I can’t believe it has been 20 years since I first started Wings! It seems like just a few months ago, and yet I see familiar faces in prisons, watch children go from infants to college graduates, and I have come to realize that I have been doing Wings for over a third of my life.

What a blessing and joy it has been! To date I’ve been able to do Wings work in 19 states, juvenile, male and female prisons. I’ve been all over India and literally ministered to and trained thousands of people. Our Wings team ministered in 14 prisons all over Kenya, and did an additional 20 Wings events in Kenyan orphanages, schools, and congregations. Our white, American Wings team, actually opened the door for Kenyan pastors and church leaders to go into their prisons and minister to the inmates. I’ve never seen a more Christian country and everywhere we went the doors swung wide open.

I’m a picture taker, and I love to see the photos from the Wings Parties (new name Family Days). I guess what surprises me the most is that it doesn’t matter what state we are in, whether the photo was taken in 1995 or 2015, the smiles, the family reunifications, and joy and the tears are all the same. It doesn’t matter if we are in New Mexico, the United States, or a foreign country, the reactions are the same. The comments too don’t vary much, and I’m thrilled that this is true.

Wings Family Days are based on scripture—Acts 2:42. That’s why the response is universal. People come together and experience Christ’s unconditional love. They sing, dramatize scripture, do arts and crafts and eat together in a very intentional way. They talk over dinner. They play an after-dinner game, and everyone laughs together and rebuilds relationships. New positive memories are created and families start to reunite.

Wings second program, Wings For L.I.F.E.—Life-skills Imparted to Families through Education, came out of all the things I learned and wrote about in my book Family Arrested.

All the difficulties, emotions, and ultimate joy I can now share with others and I love to wake up each day to see what new opportunities await me. That’s the way life should be lived, and every day I get to experience God in so many ways.

I am SO very grateful to all the mentors, pastors, teachers, friends, and family who have helped and encouraged, loved and inspired me along the way. No woman could ask for more. As I look back on my life I see how God brought just the right people to me. I can now see how God worked in my life, and carried me through the tough times, but always provided in His time for me to now be so blessed to follow my calling. I always say I’m uniquely qualified to do Wings, and I wouldn’t change any of the various paths I’ve been on because they all have brought me to this point in time.

I don’t know what God has in store for the next 20 years and beyond, but I’m excited to experience each day to see what transpires.

My dream is to train leaders in all 50 states so that Wings prison and community Family Days are held in all the prisons and communities where prisoners and their loved ones live. (Yes, that means all over the place, in communities and prisons small and large. All it takes is a few caring and trained people in each community and we can do this!)

Our vision to have Wings For L.I.F.E. be to families of prisoners what AA is to alcoholics is a huge vision, but one that can be reached with today’s technology. We have leaders all across our country and around the world who I can’t wait to meet and to train.

God didn’t intend for his children to live behind bars. My goal is to give people “wings to fly” and to break the generational cycle of incarceration. Wings has the ability to truly change lives, give hope, and teach people how to maximize their lives so they can be the children that God intended them to be.

If you are reading this it means that you too care and see the vision. Please share your God-given gifts with Wings so that even more people can be reached, motivated, and live fulfilled lives.

I thank all the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who have helped us minister and train all the inmates and their loved ones in all the places we have been. I thank the correctional leaders for their vision and their caring about “the least of these”, and I thank those who have helped us as volunteers or as donors, who have no one in prison and yet can see how this is God’s work and they share their caring, loving hearts with all of us.

THANK YOU! Thanks for believing in me, in Wings, in the so often lost and lonely and forgotten. May God richly bless you!

Sincerely,

Ann Edenfield Sweet, Founder/Executive Director
History of Wings/Prison Fellowship/Operation Starting Line (OSL)

By Ann Edenfield Sweet, Wings Ministry Founder/Executive Director, 12-10-12

Eighteen years ago I requested a grant from Prison Fellowship to create an “extension” of the Angel Tree program. I had gone to meet with Homer Gonzales, the New Mexico/West Texas Prison Fellowship (PF) Director in Albuquerque, to see if PF would be interested in publishing my manuscript, Family Arrested: How To Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One. Homer was a wonderful man who wasn’t sure if PF would be interested in publishing a book, but he mentioned the Angel Tree program. It was as if God shot an immediate idea in my head that besides giving the child of a prisoner a gift at Christmas, we could host a party using the methods of ministry I had learned through the LOGOS Ministry when I was Youth Director in a church. Our youth program had grown from 8 youth to over 250 youth and children through the relational programming LOGOS taught that lived out Acts 2:42, where the early disciples sang together, learned and studied scripture, had fun (crafts and games), and ate together.

I had been leading mission trips to Russia for LOGOS, bringing American youth into Russia to share Christ’s love. I knew the same model could be used to share Christ’s love with families of prisoners.

On one of the trips coming back from Russia in 1995 I stayed an extra day in Washington, DC to meet with Angel Tree staff, as an international Prison Fellowship conference was being held. After meeting with Angel Tree and PF staff, I submitted a proposal and was given a $3,000 “grant” to host a Christmas Party where Angel Tree gifts would be given out to children of prisoners.

I used all the training I had received through LOGOS to create the model for the “Party.” The model was actually what we had done on our ten trips to Russia. I connected again with Homer Gonzales and he helped introduce me to other prison and ministry leaders. I already had many ministry contacts through LOGOS, but I needed to involve the Catholic Church as 85% of New Mexico inmates claimed to be Roman Catholic if they stated a religious preference.

I also needed a name for this new program. Since the Angel Tree program had funded me, I felt that an appropriate name could be “Angel Wings.” I always felt that “wings” had to be in the name, for what Wings tries to do is give people wings to fly. I use a mother bird as an analogy. First we have to provide a safe place, like a bird that makes a nest in a safe, protected place. Then we need to comfort, nurture, and support people, for if they have incarcerated loved ones they are probably wounded. Then we need to teach, train, and model positive ways for them so they can ultimately “fly.”

I also like to envision our “wings” as God’s arms, reaching out to hug, embrace, and nurture hurting people. That was my vision for Wings.

Prison Fellowship wasn’t too sure about calling this new program “Angel Wings,” I laughingly think they might have felt it was too close to their Angel Tree name, and after all I was a total stranger to them. So I thought it would be fine to just call it Wings. Of course it needed the word “ministry” in its name, for Wings Ministry’s goal is to share Christ’s unconditional love with ALL families of prisoners. That doesn’t mean just United States families. Therefore we’ve been to India, and in January 2013 our “wings” will expand to Kenya.

Wings Ministry held its first Christmas Party in Albuquerque, NM in 1995. About 120 people came to this party. It was so successful that the volunteers said, “We can’t stop now just because the funding is gone!” They were right. We just continued without any funding. The volunteers decided the next time people usually went to church after Christmas was Easter, so we held our first Easter Party in 1996. Then we didn’t want to wait until Christmas for another party, so we started a Back-To-School Party to encourage children and family members to get involved in church programming at the beginning of the school year.

This 3-party rotational community Wings Party model continues to this day. In 2002 the New Mexico Secretary of Corrections called and asked me if we could hold a Wings Party in a prison. Of course that was the best of all worlds, because now the inmate could enjoy the fun and fellowship of a party in a prison with his/her loved ones!

Deputy Warden Art Murphy and Prison Chaplain Paul Collins, both men of incredible faith, heard of this invitation and thought they could do it at the prison where they worked. The idea of hosting a “party” in a prison with inmates, family members, and many volunteers was a frightening proposition (and still is) for many correctional staff. But Art and Paul knew that it could work. So they put their faith in God, trusted the Wings volunteers, and we planned very carefully all the details of taking Wings into the prisons.

The first Wings Party at the Central New Mexico Correctional Facility in Los Lunas, NM was VERY successful! The prison staff quickly realized they could trust Wings. They saw the positive impact on the inmates and their loved ones, and soon prison wardens from across New Mexico were calling asking for a party at their facility.

Wings Parties have now been held in 13 states to date for male, female, and juvenile facilities. Wings biggest parties were in the Women’s Correctional Facility in Grants, NM and on Dec. 1, 2012, there were 891 inmates, family members, volunteers, and prison staff registered for that party.

Wings Ministry started a formal collaboration with Operation Starting Line (OSL) in August 12, 2006 with the first OSL Collaboration Party at the Mohican Juvenile Facility in Loudonville, Ohio.
Since that party every Wings Party has collaborated with OSL to bring and share even more ministry to inmates and their loved ones. Wings looks forward to a long collaboration with OSL where together we can do far more than doing ministry alone.

After my first book was published, Family Arrested: How To Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One, I knew that I needed to do more. Wings Parties “plant seeds,” sharing Christ’s love and encouraging people to find a church home. I knew that people wouldn’t find a church home if they didn’t have a roof over their head, food in their stomach, and a job to make a decent living. The sub-title of my book, “How to Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One,” inspired me to start a program that would help people discover what I learned about how to survive incarceration, without having to live it first. I thought if I could start a program where we could teach life skills and empower people about incarceration that we could live out our faith by addressing the unique needs that families of prisoners encounter.

That was the start of Wings For L.I.F.E., where we literally want to give people “wings” to fly for the rest of their lives, by teaching Life-skills to Families through Education.

January 1, 2005, ten years after I started Wings Ministry, I was now working full time for Wings. We only had $1586 in our Wings treasury that first month, but through many prayers and people believing in our calling to help families of prisoners, Wings continues today with me as a paid, full time employee. Wings For L.I.F.E. (WFL) focuses on four topics each month: jobs; money; family/communication/parenting; and issues unique to incarceration. In 2009 Wings For L.I.F.E. was honored and received the prestigious “Award of Excellence in Crime Prevention”—best program in America, from the American Probation and Parole Association.

Wings For L.I.F.E. continues to grow. Our Albuquerque program ministers to close to 3,000 people each year. Roswell, NM and McMinnville, TN also have programs. Some of the Angel Tree churches are now starting to use the WFL curriculum in their year-round ministry to inmates’ children and families.

Wings is proud and honored to be an OSL collaborator and looks forward to a long and fruitful partnership of ministry to inmates and their families.

Tony called yesterday. He is eleven years old. His stepbrother is in a correctional facility in Grants, New Mexico.

I met Tony and his parents while riding together in the church van to the Wings Valentine’s Day Party. While we rode, we played mixer games so we could get to know one another. Then I started teaching the songs we planned to sing at the party.

Tony paid such close attention that I had to ask him, “Want to help me lead the music once we arrive at the prison?”

“Wow! You mean it?” His reply was confirmation enough.

Tony sang along with me and helped demonstrate the gestures to the more than 350 inmates and guests in attendance. Tony and his parents come from a small town in rural New Mexico. Tony’s stepbrother, his parents’ other child, and his friend are all in prison, and they come to the Wings event on the bus. Tony sang along with me and helped demonstrate the gestures to the more than 350 inmates and guests in attendance. Tony and his parents come from a small town in rural New Mexico. Since their old car was unreliable, they rode the sixty-two miles to the prison with us. They caught a ride back to their car in Albuquerque with another woman from their home town. She followed them for the remaining hundred miles to make sure they got home safely. It was regrettable for me, because I didn’t have a chance to talk with Tony or his parents after the event.

Two days later Tony called. “Could you please mail me copies of the music for the songs we sang?” He explained that he had been given an old guitar. When he tried to teach himself how to play and sing the songs, he realized he needed the music.

