

Crossroads Connection Prison Ministries
2009 Annual Report



By the grace of God and the support of many individuals and church partners, Crossroads Connection continues to develop its approach to prison ministry and to support individuals remaking their lives as they return to society. That we are a strong worship community is only possible with the generous support of all who assist us: the volunteer pastors and lay who lead our services; the transportation sponsors and host churches by whose cooperation we meet in places filled with the Spirit; the meal providers who give opportunity for God's acceptance to sink in; the Crossroads and Corrections leaders who work together to foster successful transition; the individual and congregational contributors who address the needs of our attendees; the board members who pull this together; and the inmates and former inmates who form the community of mutual encouragement and evangelism. We hope you find this report encouraging and that you will support us in 2010.

Partnership Churches

Crossroads is blessed by our 21 Partnership Churches. They provide direct financial support, gifts in kind (work and winter clothing, food for our pantry, and other supplies), fellowship meals after worship each Sunday, worship leaders and music providers for Sunday worship, and ongoing prayers for our ministry.

Partnership Churches

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

Board of Directors

Changes to the Crossroads Board this year included appointment of Steve Meyer of St. Timothy Lutheran Church and Brad Whitman, a long-time participant

in Crossroads now working and living in Omaha. Steve Meyer resigned when he realized it was too much with other time commitments. Because of an injury to Rev. Roy Fox, Jim Carroll assumed the duties of Board President this year. As Vice President Roy has more time to devote to forging relationships with inmates, supporting churches, and Project LIFE participants.

Board Members, December, 2009

James Carroll, President (Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church)
The Rev. Roy Fox, Vice President, (Missouri River Valley Presbytery)
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)
Brad Whitman (Crossroads Connection)

Worship Ministry

The Sunday by Sunday evening worship service continues to be the center of Crossroads Connection ministry. All other activities of the ministry flow out of the worship service. As the inmates pray and sing together, listen to scripture and are inspired by the preaching, they come to understand that Christ-centered living is empowering in unexpected ways. Seeing their growing trust in God replace self-centeredness is nothing more than the work of the Holy Spirit.

The fellowship of a meal following worship opens participants to spiritual growth and possibilities of successful transition. Inmates have the opportunity to interact with their families, sponsors, and visitors and expand their support network. Partnership churches and organizations generously provided a meal each week. Presbyterian Church of the Master again sponsored a Thanksgiving meal serving over 70 invited inmates, former inmates, sponsors and families.

Most Crossroads Connection activities occur in the facilities of Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church. In addition to using the sanctuary and fellowship hall Sunday evenings, a support group of former inmates meeting early Sunday mornings and a mission sewing group meeting Wednesday afternoons occupy one classroom; the clothes closet and food pantry are housed in another. Underwood Hills' pastor and Crossroads' Program Coordinator, Rev. Becky Balestri, coordinated ministers, musicians, and meal providers, and prepared worship bulletins when asked.

Crossroads appreciates the generosity and hospitality of Underwood Hills in the use of their building.

The average attendance at our worship services for 2009 was 61. Our 25 dedicated, trained transportation sponsors, coordinated by Mary Ann Fox, did a marvelous job of getting between 30 and 40 inmates to worship each week. Presbyterian Church of the Master has averaged transporting 20 inmates on their bus most Sundays. 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. Approved housing such as ours is a requirement for parole. Former inmates in our program transition over a few months to fully independent living. Participants are also provided a weekly counseling session, assistance regaining identification papers and finding 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.

Tim Locatis has served as our full time Project LIFE Manager in 2009. 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 transition to day to day life in the community.

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.

Crossroads maintains a clothes closet where warm coats, shoes and other clothing items can be obtained by newly released former inmates and inmates. The clothes closet is stocked mostly by clothing contributions from individuals and participating churches. Carol Cherek organizes and coordinates our clothes closet.

The Crossroads food pantry can help provide essential food items for newly released former inmates and others who are struggling financially to make the transition back into society. 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.

Crossroads also provides bus passes to help with transportation for education classes and the first two weeks of employment.

Program Success

Between April 2008 and December 2009, 23 men have participated in our Project LIFE program.

