals for 2009 have been established:

1. Improve communication with and support from community partners via in-person presentations, updated brochures, ministry website, quarterly newsletters, and PowerPoint presentations.
2. Increase financial support for ministry programs from individuals, partnership churches, grants, and corporate sources.

3. Increase housing capacity to 13 by changing 5 Park Avenue apartments to double occupancy as the current residents vacate.
4. Establish a Project LIFE Service Club for former inmates.

Thanks

If you currently support Crossroads Connection Prison Ministry in any way, THANK YOU!! Please continue your support and consider increasing your level of support. Above all, please pray for the ministry participants, partnership churches, transportation sponsors, and board members.

Opportunities for You to Get Involved

If you are not a current Crossroads Connection supporter, here is how you can get involved:

1. Pray for the ministry and its participants.
2. Attend worship one Sunday night (6:00 PM) and stay for the meal and fellowship afterwards—see what we are all about! You are always welcome!
3. Consider a financial gift, or even better, an ongoing pledge.
4. Train to be a transportation sponsor.
5. Talk to your church's pastor about leading worship with a sermon, scripture reading, or musical offering.
6. Talk to your church's mission committee and your employer about supporting us financially.
7. Get a group from your church or employer to provide a meal for the fellowship after worship.

Contact any board member or our Program Coordinator, The Rev. Becky Balestri, at 402-397-4318, for more information.

God is good, all the time; and all the time, God is good.