“Sure, Tony, glad to. I haven’t had a chance to talk with you about the party: What did you like best?”

“It was the music!”

As I spoke with his mom the next day, she remarked, “You should see Tony. He’s been singing those songs since we left the prison, and that’s not all. He’s teaching his friends, too. They’ve learned all the words, and now they want more. I don’t recall when I’ve seen him this happy. I don’t know how to thank you, Ann. (Ms. Edenfield.)”

“I’m happy he’s so passionate about music,” I replied. “I just hope and pray that I’m making a small difference in his life.”

Tony’s grandfather, father, two stepbrothers, and one stepmother all have been in prison; yet Tony went into a prison and came out singing songs that praise God. Now he’s sharing them with his friends in rural New Mexico.

When I told this story to my friend, owner of a radio station, he told me he would like to put Tony and his friends on the air. I called Tony and told him the news, adding, “When you and your friends have rehearsed enough and are confident in singing on the radio, my friend at the station has invited your team to perform. How about that?”

“Thanks, Ann. We’re already working on one special song.”

Perhaps Tony’s interest in music is powerful enough to help him avoid the family pattern of incarceration. Even though his story is still unfolding, his positive actions are already changing his young world.
Wings For L.I.F.E.
Life-skills Imparted to Families through Education

The author of Family Arrested: How to Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One and a wife impacted by her husband's incarceration, Ann Edenfield Sweet started Wings For L.I.F.E. twenty years ago to share the coping skills she learned the hard way. Once her husband was sent to Federal Prison, Ann came face-to-face with the demands from the courts and judicial system while trying to raise four young sons in challenging circumstances.

A nationally recognized Best-Practice Model and the 2009 winner of the prestigious American Probation & Parole’s National Award of Excellence in Crime Prevention, Wings For L.I.F.E. is focused on providing the skills, tools and resources that prisoners returning home and their families need to move past their challenges and thrive.

Why is the Wings For L.I.F.E. program so important?

- An estimated 7 out of 10 children of prisoners will spend time behind bars.
- Over 50% of the children who have a parent in prison NEVER visit their parent in prison.
- 1 in 10 American children have a parent under penal supervision.
- 1 in 33 American children overall and 1 in 8 African American children have a parent behind bars today.
- In California, 50% of all boys who have a parent in jail or prison will also wind up serving time behind bars.
- If current trends continue, 1 in 15 Americans will spend time in a State or Federal Prison.

In our society where children are all at risk in one way or another children whose parent(s) are in prison face even more challenges.

Wings For L.I.F.E. (WFL) builds relationships with families, probationers and former prisoners through discussion, mentoring, empowerment and support by:

- Teaching life-skills and addressing unique needs of family members
- Strengthening families by building Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets ©. Scientifically sound principles which focus on prevention and resiliency to promote positive, healthy development in people of all ages; Assets that influence choices people make and help them become more caring, responsible individuals; Changes at risk behaviors of all ages
- Mobilizing and networking community stakeholders to identify and reach families in need. Stakeholders include Congregations, Corrections, School Systems, the Justice System, and community programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and Boys & Girls Clubs.

Wings For L.I.F.E. impact and expected results

Reduce recidivism rates, help family members and children of prisoners reduce at-risk behaviors and future incarceration, help returning citizens better reintegrate back into society, and strengthen the overall family unit.

Wings gathers prison or jail numbers from participants, conducts entrance and exit surveys, and Asset awareness is tracked.

Participants write comments and suggestions. Children are given new books and incentives to read, and verbal Asset questions to track their progress.
First Impressions
Brie Martin 06-21-15

Writing for a local newspaper several years ago, I had the opportunity to interview someone who I considered to be very brave. I asked her how she found the courage to minister in the way that she did, and her answer has stayed with me: “God gives you the courage to do what you’re supposed to be doing.” She went on to clarify that while she was not afraid to do what she was doing, there were other types of ministry that she didn’t think she could do. “I’m not sure I could go into a prison,” she offered as an example.

I doubt she had any idea that she’d planted a seed that day, but I went away wondering why the idea of going into a prison was not frightening to me. If God gives you the courage for certain things, I thought, then maybe this was the population I was supposed to be serving and loving all along.

About a year later, I was in a van full of Wings volunteers headed to Springer, NM. I wasn’t sure what to expect going into a prison for the first time. As someone with an unreasonable fear of security guards and checkpoints, I was more nervous about interacting with the guards than the inmates. Once inside, though, my natural tendency toward shyness in new settings took over for a few minutes, but inside, though, my natural tendency toward shy, I found myself hanging back around the edges.

I spotted an inmate I’m sorry to say I was a little afraid of. I won’t describe him except to say that he matched every prejudice I never knew I had. He was, simply put, intimidating. I joked a little with God that I hoped that was not the person He’d called me to speak to that day.

Not five minutes later, while I’d gone on with whatever set-up I was helping with, I noticed that same inmate asking the chaplain something. Then something I never would have expected happened. He disappeared for a minute, and when I saw him again, he was heading straight for me with a plastic cup. He approached me, introduced himself, and thanked me for being there. Then he handed me the cup of ice water and explained that he’d overheard me telling another volunteer that I was thirsty, so he’d asked the chaplain if he could get me a cup of ice water.

I was shocked. I don’t know many people who would go out of their way like that for a total stranger, and it made me ashamed of my first impression... Wasn’t I there to minister to him? It blew to bits everything I thought I knew about why I was there. I was feeling pretty good about myself, but the two of us, this man probably had the better attitude toward people. He wasn’t the only one, either. These guys wanted to serve us. It set the tone for my first Family Day, and wasn’t the only one, either. These guys wanted to serve us. It set the tone for my first Family Day, and I still think about that time every time I go into a prison with Wings.

This is one of the great things Wings does to and for people. It challenges what you think you know about yourself and others. It teaches you that people are feeling like a part of them stays behind these walls because they can’t take us home. Because of your ministry, all of us had such a fun time together and we made our bond stronger with our daughters and me.

I’d like to thank you and all of you God sent people of Wings Ministry for giving me and my younger brother Mario Bernal and all of our family for the gift that you guys have brought to our lives. The way you guys have, all of you people, have touched us all with lots of love is heartwarming with irreplaceable time your guys have given all of our family. Two years ago I met my grandson David for the first time in your Wings Party. It meant the world and again a year later your ministry came and gave my daughter & David the chance to be together again.

Ann, I cannot put it into words on how wonderful I’ve been touched; I’m a grateful person. My brother Mario Bernal was also blessed by your ministry. He also has not seen his daughters in over 10 years and when you guys had the Wings Party here in Santa Rosa, he was blessed and got to see his hitas and because of the Wings Party all of our family came together without feeling like we were behind walls.

Sister Ann, me and my younger brother do not get visits from our daughters. We don’t know why that is. Maybe it’s because our daughters think that they themselves are feeling like a part of them stays behind these walls because they can’t take us home. Because of your ministry, all of us had such a fun time together and we made our bond stronger with our daughters and me with my grandson.

“May God bless every one of you.”

Thanks from:
Christopher Bernal

Bernal Letter
April 2013
The Trip to the Wings Party in Grants Women’s Prison 2005
by Las Cruces, NM resident Karma Brewster

The Lord put the trip on my heart since I knew a family that had never gone to Grants to see their inmate because of the expense and not having a car that would make the trip. Since I knew one family, I was sure there were others having the same problems. I called Gerald Qualls at First Baptist Church of Las Cruces and explained that we needed a bus to take families and volunteers to Grants. He asked what date and said the bus was available and that he would get a driver for us.

Then I thought about asking a church if we could borrow a fellowship hall and take the sandwiches and eat them there. The Lord impressed me to call First Church Belen and ask them to provide the food for us so that they could be apart of this ministry. I called and was so well received and was very blessed by their response. When we got to Belen, we were welcomed very warmly and fed. Not sandwiches but Nacho’s Supreme, ice cream, cookies, pops, lemon-ade, and coffee. Pat and the others that served us welcomed very warmly and fed. Not sandwiches but Nacho’s Supreme, ice cream, cookies, pops, lemon-ade, and coffee. Pat and the others that served us welcomed very warmly and fed. Not sandwiches but Nacho’s Supreme, ice cream, cookies, pops, lemon-ade, and coffee. Pat and the others that served us welcomed very warmly and fed. Not sandwiches but Nacho’s Supreme, ice cream, cookies, pops, lemon-ade, and coffee. Pat and the others that served us.

I would like to share with you about some of the families. These are things they shared with me on the way to Grants.

One lady and her two grandkids had never been to visit the daughter/mother because their car would not make the trip. They got to visit with her. The inmate came to THANK me for bringing them up to see her. She was holding on to her daughter and her son. She thanked me again as we were preparing to leave. She said that it meant so much to her.

Two sixteen year old girls were able to go even though their grandmothers were not able to make the trip.

One lady had broken a leg and had not been able to go see her daughter in two and a half years. Her three grandkids had been able to go with other relatives a couple times but had not gone in several months. They all had a good time together. The mother and daughter held on to each and cried for a long time. Every once in awhile one would reach over and touch they other one and tears would come into their eyes.

Some of the young people’s comments on the way home were:

- “I liked this trip. It was fun because I got to see my Mom. And I liked all the food. Thank you.”
- “The trip was a blast and it was fun. We should do this again.”
- “I felt happy and it was fun. I wasn’t the only kid so that was cool.”
- “This was fun and cool. I hope we do this again.”
- “I felt that it was a helpful thing that First Baptist Church took us to go see my Mom. And that the other church feed us.”
- “I felt happy because I haven’t seen my Mom for awhile. It was sad when we left though. The bus ride over here was fun and comfortable. Food was good. Thank you.”
- “My experience in Grants with my Mom, sister, and nephew were great because I don’t ever come see my sister over here. The Wings Program is great to do this for the families that came with us and for the other families also. Thanks to them and the Prison to work this out for us.”
- “Well, today’s trip was pretty good because I got to see my Mom. I enjoyed spending the time that I got to have with her. But when I was leaving it was sad because she couldn’t come with me but in time she will be home soon. Thank you for take time to bring me to see my Mom.

Some of the adult’s comments on the way home were:

- “The trip to the prison to see my daughter is always bittersweet. The sweetness is seeing her face and the kindness in her eyes. The love she has for her family and how much she adores her daughter. The sadness is in leaving her there. All that potential locked up and stagnating. Time doesn’t stand still. Her only child is becoming a young women and she has missed so much of it. That time can not be replaced. So many mothers, so many young women without the privilege of raising their children. Today was about joy and sadness. The joy of being there with our loved ones and the sadness of the situation or situations so different but still the same in the outcome!"
We leave; they stay. We’re free but every time we leave, we leave a piece of ourselves as the doors open for us and close for them. Today was about family, God and kindness of good people that made our trip possible and comfortable. Still as we ride home on a very comfortable church bus, we leave behind our little girls who have to part with their little girls and boys who don’t want to leave their arms.

Today was a good day for us, as parents, grandparents, spouses but it’s not enough for all the motherless children waiting for the most important part of family, the only mother they have. Perhaps as society says they deserve to be punished. But on the list of the punished are the innocent children who do not understand the concept. And in many of the children’s lives they will again lose a parent to the justice system as there is a high return rate among released felons. In the end what is not just is that family is lost, and the real questions remain, How many people can be punished for one crime?