- 4 are current program participants
- 4 are living in a shelter or halfway house
- 10 are living independently
- 4 have returned to prison
- 1 has left the program but his whereabouts/status is unknown

Based on the above, 14 of 18 (78%) of Project LIFE participants have Stayed Out of Prison since completing our program with 4 remaining active in the program and 1 whose whereabouts and status is unknown. We also provided assistance to two females this year, one in independent housing and one in a treatment program.

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. 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. Small groups of participants also helped with various moving and clean up projects. Tim Locatis coordinates most of these service opportunities.

In 2009, our sewing group, organized by Anne Carroll, met periodically through the year. These women sewed blankets, baby clothes and other items for Direct Relief and enjoyed each other's fellowship.

Freedom Keepers

In January, 2009, a small but energetic group of former inmates formed Freedom Keepers. Their stated purpose is to offer assistance to former inmates and their families in their transition into society and to participate in projects that assist the greater good of the community. The Freedom Keepers mission statement is "Life After Fences and Fellowship for the Freedom of All". Project LIFE participants are encouraged to participate in Freedom Keepers projects and become members.

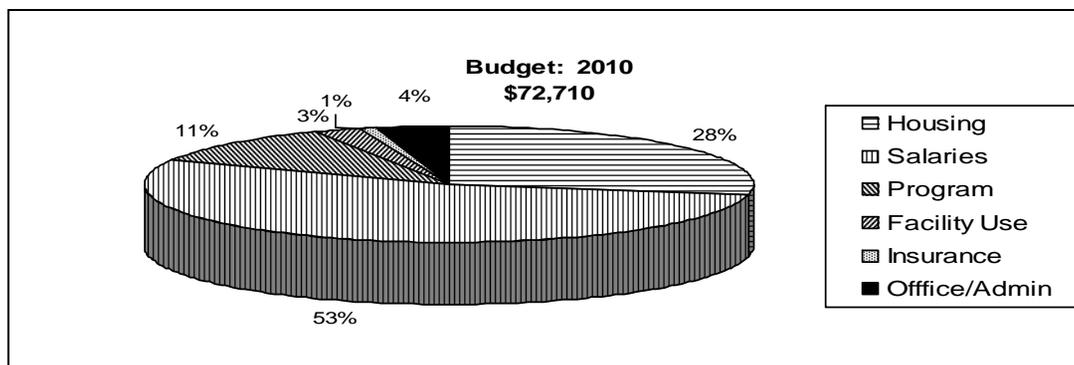
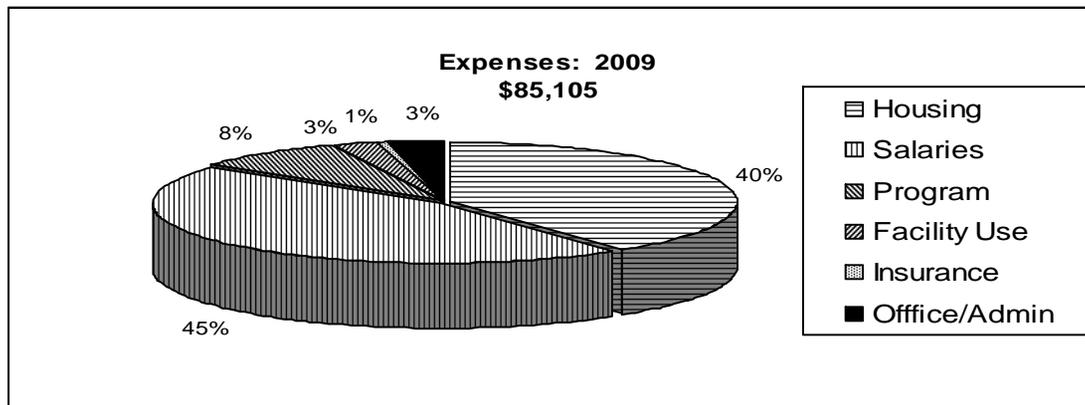
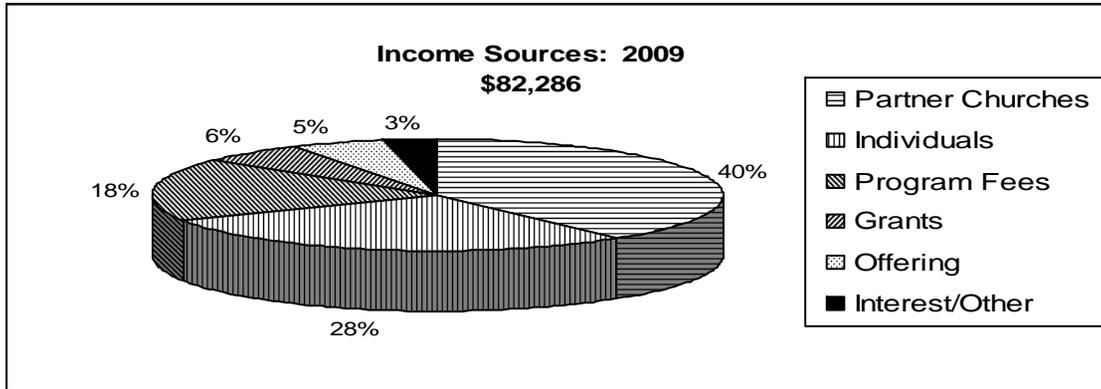
Freedom Keepers projects in 2009 included helping with tires, brakes and other car repairs for needed transportation, assisted with roof and home repairs for a needy family, provided inmates with Christmas and Fathers' Day cards and postage, assisted with three outreaches at homeless shelters, helped provide clothing and household goods, and assisted participants in obtaining identity cards and drivers licenses.