For now we have to live for the moment. Grasp the chance for bonding however short and leave thankful for a great visit, but sad for how little time the children waiting to get with the parent and how much time the parent loses for making a wrong choice. Today was a gift. The time so short, but so necessary, so that the time span is just a little easier to endure and that children have a memory of how it should have been in a perfect world. It gives them hope, it nurtures dreams, and it shows that even in the blackest situation love survives.

Hopefully when they get out what has survived will eventually thrive! Children do not have a choice. The mothers and the courts all decide their fate. In a perfect world the inmate would be rehabilitated. The children would heal and forgive. Society would be safer and secure in the fact that the inmates would be released and eventually convinced her to do the same. It was not an unusual story for me to hear as a prison volunteer. One thing led to another and before she told them I’d served with a missionary organization called Youth with a Mission. Upon hearing this, both of them smiled broadly, with eyebrows raised.

“You were with YWAM?” Susan asked. The fact that she called the organization by its nickname told me she knew something about it. The young offender lost no time and asked “Where in South Africa were you?”

When I told them I’d been on concert tour with another artist and was based out of Muizenburg, South Africa, Natasha’s eyes grew wide and began to fill with tears. She excitedly spoke. “Perhaps you knew my parents, Triston and Ruth—they were both missionaries with YWAM at the Muizenburg base.”

I was stunned and just sat there remembering. Natasha went on “What year were you there?” When I told her 1991, her eyes brimmed with tears as she said “I was there then. I would have been 11.”

I smiled, trying to picture the young woman as an eleven year old child. Although the years and adventures had made it difficult for me to remember her parents, I could almost imagine her upbringing. More than likely, she’d been raised, learning all the Bible stories and singing songs about Jesus. She most likely had accompanied her parents on many outreaches and had witnessed the changed lives that Jesus ushered in. What had gone wrong?” I wondered. The older woman explained that she, too, had served as an overseas missionary and knew Natasha throughout her growing up years.

Natasha explained that upon completing school, she’d met a handsome young American man and ended up marrying him and moving to New York to start their life together. Shortly into their married life, her husband began experimenting with drugs to start their life together. Shortly into their married life, her husband began experimenting with drugs and eventually convinced her to do the same. It was not an unusual story for me to hear as a prison chaplain. One thing led to another and before she went back to routine and when we return home we go back to everyday living. All has the bitter sweetness of this is how it is.”

God’s Not Finished Yet

by Mary Ellen Armbruster, PF Support Specialist and DWCF Associate Chaplain

I t had been a day full of laughter, song and skits as the WINGS party began to wind down. Being not only a Prison Fellowship staff member but DOC chaplain at Denver Women’s Correctional Facility, I served in a variety of capacities that day.

I approached the two—a guest and inmate as they sat at the table chatting. ‘Perhaps a mother and daughter? I thought.

“You wanted to speak with a chaplain?” I asked, having been directed to the guest by one of the volunteers.

They both smiled, as the older woman said “No.”

Apparently, I’d misunderstood the direction but, I was soon to discover that, in God’s economy, I was right where I was supposed to be and decided instead to chat briefly with them. I looked at the young female offender and nodded to the guest. “Is this your mother?”

Again smiling, the young woman said “No—just a family friend.”

I had never met the offender before and asked her name. Upon hearing her response “Natasha” I realized she had an accent. I asked “Where are you from?”

“South Africa” was her reply. I was a bit surprised, having been there as a missionary in the 90’s.

I spent some time in South Africa” I told her. Both women looked a bit surprised and Susan, the guest, asked what had taken me to South Africa. I told them I’d served with a missionary organization called Youth with a Mission. Upon hearing this, both of them smiled broadly, with eyebrows raised.

“South Africa” was her reply. I was a bit surprised, having been there as a missionary in the 90’s.
knew it, she was a resident of Denver Women’s Correctional Facility. Her small children now lived in South Africa with her parents.

As Natasha shared her story, and her family friend sat close, nodding at every turn in her sad tale, I couldn’t help but think how amazing it was that I was sitting there, years later hearing the twists and turns of this young woman’s journey. I couldn’t help but wonder how arduously her parents and family friends must have prayed for the return of their prodigal. I sat smiling and wondering—almost in my own trance—when I suddenly realized she was done sharing her story.

Awakened back to the reality of the moment, I asked her how she was doing now. Both Susan and Natasha smiled broadly as Natasha announced that God was doing wonderful things in her life. She spoke about being a student in TUMI, the 3½ year seminary program offered to certain inmates serious about their walk with the Lord, as well as her hopes to receive parole in the fall. She said that upon parole, she would be deported back home to South Africa and Natasha smiled broadly as Natasha announced she would be deported back home to South Africa after all, God is so much bigger than anything Satan sends your way. Are you prepared to let God fulfill His plans for you?” Tears streaming down Natasha’s face as her friend and I stood on either side with our hands on her shoulders, she nodded “yes.”

Together, the three of us prayed for God to have His way with Natasha and complete the good work He began in her so long ago. As we prayed, I couldn’t help but wonder if her parents were getting a nudge that something significant was happening in their daughter’s life right at that moment. When we said goodbye that day, I smiled as I walked away, knowing that God does not forget or easily forget. I believe God sent me here today to remind you of this. Many people have been praying for you for a long time, and God will fulfill His purposes for you. These are purposes for your good and the good of many—and God wants to use you in so many lives. But, there will be a cost to you to let Him do that. You have had the enemy set on taking you out. He’s never forgotten….nor does He want you to forget. I believe God sent me here today to remind you of this. Many people have been praying for you for a long time, and God will fulfill His purposes for you. These are purposes for your good and the good of many—and God wants to use you in so many lives. But, there will be a cost to you to let Him do that. You have had the enemy set on taking you out, but our God is so much bigger than anything Satan sends your way. Are you prepared to let God fulfill His plans for you?”

Understanding the Emotions Behind a Prison Visit and Maximizing the Visit

Ann Edenfield Sweet

Visiting a loved one in prison is tough! It’s hard emotionally, usually is an economic strain, and is stressful, no matter how many visits have been made to the prison.

My husband was in prison for over 6 years. A visit to him was about a 1,000-mile round trip drive, and about a 4-5 hour one-way drive from our home, depending on the traffic and the number of stops needed to care for my four boys. Nervousness in my heart to be away, knowing that God does not forget or easily forgets your ways. Are you prepared to let God fulfill His plans for you?”

Because of the distance and the limited visiting hours, we always visited for two days, so we spent the night in a motel near the prison to maximize our time together. Thus, getting out of town took some organization.

A week before the visit I brought the car into the shop for an oil change and check-up.

The day before the visit I filled up the car with gas and packed as much as possible in the car, for we needed to leave early in the morning. To save money we all stayed in one motel room, so I packed sleeping bags, pillows and suitcases/backpacks. The boys each need two changes of clothes, sleepwear, and toiletries. When my youngest was still a baby I needed extra diapers, filled my oxygen tanks, and packed plenty of extra clothes. Because of my husband’s incarceration my finances were lean. Therefore, I packed snacks, juices, cookies, fruit and vegetables, sandwiches, and soft drinks in a cooler to avoid expensive restaurants or fast-food restaurants. I also packed books, games, music tapes/CDs, to keep us all entertained during the long drive. I called the boys’ coaches, church, and school leaders to notify them of our absence at weekend events or games.

The morning of departure we got up usually by 5:00 AM. We had a quick breakfast, everyone showered and got dressed, and we were off. Occasionally, as a treat and to save time, I would stop for donuts on the way out of town. I had to time the drive to arrive before count to maximize our time together. Thus, getting out of town took some organization.

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I had to consider our clothing so that we followed prison guidelines. I had to remember to bring rolls of quarters, and to not get upset when the boys spent our few precious coins on “junk food” from the prison vending machines. I had to be patient with the prison system and their rules, and often detached or condescending manner of some of the correctional officials.

Our first visit to the prison was particularly stressful, as I didn’t know where I was going, what to expect, and I didn’t even know the route to get there. I worried about where I would park, what the prison would look like, and how traumatic it would be on the boys and me. Would they strip-search us? Would they be kind and considerate, or would be on the boys and me. Would they strip-search us? Would they be kind and considerate, or even murder them! These pressures and emotions from the outside world, although not spoken, overwhelmed me, and played havoc with my mind. I felt SO good to get a quick hug from him and to share the “burdens of life” with him. We were a couple again and I wasn’t all alone! So as these emotions washed through me I would feel relief, love, comfort, and yet also anger, frustration, and often helplessness.

I think it would be helpful for each inmate to consider these issues. Expect your loved one’s emotions to be at extremes. They may be all smiles and full of love one moment, and just as quickly be in tears and filled with anger the next. Societal pressures are usually heavy on the family members. I felt like a “leper” or “walking aids case” when someone found out I had a loved one in prison. They often acted like I would steal from them, perhaps rape, or even murder them! These pressures and emotions from the outside world, although not spoken, overwhelmed me, and played havoc with my mind and emotions. To have my partner—my husband, to suddenly comfort me and to “protect” me from these issues, would often bring a flood of tears. It felt SO good to let my guard down, show some vulnerability, and to share the burden with someone who knew and loved me.

Therefore, a prison visit stretched my emotions to their limits! And driving away, heading home, was always the worse. For now I heading home, alone, along with the single parent and provider again, to face the bills, repairs, household and job responsibilities, and all of the issues pertaining to each of the four boys.

Inmates, treasure the visits from your loved ones. Try to recognize the sacrifices and difficulties they have overcome to see you. Try to understand the pressures they are facing in order to survive on the outside, and the social stigmas they face daily because of having you, their loved one, in prison.

Hug your family members, try to understand their emotional roller coaster, and honestly share with them how you feel about their visit. Thank them for the sacrifices they are making for you and for maintaining the family unity. Find ways to praise them, encourage them, and appreciate all they are doing for you and your family. Try to really listen to what they are saying, and ask them probing, difficult questions like:

• Where and from who are you feeling negative pressure because of my incarceration?
• How can I help you with home life and the children/family members?
• What fears and concerns do you have?

With patience and love, a prison visit can be a time of renewal. Relationships can be strengthened and nurtured to build on the future release of the inmate back to his family and loved ones. Visits indicate caring and hope for the future. May God be with you on your next visit. I pray it will be a time of joy for you and all those visiting!
Wings For LIFE International
By the Numbers

Wings For LIFE International, WFLI, formally known as Wings Ministry, was founded in 1995 and is a non-profit 501(c) 3 organization. Mission: Transforming lives to break the generational cycle of incarceration.

- Wings For L.I.E (WFL) – Life-skills Imparted to Families through Education, started in 2005, is designed to build and strengthen relationships with families, probationers, and former prisoners through discussion, mentoring, empowerment, and support by teaching life skills and addressing individual and family needs. WFL objectives are to reduce recidivism rates, help children of prisoners from following the generational cycle of incarceration, and to strengthen the overall family unit. WFL aims at intervention, prevention, and positive adult and youth development that incorporates Search Institute’s® 40 Developmental Assets®—scientifically-sound principles which focus on prevention and resiliency to promote positive, healthy development and cut at-risk behaviors in people of all ages.

- Wings For L.I.E. (WFL) is a national and state Best Practice Model Winner of the American Probation and Parole Association’s prestigious national Award of Excellence in Crime Prevention.

- Weekly program to prevent and reduce some of the future monetary needs of hunger, homelessness and addiction groups by breaking the cycle of incarceration.

- WFL is preventative, educational, and provides long term support – seeking to change patterns and predictors of incarceration.

- WFL teaches manners, life skills and ways to improve quality of life by providing experts in relevant fields who address money, jobs, parenting/family communication and issues unique to incarceration.

- Research indicates that intervention through WFL programming reduces recidivism, teaches positive behavior, stops the generational cycle of incarceration, improves grades and graduation rates, helps adult participants find meaningful jobs and security in their lives and strengthens the family unit.

- Children of inmates have a 70% chance of becoming inmates.

- 78% of inmates claim to have had a relative in prison.

- 1 in 28 Americans are in prison, jail or probation/parole.

- 10% of American children (8.3 million children) have a parent who is under correctional supervision—either incarcerated, jail, on probation, or parole.

- If recent incarceration rates remain unchanged, an estimated 1 of 15 persons (6.6%) will be incarcerated at some point in time.

Why WFL is unique:

- WFL teaches everyone in the family together life-skills, manners, and empowerment skills to break the cycle of incarceration.

- Wings vision—Wings For L.I.E. (WFL) to be to families of prisoners what AA is to alcoholics.

- Wings recognizes that Education = Knowledge = Empowerment = Action = Change = SUCCESS.

20 Stats about Wings

1. 20 years of transforming lives to reduce the generational cycle of incarceration.

2. Held 20 Easter, Back-To-School and Christmas Community Parties in Albuquerque for an estimated 20,000 people.

3. Hosted Wings events in 19 states.

4. In 2013 Wings traveled 1,356 miles throughout Kenya and hosted 14 prison parties, 20 Wings Parties in schools/orphanages, and met and did programming for an estimated 20,000 people.

5. In 2006 Wings traveled to India from the southern cities of Bangalore, Chennai (Madras) to New Delhi and Agra. Wings hosted prison and community parties, did training to pastors and church leaders, two leper colonies, several orphanages/schools for children of prisoners and tsunami victims. Wings met tens of thousands of people and trained pastors and leaders from Bible colleges to the “blackest of black Hindu villagers”.

6. Wings travels as estimated 4,150 miles each year to host prison parties/family days in the NM prisons.

7. Members of 3 rival gangs came together for an unprecedented Wings For LIFE International family day of Level 4 inmates in Las Cruces in 2014.

8. May 2, 2015 Wings hosted its largest NM prison Family Day in Hobbs, NM for 648 inmates and family members.

20 WAYS to help Wings For LIFE International
Celebrate our 20th Anniversary:

7. Volunteer to participate at a prison where Wings is hosting a Family Day.
9. Wings averages 20 prison & community Family Days each year in several states.

10. Wings has fed an estimated 60,000 people at every event they have hosted the past 20 years in the U.S.

11. Wings has hosted parties/family days for an estimated 10,000 inmates.

12. Albuquerque’s Wings For L.I.F.E. weekly educational program has fed and provided programming for an estimated 25,000 children, youth and adults.

13. 3,206 family members of inmates attended 42 Wings For L.I.F.E. meetings in Albuquerque in 2014.

14. An estimated $3,000,000 has been given to Wings’ families through in-kind donations.

15. Inmates in the Santa Rosa prison have printed Wings Publishing first 2 books.

16. An estimated 10,000 spiral notebooks have been given to children at Wings Parties and Wings For L.I.F.E. at Back-To-School parties.

17. An estimated 15,000 books have been given to inmates, children, and family members at Wings prison and community parties and Wings For L.I.F.E.

18. 10,000 stuffed turtles were donated to Wings and given out at prison Family Days.

19. There are an estimated 25,000+ children of prisoners in New Mexico and Wings has met many of them.

20. Wings has hosted 15 Family Days for the women in prison at Grants, New Mexico.

Never Burn a Bridge
Bert Viar

The summer between my junior to senior year in college I got hired as a flight attendant by Capitol International Airways. It was an international charter company that flew groups like the Kiwanis Club, senior citizen groups, sport teams and military troops all over the world. I was 20 years old and thrilled to be a flight attendant and have the opportunity to travel.

My very first flight was to Rome, Italy. I was so excited! We landed in Rome and I talked the entire crew of 11 to go out to dinner at one of the famous local restaurants. We were to leave the next day at 1:00 pm so I found a tour that was scheduled from 8 – 12:00, told the Captain about it, and he said I could go on the tour. I was surprised that no one else wanted to do the tour, but I decided to go by myself as it was scheduled to end by noon.

Unfortunately there was a terrible accident on the road that led up to the new Rome Hilton where we were staying. The tour bus couldn’t fit on the narrow Italian back streets, so we had to wait for the accident to be cleared. There were no cell phones then and no way to call the Captain. I arrived back at the Hilton at 1:30! I was late! I was panicking because it was my first trip, I could imagine that the crew was gone, and I was stuck alone in Rome (with no money to speak of), and wouldn’t have an idea of what to do.

The Captain, in full uniform, was outside the hotel waiting for me. Instead of firing me and yelling at me, he told me that he had sent the crew ahead to the airport, he instructed me to hurry to my room to get my suitcase, and I could change on the airplane into my uniform. He said he had a limo waiting for the two of us and I was to hurry!

I couldn’t believe how kind and gracious he was. I was SO thankful.

In 15 years of flying this was the only flight I was ever late to check in for and it was my first flight! Over the years I stayed in touch with Bert, the Captain, through Christmas cards. He received cards with the birth of each of our four sons. He read about travels, and soccer games, and life. He remained a friend.

In 1986 my first husband was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Bert knew about this too. And in 2005, when I decided to leave my publishing job as VP of sales, I notified all my friends about my decision to start working full time for Wings.

In 2003 Wings had received 501 c 3 not-for-profit IRS status. My book, Family Arrested, had been published, and I felt called to using my life experiences to help others. I announced in October of 2004 at our Wings Board meeting that I would...
end my publishing career on December 31 and I would start working full time for Wings starting January 1, 2005.

At the end of December 2004 Wings had $1,586 in our checking account. I told the Board I needed to make $1,500 and our poor treasurer was so worried and wondered how they would pay me in February. I told her that I had one month to try to raise $1,500 so I could get paid the next month. If I didn’t bring in enough money, then I would go out and get a “real” job. But I felt called by God to do Wings and felt confident that somehow we would find the supporters and the money.

I sent out a letter to all my friends. I told them about Wings, told them I needed $1,500 a month at least to do Wings full time, and I asked for support.

The next week I got a letter in the mail from Bert Viar. By this time he had retired years earlier and lived on his large farm/estate in Tennessee. I opened his letter and inside was a $10,000 check! I kept looking at it, thinking I was reading the numbers wrong. The tears flowed and I could hardly read the check. My first airline captain, a man I had met 35 years earlier, had come through and sent enough money to pay me to work for Wings for the next 6 ½ months!

Bert’s generosity allowed me to build up enough support to continue to do Wings! And I’m still here 10 years later.

I’ve always told my boys to “never burn a bridge.” Always try to maintain relationships. And 35 years later I have an example of how a man I met in my first airline job, when I was only 20 years old, helped support Wings years later.

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Every Wings Family Day ends with a group game. These men were decorated by their loved ones in “New Cowboy Outfits” just in time for Father’s Day. Fun and love was shared by all and new positive family memories were created which strengthen and rebuild families.

God has called me to a unique ministry to families of prisoners. It’s called “Wings” Ministry, for our logo is an angel with ‘wings’—to protect, embrace, comfort, and also to help each person to fly! I started this ministry in 1995, two years after my first husband was released from six years in prison.

My four boys and I were ostracized in all walks of life when he was initially arrested, including our neighbourhood, schools, and even our church. So when I started Wings, modelled after the mid-week LOGOS Ministry model of Acts 2:42, I wanted to shower God’s love and grace on all who attended our parties. We sing, act out scripture, play games, do crafts, and eat together. We talk, discuss how it feels to have a loved on incarcerated, laugh, and sometimes cry together too.

Each party always culminates in a large circle with everyone holding hands, equal in God’s eyes, united as Children of God. This symbolic closing epitomizes what God wants for each of us—to experience His love through the touch and caring from another one of His children.

Each closing circle is special and unique. But I’ll never forget my visit to the Lino Lakes Prison and the Prison Fellowship group. I talked to the men about all four parts of a Wings Party, and even modelled some of the parts. We sang a few songs. One of the youngest inmates, a boy of only 18, asked if he could play along on his guitar. He had only been in prison a few months, but an older inmate had taken him under his wing and taught him to play guitar. This boy had practiced so much that his fingers were cut from the strings, but he played with such peace in his face, it was apparent his joy overcame his pain.

We acted out scripture, and even made some butterflies out of newspaper. I couldn’t bring in food and they even gave up dinner for me to continue. Now, it was the special time to close in our circle prayer. Everyone formed a circle, and I found I was holding the hand of one of the tallest men I’d ever stood next to. I found out later he had played professional football. All I knew was I felt like I had an infant’s hand in his huge palm.

I told the inmates the significance of the circle—how I had felt like a “leper” with a husband in prison, and no one wanted to “touch” me or be near me. By reaching out, touching one another, and EVERYONE being included in the circle, we were ALL of God’s children, ALL equally loved by Him, and ALL equal in His eyes.

Then I started to pray. Soon, the giant man next to me was sobbing and squeezing my hand so tight it hurt. I finished the prayer and said “Amen.” Immediately, the men began praying for me and the Wings Ministry! Then they prayed for their wives, their children, their moms, their loved ones. Soon it seemed everyone was crying, but gradually, through those individual prayers of almost man, our tears turned to tears of joy. The “closing circle” lasted over 20 minutes, but we were now brothers and one sister in Christ. And the former football player told me how he had never thought about what he put his family through before that day. He had selfishly only thought of himself behind bars. God had given me the chance to reach out to this man, and the other men in Lino Lakes. He used that “closing circle prayer” to unite us together, to break down any final barriers, and to unite us all as God’s children.

That is one closing circle I’ll never forget!
Blessed with Wings for Life
Fred & Juanita Drennen, April 1, 2015

As I typed the title of our story, “Blessed with WINGS for Life”, it occurred to me that the very name of the organization “WINGS For Life” says it all. Whether you participate in the ministry as an inmate, family member, volunteer or otherwise, the experience gives each individual “wings” to soar beyond the confines of those prison walls through the message of hope and the unconditional love shared openly with everyone involved. If only for a few hours during those family programs, the inmate is no longer just another number in a long line of many sitting in a visit room trying to provide the much needed love, companionship and support to their family members in a crowded room that restricts almost all physical contact, movement and activities to merely sitting across from one another and talking. The family programs provide inmates and their family members the freedom to spend time together in a loving, festive environment much like that of a church dinner or celebration with music, crafts, food and fellowship among family and friends. During each program, Ann Edenfield Sweet, takes the time to sit with a group of inmates and family members and discuss her personal experiences during her years as the wife of an inmate and mother of small children coping with their father in prison which resulted in her forming the Wings Ministry. She openly discusses the hardships, ridicule and sacrifices she endured, much like she does in her book “Family Arrested”. It was during this discussion, that my husband, Fred, and I, along with his elderly father, Tom, experienced a life-changing transition in our relationships.