Associated Ministries

Crossroads partners with the prison ministries of the Nebraska Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church to provide worship services six times per year in the Omaha Correctional Center. Our joint services, which are attended by an average of fifty men, are followed by Bible Study or small group discussions. Since the Lutheran Church has a congregation within Lincoln State Prison, worshippers transferring from that facility often are familiar with the Director of Lutheran Prison Ministries when they arrive at OCC. This provides excellent continuity and offers us the opportunity to introduce them to the Crossroads ministry before they enter the Work Release program. We hope to encourage more Lutheran congregations from the Omaha metro area to join Crossroads and will pursue an outreach program to introduce our ministry to them.

Financial

Crossroads is blessed to have generous contributors to support its ministry. We welcomed two new partnership churches and a number of individual contributors this year. 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 2009 income and expenses is included below.



Celebration Event

On October 3rd, 2009 Crossroads held its first Celebration Event. Partnership churches and individual supporters attended at First Presbyterian Church of Omaha. Dinner was followed by entertainment from the Heartland Harmonizers Barbershop Chorus, a keynote address by the Honorable Judge John Hartigan, and heartfelt testimonials from former Project LIFE participants Val Flores and Brad Whitman. This event gave Crossroads a chance to thank its supporters and inform others about the ministry.

Communication

In 2009, Crossroads launched its website. You can now go to www.CrossroadsConnectionOmaha.org to learn the latest about our ministry, look at the volunteer schedule and find out how you can support Crossroads. We also produced a brochure and a PowerPoint presentation about Crossroads that we use in informational and fund raising presentations.

Goals for 2009

The following goals that were established for 2009 were met:

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. Establish a Project LIFE Service Club for former inmates.

Goals for 2010

1. Maintain cooperation with Lutheran prison ministries.
2. Serve a total of 15 former inmates in the Project LIFE ministry.
3. Raise an additional \$10,000 from individuals, partnership churches foundations, service clubs and corporate sponsors.
4. Increase the number of partnership churches to 25.
5. Improve communication by regularly updating our website, producing a semi-annual newsletter, updating PowerPoint presentations and brochures, and seeking additional testimonials.
6. Hold an appreciation and awareness luncheon for pastors of our partnership churches and potential partnership churches.

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 and commit to transporting at least once a month.
5. Talk to your church's pastor about leading worship with a sermon, scripture reading, or musical offering.
6. Make a donation to provide bus passes for newly-employed inmates.
7. Talk to your church's mission committee and your employer about supporting us financially.
8. Get a group from your church or employer to provide a meal for the fellowship after worship.

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

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