Fred and I both grew up in neighboring small towns in rural West Virginia and although we had mutual friends, we did not actually know one another personally prior to his incarceration. Fred is serving a life sentence and fourteen years into his incarceration, we were introduced through mutual friends. We began writing letters, talking on the phone and visiting which cultivated a deep connection and love for one another. It was during the first year of our relationship that Fred and I, along with his father, Tom, participated in our first WINGS family program at Southwestern Correctional Institution in Lancaster, Ohio, in December 2006. I remember it well. I was still a newcomer to the prison system and trying to adjust to the many rules and restrictions not only for the inmate but for family members as well. Being an outgoing, talkative, touchy-feely person, it was difficult for me to become accustomed to refraining from casually touching Fred on the arm, shoulder, etc., during visits and to refrain from speaking to other inmates and their family inside the visit room. At this time Fred’s father was in his late 70’s and wasn’t able to visit often like he did in the early years of Fred’s incarceration. Privately, Tom shared with me some of the turmoil he endured during Fred’s court proceedings and how difficult the early years had been at Lebanon Correctional Institution. Fred had also confided in me sharing some of his experiences and personal battles during those years. After these talks with each of them, I always felt as though the two of them were burdened by one another’s worry for the other’s well being. It seemed that they were each trying to be so strong for the other that they somehow could not connect in a way that allowed them to release the past and live in the present. I sensed a wall between them, not of anger or resentment, but of years of holding back their emotions trying to be strong for one another. As a means of survival, Fred, like most other inmates, had been forced to learn to control his emotions, both good and bad, to the point that compartmentalization of any and all emotions had become a natural response. Tom, on the other hand, had become good at wearing a smile and pretending that everything is alright, even when inside his heart was aching. I knew if they both could just open up to one another and let it all out, that the burdens they carried for one another would be lifted. However, a restricted visit room surrounded by people is not conducive to an emotional heart to heart talk for two people so heavily steeped in their idea of being strong.

Prior to the WINGS program, we were informed that there would be food and activities much like a church Christmas party, and we would be permitted to walk around and talk to everyone else. I remember Ann opening with prayer and welcoming all of us. There were tables set up for us to decorate Christmas cookies and make Christmas tree ornaments together, and there were tons of cookies to share as well as pizza and drinks. Seating was arranged in small groups of eight to ten people sitting in a circle with group activities as ice breakers. However, the atmosphere was so relaxed and friendly that the ice breakers weren’t really needed, but we did them anyway just for fun. Everyone was socializing and the children were running around playing together and laughing. Someone watching us would never have guessed we were inside the walls of a prison.

A special treat for Tom and I was that Fred was a member of the Chapel praise and worship band, and they had been asked to perform some Christmas carols for the program. One of the songs was “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer”. Fred, having the creative mind of a musician, decided to plan a surprise for everyone. He colored a ping pong ball with a red marker, placed a battery operated, small light bulb from a reading light inside it, and used his nail clippers (inmates are not permitted to have sharp objects like scissors) to shape the ball to fit over his nose,
by using Ann’s testimony and ministry to restore Tom and Fred’s relationship and form a powerful bond between us. Fred and I are eternally grateful for that day, as a little over two years later, Tom’s health deteriorated, and he went home to be with the Lord. However, thanks to what we experienced at the WINGS program, I know he died with peace in his heart.

As I read her in depth recollection of her journey, I cried many tears and became filled with a desire to reach out to Ann and share the story of someone else who was arrested and now a little closer to home at Noble Correctional Institution in Caldwell, Ohio, where he resides in the Faith Dorm and serves as a mentor to incoming inmates. He continues to participate and volunteer in various Chapel programs and services and is bass guitarist/vocals in the Chapel praise and worship band “Living Stones.” He has been blessed to serve as a volunteer in both the 2013 and 2014 WINGS family programs held at NCI. Although limited by my struggle with a disabling illness, I have continued my prison correspondence ministry and worked with several local families with incarcerated loved ones. In August 2015, we will celebrate our seventh wedding anniversary. Fred has an upcoming parole hearing in 2017, and it is our prayer that God will grant us the miracle of his parole and release so that we may continue our ministry together at home. “Keep the Faith” 2 Timothy 4:7

Fred, Nita, and Tom Drennen—December 2006

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SCl WINGS program as “Mr. & Mrs. Fredrick Drennen.” Since that time, Fred has obtained his credentials in ministry. He is now a little closer to home at Noble Correctional Institution in Caldwell, Ohio, where he resides in the Faith Dorm and serves as a mentor to incoming inmates. He continues to participate and volunteer in various Chapel programs and services and is bass guitarist/vocals in the Chapel praise and worship band “Living Stones.” He has been blessed to serve as a volunteer in both the 2013 and 2014 WINGS family programs held at NCI. Although limited by my struggle with a disabling illness, I have continued my prison correspondence ministry and worked with several local families with incarcerated loved ones. In August 2015, we will celebrate our seventh wedding anniversary. Fred has an upcoming parole hearing in 2017, and it is our prayer that God will grant us the miracle of his parole and release so that we may continue our ministry together at home. “Keep the Faith” 2 Timothy 4:7

Fred & Nita Drennen—2015

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“Tell Us Your Story” Commentaries from Wings For L.I.F.E. International 20th Anniversary Donation Form

The Wings Party is very fun and helps us look forward to future parties and helps time pass quickly until the next event.

I love these parties, and thank you!!!

It was a blessing. It made me and my daughter feel good and I was so happy. I want to thank you. And if it wasn’t for Wings I wouldn’t be able to have shared a special time with my family. – Luisa.

Wings made it possible for her daughters to spend the day with their mom and it was great to see them all together and very happy. – Evelyn.

Today is Valentine’s Day, February 14th 2015, and I’m visiting my mom in Grants, NM. Wings has helped me today by giving me an opportunity to see my mom again. Thanks. – Destiny.
Joey started coming to Wings For L.I.F.E. (WFL) when he was a young boy. His father had been in prison, he really never knew his mother, and first his grandmother raised him and then his aunt adopted him.

Joey had a speech problem and it was very difficult to understand him when he was little. Apparently other children used to make fun of him because when he came to WFL he always said he had so much fun, felt loved, and he especially liked that no one laughed at him.

Incentives are given to children at WFL for books that are read to them when they are little, or for books they read on their own when the child gets older. First Joey received new books and other special things from the WFL treasure chest when his grandmother read him stories. He proudly came to WFL and told the leaders how many books “he had read” each week.

Soon Joey was in elementary school was reading many stories on his own. He was so encouraged by the praise received and all the new books he was given at WFL that he read even more.

Joey just completed fifth grade year and he was honored as the student who had read the most in his entire school! Joey is so proud of his reading, and often is found reading a story to the younger children at WFL.

Joey still has difficulty speaking clearly. But at WFL each week families sit around tables of eight people, and people talk and share with one another. Joey has participated in these conversations for years. One of our WFL “guidelines” are that everyone is treated with respect and everything has a chance to share and speak. He now has a confidence in himself that he didn’t have when he was younger. Joey has even recently represented other WFL children at events where he has spoken to 80+ adults.

Joey is probably still classified in school as a child with a “speech deficiency.” But Joey has all the confidence of himself in the world. We know that much can be attributed to his grandmother, aunt, and other adults in his life. But we know that his friends at WFL have also helped Joey grow into the fine young man that he is today.

*Name has been changed.
“Now I Know Who Jesus Is!”

Ann Edenfield Sweet

The Wings Ministry, a program that connects unchurched family members of prisoners to caring Christians from local churches, was founded in 1995 as a result of the love that my four boys and I experienced in a local church through the LOGOS Ministry. After my husband was given a 15-year prison sentence, I knew I needed to find a church “family” and I found it. I wanted others to experience what we had—thus the founding of Wings.

The Wings Ministry generally hosts three community parties per year—a Christmas, Easter, and Back-to-School party. Now Wings host parties in prisons and juvenile facilities too.

Recently, I was listening to a rerun of the Jay Leno Show. He was interviewing people outside his studio and asking them “religious questions.” I was shocked at some of the responses.

- When was Jesus born? Answers varied from about 200 years ago up to millions of years ago. Leno joked that Jesus either knew President Lincoln or roamed with the dinosaurs.
- One anthropology student said that eggs were used at Easter because there was not enough food in the world and to prevent famine.
- Others said that rabbits and bunnies were found in the Old Testament.
- One young man said the name for the Friday before Easter was Palm Sunday!

These responses from American shocked me, but also reminded me about how important knowledge about Christ and experiencing Christ’s love today is! And that’s what happens at a Wings Party.

I was reminded of a Wings Christmas Party where there were over 500 guests and church volunteers present. We now have members from over 150 churches and 18 different denominations participating in our Albuquerque parties, so our request to church leaders to bring “Christmas costumes” provided a huge variety of “outfits”. We had several dozen “Shepherd’s robes”; 30-40 angel costumes with wings; wise men’s crowns, jeweled boxes, and vases for the gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We had pig ears and noses, cow vests, many sheep ears and fuzzy vests, and even a rooster costume that a 2-year old wore. Everyone not in “official costumes” wore a paper plate “halo” and everyone’s raised fingers became “twinkling stars” at the appropriate time during our Bible study retelling the birth of Jesus.

A wife of an inmate, with her newborn daughter as “Jesus”, took center stage, beautifully draped in a light blue shawl. All the players (500+ of us) were ready as the priest helped us all experience and dramatize the scripture passages. I don’t know if any “Christmas Pageant” had been more fun OR meaningful to me than this one.

A Wings Party starts with singing, then Bible study, crafts and discussion, and ends with dinner and a group game. We close in a huge circle of prayer, holding one another’s hands, and rejoicing in God’s unconditional love and acceptance and recognition that we are all Children of God.

I’ll never forget what happened at the end of that prayer—one little former “cow” came racing across the gym floor and jumped up into my arms. Thank heaven my years of raising four boys had prepared me instinctively for his unannounced leap of faith. As I held him tight, with his arms claspimg me around my neck, he shouted out joyfully, “Now I know who Jesus is!”

I smiled at him and hugged this “little stranger” that I honestly hadn’t singled out of the crowd until this point. Suddenly, the meaning of his words dawned on me. This little 4-year old “cow” had only heard up until this point in his short life, “Jesus Christ! Can’t you do anything right? What’s wrong with you?” and whatever other derogatory words had been yelled at him. But now he knew Jesus was real, came to earth as a baby to live with us and die for us. This little boy had experience Jesus Christ’s love for him and all of us at this Wings Party.

Now my dream is to help all those “Jay Leno guests” and “unchurched others”, whether inmate family members or not, to know Jesus’ love for you, for me, for all!
Two Little Girls

Janet Winchester-Silbaugh

Two little girls, about 5 and 7 years old, looked lost in their pretty Sunday dresses, dirty sneakers, and bows in their hair that weren’t tied quite right. They stood by their Dad, awkward in his clean, but un-ironed white shirt. The gym echoed with families getting together and people setting up activities. People were getting ready for a celebration. The little girls were waiting for the Wings party to start in the gym at the New Mexico Women’s Correctional Facility in Grants, New Mexico, February 8, 2003. They were also waiting for their mom.

The Wings Ministry hosts family celebrations at prisons in New Mexico where families can eat, play, and sing together. Wings Ministry gives families the opportunity to build memories together, even when mom or dad is in prison. The Wings Party is based on Acts 2:42.

“And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.”

Wings parties are a bit loud. In Grants, the large, echoing gym vibrates with the songs of a Christian band with plenty of amplifiers playing good hand-clapping songs. There are activities for kids of all ages—a play area for the little ones, craft tables for the middle-sized kids, and activities for the adults. It’s a time where kids can make Valentine cards for their parents, and parents can get their kids pizza and cookies. It’s time to just be a family and talk about normal things—the dog’s latest adventure, what happened at school, and what mom did at work yesterday. It’s a time to bask in God’s light.

Families have family portraits taken. They may be in a prison, but these portraits look like family portraits taken anywhere—toddler’s trying to crawl off their mother’s lap to go play, sisters with silly expressions, cries of “look at the camera” and Grandmothers very proud of their children. Wings volunteers brought a studio-quality camera and a photo printer, and printed one copy of the picture for the family and one for the woman in prison. The Wings Ministry creates family memories.

Wings connects inmates’ families to caring Christians, who welcome them into congregations and teach them about Christ’s love. Volunteers come from area churches around New Mexico. The volunteers tell people about the party, offer rides, set up the craft activities, borrow vans from churches, offer their time, and most of all, let families know they are cared about and welcome. Churches loan their vans so that families, many of whom don’t have cars, can get to the prison. Wings Ministry coordinates the entire activity and makes sure families know they are part of God’s family.

The little girls brightened considerably when their mom walked in the door, uncertainty gone. She smiled as they quietly walked up to hug her, proud of how they’d grown. She admired their pretty dresses and commiserated about the mess the dog made. Her husband got to spend time with his wife. They made expressions, cries of “look at the camera” and Grandmothers very proud of their children. Wings volunteers brought a studio-quality camera and a photo printer, and printed one copy of the picture for the family and one for the woman in prison. The Wings Ministry creates family memories.

Churches helping families stay together, even during the hard times; connecting families to their communities and churches that care about them; that’s what Wings parties are all about.

On Saturday We Met Jesus

Ann Edenfield Sweet

Wings held its first party at the Men’s Recovery Academy in Los Lunas, NM on Saturday, June 9. It was a fabulous party and Jesus was definitely there. About 225 men, family members, staff, and volunteers attended the 3-hour party. We sang “shake a neighbor’s hand”; saw that “Jesus is the friend, he’s the friend next to you”. The NM Deputy Secretary of Corrections, Joe Booker, was Noah, and we had animals of all kinds get onto the ark, including the slowest turtle. The “wind” and “rain” blew and poured down, the “dove” flew out to bring back the leaf, and the “rainbow” was high in the sky to show God’s promise to always be there for us, even if we’re as slow as the turtle.

Dads and kids made Father’s Day cards, strung cheerio necklaces, made butterflies, and made Frisbees out of Legg’s seconds. They even threw the Frisbees with their kids on the lawn. We ate together, enjoyed sharing Father’s Day traditions, and then had an “Olympic Summer Relay” – Going for the Gold – and everyone received their gold medal, proclaiming, “Let us run with perseverance. Heb. 12:1.”

Families reconnected, new memories were created, and Christ’s unconditional love was shared with everyone.

After we returned to Albuquerque and unloaded the church van, we decided to go to dinner. Charles Rock, Jr., the national Angel Tree Director from Lansdowne, VA, had attended his first Wings Party, and Chaplain Jake McLeroy, from the Santa Fe Penitentiary, had led music at the party. We decided to go to the Frontier Restaurant to relax, debrief, and get to know one another better.

We were standing in line to order when a bus boy/man came up to us, pointed at our Wings T-shirts, and asked if we did prison ministry. I said yes, and told him all about the MRA party that we had just hosted. Then he said, “You work also with families of prisoners don’t you?” Again, we said yes. Suddenly he opened up his wallet, pulled out a $100 bill, and gave it to me saying, “Please use this for your ministry.”

I’m still in awe. Never had anything like this happened before! He proceeded to let us know that he had spent about 8 months in prison. He had never attended a Wings Party, but had heard about them in the prison from other inmates, and he wanted to support us!

He said he had worked at the Frontier off and on for the past 20 years. After I had hugged him, and thanked him profusely, I asked his name. I shouldn’t have been surprised—his name was Jesus.
The Impact of Incarceration on Families

Ann Edenfield Sweet, Founder and Executive Director of Wings For LIFE International

I started Wings Ministry which is now called Wings For LIFE International in 1995 after my first husband ended up in a federal prison with a 15 year prison sentence. I raised four boys on $800/month with a $3.5 million IRS lien that was totally erased after 15 years. Our family attended churches—the first, where no one contacted us after my husband arrest and the second, where I had been youth director for five years and when I announced my husband was coming home from prison, the new Senior Pastor said, “Then I can no longer be your pastor.”

We needed a church home where we were loved, accepted, and wanted. I went to Prison Fellowship, received a small grant through Angel Tree to have a party where we built relationships with people through singing, Bible stories, crafts and games, and eating together. At the end of the party we gave a Christmas present, but the greatest gift we gave was the gift of our caring and being welcome—especially into a church!

Our Wings’ volunteers are encouraged to be God’s angels to create a safe place, for our guests are generally wounded and hurting. Then we need to comfort and protect them: nurture, love, feed, (through God’s Word and food) and ultimately we want our guests to be able to fly on their own. That’s the goal of a Wings Party: to share Christ’s unconditional love with everyone.

In 2002 we started Wings Parties in prisons, and currently parties have been held in 18 states. In 2014 the New Mexico Corrections Department asked Wings to host parties in all of the 11 New Mexico prisons. The NMCD has seen lives change, hope given, faith shared, and prisons have been changed. Happy people cause fewer problems. When an inmate looks forward all year to a Wings Party, knowing that an infraction may keep them off the guest list, they behave. Those positive attitudes permeate a facility. And we’ve heard Wardens say that attitudes change not only with the inmates and their loved ones, but with the prison staff too! Soon we’ll be training leaders to lead Wings Parties all over the country.

Our second program, Wings For L.I.F.E. – Life-skills Imparted to Families through Education (WFL), came as a result of my book, Family Arrested: How to Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One. Even though I was college educated, and had been respected at one time in my life, I found that the prison system had a whole new language and world that I wasn’t familiar with. 95% of all inmates get out of prison. WFL works with the children and strengthens family relationships to avoid incarceration. The positive ripple effect of keeping even one person from returning to prison has a dramatic impact on the family and our communities.

Wings For L.I.F.E. won the American Probation & Parole Association’s national Award of Excellence in Crime Prevention and is considered a national best-practice model. It is also the basis for Prison Fellowships; Angel Tree Year-long Program.

Lastly, Wings tries to find the good in everyone and tries to strengthen family relationships. God doesn’t make junk. People make mistakes, but through sharing Christ’s love and seeing people through Christ’s eyes, people can change and can become the people God intended them to be.

These are just a few of the thousands of quotes from Wings prison parties:

- The Warden, Chaplain and staff need to be put on a pedestal for allowing this wonderful authentic family visit.
- Family is essential to recovery and a feeling of hope.
- People showing concern from the outside also gives great encouragement and more hope of a future.
- I loved praising God with my family and Brothers and seeing the smiles of their faces.
- It allows our families that were split apart to reunite and fellowship.
- This party allows family to worship together and give God all the praise. It gives the incarcerated and their family time to bond toward one another in harmony and spirit to reconcile the past and secure their future on God’s grace.

Impact of Wings For L.I.F.E.:

- I learned that I could help young kids to show them a different plan and be a role model.
- Kids of prisoners often can’t talk about what’s going on. They often act out, eat too much, drink, use drugs, act out in school. Thanks for teaching and showing us ways to cope.
- Thanks for all the support and helping our family. If it wasn’t for all of you I could not get through this.
- The meetings are very enlightening.
- The topics presented need to be discussed as some don’t know how to deal with these topics.
- WFL teaches us valuable skills that can be used to help transition back into the community.
- We need WFL available to people all over the State of NM and the United States.
- It is a great place to learn. WFL helps prepare us and gives us knowledge to succeed.
- WFL has opened my eyes to a new way of living.
I grew up reading Guideposts Magazines. My parents subscribed to Guideposts as far back as I can remember. When my parents, two brothers, sister and I finished reading each magazine, the past issues were then hauled up to our summer camp/cottage on Lake Superior in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and stacked on a shelf. Our camp still has no running water or electricity, so there were many times when it rained or we experienced foul weather, and I, or our many extended family members or guests, would curl up in a chair for a quiet afternoon of inspirational reading from Guideposts.

Soon I was a flight attendant, married to an airline captain, and in time we had four boys. Each night I would read stories to them, and I always included stories from Guideposts.

On August 5, 1985, I received a call that changed my life forever. My husband had been arrested! I suddenly found myself penniless, with over a $3.5 million dollar IRS lien. I had a 6-month, 2# baby diagnosed with failure to thrive, and I had no health insurance and couldn’t even pay for his oxygen! The older boys were 2, 5, and 7. This was one of the lowest points in my life.

After graduating from college and moving out on my own, I decided that Guideposts still needed to be a part of my life. A magazine would arrive and I would read it cover to cover. I loved reading stories of faith about real life people! Their faith helped mine grow, and I would finish each magazine feeling uplifted and refreshed. This pattern continues to this day.

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God had always been a part of my life, so when no one called us from the church where we had been members of for 12 years, I still felt His presence. Now when a Guideposts Magazine arrived, I devoured it. Reading stories of everyday people and His presence in their lives reassured me. It hurt deeply that no one called from our former church, and after being shunned by neighbors and what I thought had been “friends”, I needed reassurance that God was still there. God reassured my of His love through the words and stories on the pages of Guideposts Magazine.

My husband ultimately pled to a 15-year sentence in a federal prison. I had never felt so alone. I knew I needed to find a church home. I met the most wonderful pastor who prayed for us and welcomed us warmly into his congregation. I got so involved that soon he had the courage to hire me as Youth Director. For five years the boys and I thrived. The youth program grew to over 250 youth and children.

One morning my husband called to tell me he would be home in 5 months and would serve only 6 years. I went into the church staff meeting and excitedly burst out that my husband would soon be home. The new Sr. Pastor looked at me. In front of the whole staff he said, “Then I can no longer be your pastor.” I thought he was kidding until one of our female pastors left the room in tears. Only then did I realize he was serious. The good news is that if he hadn’t said that, I would have thought all family members of prisoners were loved and welcomed into churches and I’d probably still be the youth director today.

Shortly after my husband was arrested I looked everywhere for a book to help me with his incarceration. No one could help me, so I finally made an appointment with the Head of the Psychology Department at the University of New Mexico. After about 20 minutes he pulled a book off the shelf. It was a study of Norwegian fisherman going to sea for 9 months and the impact this made on the family. I couldn’t believe there were millions of people in prison and not one book I could read to help me! Thus, I began writing of my experiences that became my book, Family Arrested: How to Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One.

No publisher was interested in my book. I even contacted Prison Fellowship. When it seemed like there was no interest from them, I made contact with the Prison Fellowship Area Director for New Mexico. He graciously met with me and told me about their Christmas gift program called the Angel Tree Program. My husband had played Santa Claus in prison for 6 years. Yet I had never heard of the Angel Tree Program, but I had an idea.

I had been on the Board of Directors of LOGOS System Associates, the finest congregational youth program I’m aware of. Instead of just giving a wrapped Christmas gift, I knew that the greatest gift of all is a person’s gift of love and to discover that someone personally cares about you. I met with Prison Fellowship executives in Washington, D.C. in 1995, and received a small grant to start what I called the Wings Ministry. The program is called “Wings”; because wings lift you up, protect you, can surround and hug you, and hopefully help you fly to new heights. The logo became an angel with wings and a trumpet to proclaim the good news. The mission of the Wings Ministry is to share Christ’s unconditional love with all families of prisoners and to connect them to local churches.

The job as Church Youth Director paid $800 a month. I have no idea now how the boys and I survived and even thrived making so little. Although I barely had money for food, I knew I needed the inspirational stories from Guideposts each month. Somehow I found $9.99 each year for the annual subscription. There

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Guideposts and the Wings Ministry

Ann Edenfield Sweet, Founder and Executive Director of Wings For LIFE International

Angel Tree Program

Family Arrested: How to Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One

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were times when I had a choice of reading the Bible or Guideposts, and often I would pick up Guideposts, for the true stories of people living today encouraged me and helped me to stay focused on God.

In planning our first Wings Christmas Party in 1995 for the family members of inmates in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I remembered Guideposts, and how the stories had helped the boys and me over the years. I even read “His Mysterious Ways” every week to my youth Sunday School class, often finding stories from issues decades old. It was as if God told me to call Guideposts to see if they would be willing to give a discount to inmate family members, as the annual cost had now gone up to a whopping $11.95 (if I remember correctly). The Guideposts representative responded, “Oh, we can’t do that,” and my heart sunk! And then he continued on, “We don’t give discounts, but we can GIVE you FREE magazines!” I couldn’t believe my ears! FREE MAGAZINES! Now our guests would be able to experience God’s unconditional love and presence in our lives today, by reading the stories in each magazine! I was overcome with thankfulness to Guideposts and humbled again by God’s presence in my life.

Beginning in December of 1995, Guideposts Magazine has been one of the “official sponsors” of each and every Wings Party. The ministry has grown and expanded from the humble beginnings in Albuquerque, NM to reach families and inmates all over NM and in other states as well. We host community parties in local churches, sponsored by members of the neighboring faith community. Wings has now been invited to host a Wings Party in every New Mexico adult and juvenile prison.

Over the years Guideposts has given us a variety of magazines, videos, Christmas cards, prayer and inspirational books, hats, and now sweaters too. The printed materials are very powerful, for when a guest goes home from a Wings Party and returns to their often dismal environment, they have words to comfort and sustain them. When they place a ‘Guideposts sweater’ on their little one, they are reminded of each stitch knit/crocheted in love and prayer, and as one mother said to me, “I feel like God is protecting and hugging my baby every time I put the ‘Guideposts sweater’ on him.”

I tell every Wings volunteer that they are God’s angels at a party, and their job is to share Christ’s unconditional love to the guests through a smile, a helping hand, and a hug. Sending our guests home with gifts from Guideposts helps keep that spirit alive in Guideposts and humbled again by God’s presence in my life.

I thank the staff and donors of Guideposts Magazine for living out the Gospel so beautifully. We are reminded in Matthew 25:40, “I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Thank you for recognizing that the ‘least of these’ are not only inmates, but loved ones of inmates. Thanks for helping the Wings Ministry to expand their wings, by sending gifts home that remind everyone of God’s undying love for each of us.

Parenting With a Husband in Prison

Parenting is difficult enough these days without the extra burden of incarceration. But that is exactly what is happening in America today. Children are being raised without father or mothers because they are in prison. The Department of Justice’s annual report on the U.S. prison population reports the number of people under the supervision of the corrections system — whether on parole, probation, or incarcerated, reached almost 6.9 million in 2003. This represents about 3.2% of the nation’s population. One in 40 children in American has a parent in prison. One in 14 African Americans will be incarcerated in their lifetime. No wonder America’s children have a depletion of developmental assets in their lives and are 6-8 times more likely to end up in prison than others. A staggering 76% of inmates report having had a relative in prison. This generational pattern of incarceration has to stop!

My husband was given a 15-year prison sentence. I was a mother of four young boys, ages 18 months to 8 years of age. My baby was on oxygen with “failure to thrive”. I had over a $3.5 million IRS lien. The IRS also told me I couldn’t make over $30,000 per year or they’d garnish my wages and one mistake on a tax return would send me to prison and my four boys into foster homes in the four corners of the country! The picture was not pretty! On top of it I had to be a mother/father/breadwinner/ and comforter for my boys.

As I laughingly say, I didn’t have to die to find out that some people came to my “funeral”. I quickly found out that I had a few friends left. The rest of my “acquaintances” treated me like a leper or a ‘walking AIDS case’. As hard as it was on me, we can’t forget that often our children are treated that same way. Therefore, we must do everything we can to build our self-esteem as well as our children’s self esteem.

These are some of the things I learned about parenting:

- I had to take care of myself. This meant maintaining a positive attitude, staying well groomed, and getting adequate sleep to maintain my health and energy.

- I had to get very organized. I found ways for the boys to help me maintain the house and yard. Together we created lists of “Family Chores” that included daily tasks like making beds, straightening their rooms, setting the dinner table, doing dishes, and helping with meal preparation. We fixed school lunches each evening. Weekly chores consisted of washing and changing sheets, vacuuming, moving/weeding, and gardening, and cleaning the bathrooms and miscellaneous chores that came along.

- Although I had little money, I found that the incentive of Friday night pizza and a rental movie after our household cleaning tasks were completed (vacuum, dust, bathrooms, and general house pick up) worked beautifully. I ordered the pizzas when all the tasks were completed. The “clean” house on Friday night prevented me from being a “nag” all weekend and we all felt better in a clean home. Treating us all to pizza and a movie was a small price to pay for a clean home.
I really didn’t have money for allowances, but found that allowances actually saved me money in the long run. More importantly, allowances taught them to budget their money wisely. They learned to save for special things. They also learned that spending all their money on candy and junk food meant they might not have money for fun weekend events. They learned the value of money and could spend it as they wished. Learning this valuable lesson at an early age is invaluable. An allowance also removed me from being “mean mom”. They chose how they wanted to spend their money and could only get mad at themselves for poor choices.

I feel it is important to share your situation about a spouse in prison with the principal, teachers, counselors, coaches, and friends and neighbors YOU CAN TRUST. The key word here is TRUST. Hopefully, they will become your ally at school and help to keep you informed about your child’s well being and attitude. When my oldest son was 24 and I was ready to publish my book, he told me about his first day as a 6th grader in his new middle school. He walked into the cafeteria for his first lunch and a kid yelled across the room, pointing his finger directly at him for all to see and yelled, “Aren’t you the kid whose dad’s in prison?” What a terrible way to start school, and he didn’t tell me for 13 years!

I believe in the African proverb that it takes a whole village to raise a child. That is certainly true when a parent is in prison. I would encourage the parent at home to get their child involved in as many sports and extra curricular activities as possible. Join a local congregation and participate in youth events, camping programs, and mission retreats. Coaches, teachers, and congregational leaders can become positive role models and/or mentors for your child. Boys with fathers in prison especially need strong, positive role models.

Through the incarceration, learn to turn to family and friends for help. Don’t try to do it all yourself.

98% of all inmates are released from prison so your spouse will hopefully be soon home. Maintain open, honest lines of communication with your spouse.

It is also important to remember the parent in prison. They are still a parent. Try to find ways to include them in their children’s lives. Send copies of report cards and school papers. Encourage your children to write their parent in prison. Share parenting situations and issues that have come up with your spouse and try to discuss the situation, possible solutions, and if the situation has already been dealt with, how and why you chose your option. Remember also that it always seems easier to find a solution away from the heat of the moment and after the fact. Learn from your decisions—right or wrong.

Wings for Life International Celebrate our 20th Anniversary:

15 Take photos at Wings events.

What is it like to have a family member—a husband, wife, son, daughter, grandchild—arrested, incarcerated, and put in prison? No one is prepared for the reality they face when this happens. Life is completely altered. Friends turn away; you are isolated within the community, and feel like a leper.

Until August 5, 1986, my life was the epitome of the American middle class. That day, my world came crashing down and changed forever. My husband was arrested. I was now facing a nightmare that no one could have prepared me for. It didn’t matter who I had been or what awards I had won. Now I was known ONLY as the “wife of a prisoner”.

With a husband in prison I was treated like an outcast. I met a police chief many years after my husband’s initial arrest who said, “In all my 33 years in law enforcement I never considered what has to be faced by the ‘other victim’ of most crimes—the family of the prisoner.” It is as if the family members become invisible to law enforcement officers, as well as to the public.

When my husband was arrested, I had to suddenly learn a ‘foreign language’—the language of the legal system and prison culture. Our attorney gave me a ‘crash course in legalese’ and this new world I was thrown into.

My careers have run the gamut from international flight attendant, high school teacher, real estate broker, motel chain owner, director of development for an art center, youth leader and author of the book "The Inmate’s Family and Why They are Important."
It has now been 24 years since my family and I were thrown into this ‘foreign world’ and it isn’t quite so foreign to me now. I wrote a book about my experience, Family Arrested: How to Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One, to help others. It’s the story of my life during the six years my husband spent in a federal prison and an additional four years after his return home.

In 1995 I started the Wings Ministry, basically an addition to Prison Fellowship’s Angel Tree Program. Wings hosts a party for the families of prisoners in a local church, and members from area congregations help sponsor the party. (In Albuquerque we have had volunteers from over 150 congregations and at least 18 different denominations participate in our parties.) In 2002 the NM Secretary of Corrections asked us to host parties in our New Mexico prisons. We have now hosted parties in nine NM prisons and all the NM state juvenile facilities. We have also hosted prison parties in Ohio, Texas, Tennessee, Colorado, and Hawaii. Wings community parties have been held in 13 states and all over India. The goal of the party is to let family members know that people in the community care about them and they are welcome in neighborhood churches.

In 2004 I became the only paid staff of the Wings Ministry and started a second program—Wings For L.I.F.E.—Life-skills Imparted to Families through Education (WFL). This is a support and empowerment program offered by Wings for former inmates (returning citizens) and their families. WFL just won the APPA (American Probation and Parole Association) national “Award of Excellence” and will be recognized at their national conference in February, 2009.

At Wings For L.I.F.E. we truly want to give family members ‘wings to fly for the rest of their lives.’ We teach manners, life-skills (i.e. how to shake a hand) and one of Search Institute’s® 40 Developmental Assets®, which public schools across the United States endorse because their research shows that the more assets a person has, the less at-risk behaviors they exhibit. A speaker addresses one of the issues that relate to strengthening the family with an incarcerated loved one, and we provide time for small group discussion. We work with the whole family as we find it’s more effective to teach the whole family so everyone in the family understands and values the new learning.

One night at WFL we were having a discussion about single-parenting as a result of incarceration. One 25-year old mother of seven children was in my group and we were discussing the importance of family chores. I mentioned that one of our family daily chores was for my boys to make their bed before school. This mother said, “We don’t make beds. My mother never taught me to make beds so we don’t make beds in my family.” I was shocked and asked what they did with their bed linen. “We just throw it all in a corner,” was her response. Just then her two oldest children, ages 12 and 11, came running over from the teenage table and excitedly said, “Mommy, mommy, we just learned we need to make beds!” She grimaced, looked at me and then said with a smile, “I guess I need to learn how to make a bed!”

I don’t know if that family makes beds now or not. I do know that the children would have never known about bed-making without our discussion. When families learn and discuss new ideas together, they are encouraged to positive family changes that strengthen their own unique situation. They have learned and explored together, which equips them to make choices that better suit their family.

Again, why should you care about this? These statistics are startling.
• If recent incarceration rates remain unchanged, an estimated 1 of every 15 persons will serve time in a prison during their lifetime! (Incarceration may even touch your family.)
• Children of inmates have a 70% chance of ending up in prison themselves!
• In 1 of 5 American children has a parent under penal supervision.
• The U.S. corrections price tag exceeds $68 billion a year.
• The national recidivism rate is about 67%.
• Thirty-one percent of jail inmates had grown up with a parent or guardian who abused alcohol or drugs
• About 12 percent had lived in a foster home or institution.
• Forty-six percent had a family member who had been incarcerated.
• More than 50% of the women in jail said they had been physically or sexually abused in the past, compared to more than 10% of the men.
• One in 30 men between the ages of 20 and 34 are behind bars. And for African-Americans, the number is one in nine.
• At least 95% of all State prisoners will be released from prison at some point. (Returning citizens will be in our communities, grocery stores, and highways. Their attitude will reflect how they were treated in prison and how they and their family were treated when released.)
• An inmate with no ties to family or friends on the outside often remains in the prison system for life. The more the family stays involved in their life, the better chance they have of remaining positive and hopeful.

I hope you see now why we must continue to work with returning citizens and their families. Why should America spend $68 billion a year to incarcerate human beings? Wouldn’t that money be far better spent in strengthening families, education, health care, and improving our communities?

Why Should the Faith Community Care and How Can They Help?
• Jesus said, “I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”—Matthew 25:40 (Includes prisoners as well as their family members.)
• Recognize the impact incarceration has on family members and welcome them into your church.
• Encourage families and returning citizens to remain positive and encourage them to find support groups like Wings For L.I.F.E. in their communities and get actively involved in their local congregation.
• Encourage the prisoner to stay in close communication with his/her loved ones.
• Prisoners will be easier to work with if they know their family is OK. Welcome Wings Parties, or other opportunities for the prisoner and family members to meet together in a positive environment.
• Visit our website at www.WingsMinistry.org to view photos and comments from past community and prison parties.

20 WAYS to help Wings For LIFE International Celebrate our 20th Anniversary:

Take video at Wings events.
Don’t you just love a good “rags to riches” story? This story has a different twist. Ann Edenfield Sweet went from “riches to rags.” But now she has Wings, and that’s all that matters!

Her story begins when she and her husband were living a comfortable life in a huge adobe house along the Rio Grande. Ann had been a flight attendant for over 15 years, flying all around the world, collecting wonderful trinkets from exotic places. Her husband was a 747 pilot. They had three beautiful boys and another one on the way.

Suddenly this rosy picture shattered. The baby was born premature with Failure to Thrive Syndrome. Her husband spent six years in prison. When he was released the couple tried to stay together but it didn’t work out. Back then there were no programs like Ann’s. Families and inmates grew apart. Divorce was a common result of incarceration.

The young mother found her circumstances and lifestyle caught up in a cyclone of change. She was suddenly a single mom, with a sick baby and creditors banging at the door. The couple had purchased land and now mortgagers were foreclosing. The sizeable family budget she had enjoyed was cut to the $800 a month she could earn. Work, that would accommodate a sick baby and the needs of young children, was hard to come by. Even the people at Ann’s church wouldn’t talk to her.

Ann’s story may be a reversal of the classic theme. But it has the happiest of endings. She loves to think of the family members she works with as spreading their Wings and flying above their troubles and into a new life. That’s what she did.

Its founder flies around the country and around the world talking to prisoners, their families and community members. Everywhere she goes, she encourages people to start Wings support groups.

In Albuquerque 150 different church groups participate in this work by sending volunteers to her organization. Wings offers education about life skills for both inmates and family members. The work is based around Ann’s idea that people learn better when they are having fun. So the meetings always have food, games, socializing and activities for kids.

The dentist at a free clinic told Ann she was an irresponsible mother because her youngest child had cavities. It was a devastating assessment. Much later, when she finally had money to pay for a dentist, Ann learned that her youngest child’s dental problems were the result of birth trauma, not neglect, as that other dentist had indicated.

As Ann’s life stabilized, she wrote a book of support called Family Arrested: How to Survive the Incarceration of a Loved One. One woman said, “I stood in line with my whole family at a book signing just to have a chance to talk to this woman. Our dad had been sent to jail and we were all in shock. Ann spent an hour talking to us.”

Beginning in 1995 Ann started a program to do something for others whose situations were even worse than her own. She called it Wings Ministry, and in 2004 started Wings For L.I.F.E. (Life-skills for Inmate Families & Education). It is a support system for the invisible victims of incarceration—the families. Wings has become international in scope.

The “Prison Parties” sponsored by Wings, allow incarcerated parents and children to do crafts together. They make frames and take photos of the family. Inmates work ahead of time to prepare Bible skits to share. One inmate reported to Carr, “I didn’t know the Bible could be so much fun.”

The “Parties” didn’t sound like the right concept. But we gave it a try. And it is wonderful. Children are reassured that their incarcerated parents are safe in spite of the ugly things portrayed in the media. Families begin to feel re-united.”

For both inmates and family members, the “Prison Parties” are a much-needed break that cycle. “Parties” give it a try. And it is wonderful. Children are reassured that their incarcerated parents are safe in spite of the ugly things portrayed in the media. Families begin to feel re-united.”

Today, Ann is remarried to a Methodist pastor who lives in Ohio. She commutes back and forth between states. Her children are grown and offer support to Mom for her work.

Ann’s story may be a reversal of the classic theme. But it has the happiest of endings. She loves to think of the family members she works with as spreading their Wings and flying above their troubles and into a new life. That’s what she did.

“Today I feel like the richest person in the world,” she says. “I’m not rich with money, but rich with purpose.”

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ATM Story
From Riches to Rags, then WINGS
By Judith Costello

The statistics says that seven out of ten children who have a parent in jail will end up in jail themselves, says Ann. “That is unacceptable. We have to break that cycle.”

Joe Williams, the Secretary for the State Department of Corrections, says, “Ann is making a difference in our communities with her energy and enthusiasm, her wit and her drive. We have witnessed generation after generation following each other into incarceration. But with the support and guidance of programs like Wings, that can change.”

Ann says every family needs the gift of love and acceptance. “We need to water the seed of love. Our goal is to strengthen families.”

Her husband spent six years in prison. When he was released the couple tried to stay together but it didn’t work out. Back then there were no programs like Ann’s. Families and inmates grew apart. Divorce is a common result of incarceration.

WAYS to help Wings For Life International
Celebrate our 20th Anniversary:

- Help out webmaster with our website.

- Decorated with place mats highlighting discussion questions. During dinner, leaders at each table encourage constructive dialogue. Presenters talk about such diverse topics as Job Interview Skills, Manners, Tattoos and Creating Summer Fun on a Low Budget. A recent talk was on How to Have a Great Wardrobe on a Tiny Budget.

- “Today I feel like the richest person in the world,” she says. “I’m not rich with money, but rich with purpose.”
Jane Julian Hanna’s Miraculous Gift
Ann Ederfield Sweet, Wings Ministry Executive Director and Founder

I

t was over 18 years ago when I joined Central United Methodist Church (CUMC) in Albuquerque. I had just left my job as Youth Director in another church after I had announced to the staff that my husband was coming home from prison and the new Senior Pastor said in front of everyone, “Then I can no longer be your pastor.” I’m still amazed today by his response, but he hadn’t said that, I’d probably still be a Youth Director today and Wings Ministry never would have been formed. So God truly does use all things for His glory if we allow it.

I wasn’t on the national LOGOS Ministry staff yet, but had been on the national LOGOS Board and my friend and fellow LOGOS Board member, Susan Butler, was the CE Director at CUMC. I knew that I wanted our family to be in a LOGOS church, so we joined CUMC.

I started Wings two years later in 1995. Over the years CUMC’s church leadership and members have always welcomed my family and me and supported Wings through donations, prayers, hosting parties and Wings banquets, providing speaking opportunities to the congregation through mission moments and talks to Sunday School classes, having the No Boundaries Praise Band play at numerous Wings community parties and prison parties, and CUMC has allowed me to drive the church van to every Wings Prison Party in New Mexico since 2002! CUMC has been my church family and I’ve been so blessed.

About a month ago I received a call about a very generous bequest that was given to the church by Jane Julian Hanna. A committee was formed and the Samuel Project was established and they asked me to prepare a budget listing what needs Wings would have if some of that funding were to go to Wings. I was thrilled! I couldn’t sleep—my mind raced — I had numerous meetings with Board Members, staff, and volunteers. A congregational meeting was held two days before Thanksgiving and the congregation unanimously voted to provide some funding to Wings!

I am ecstatic – humbled – and mostly in awe how God works in our lives in the most amazing ways! The donation does NOT include any money for me or current staff members on the Wings payroll. How is this possible? Well, it DOES allow Wings to add two new members to our staff over the next two years to create a solid foundation for the future growth of Wings and to publish materials that will allow replication in other parts of the country.

If Wings is to grow bigger than me and to be sustained long after I am gone, the how’s and why’s of Wings need to be in place. That way our ministry methods can be taught, shared, and new leaders can emerge in places all over the world.

This is what the funding WILL allow:

- Publication of a Wings Ministry handbook. This handbook will include not only the “how to do a Wings Party” but more importantly “why” each part of a party is done.
- Publication of a Wings For L.I.F.E. After-School Handbook, designed and written by MaryAnn Gay, our Warren, TN Wings Director, who has been leading life-changing after-school programs for children or prisoners and at-risk elementary age children in Tennessee for several years. MaryAnn’s curriculum teaches how to build and instill Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets® in the children — best practice building blocks which lessens at-risk behaviors. I haven’t had time to do any programming in our school systems, so I’m eager for this curriculum to be in print so we can start programs in our Albuquerque schools too!
- DVDs and training materials to demonstrate and prepare future leaders about Wings Ministry Parties and Wings For L.I.F.E. programming.
- New brochures, banners and display materials to give a “more professional” look to Wings’ displays at conventions and speaking engagements.
- Purchase of a new digital camera, computer and software to keep updated with new technology which tell the stories of all our parties and programs.
- Hiring of a part-time Media Director who will work with our volunteer Webmaster to update the website, Face book, newsletters, and other media materials.
- Hiring of a part-time Marketing Director who will help me with existing and new fundraising programs.
- Hiring of a part-time Volunteer Coordinator who will help coordinate volunteers for the Wings Parties, Wings For L.I.F.E., and other Wings events.
- Funding for future Wings Parties. Since no grant can be written for a Wings Party, (in prison or in a community because we pray and talk about Jesus dying on the cross for all of us) this funding will allow us to purchase pizza, supplies, and cover travel costs for some upcoming future parties. Last year Wings ministered to almost 8400 people; in 2011 we have seen the numbers rise and in 2012 we expect an even larger increase.
- A $25/month transportation allowance for one year which Wings has never been able to provide to its staff.
I hope by building this stronger foundation that more grants will be able to be written, more congregations will put us in their mission budgets, and that Wings Affiliates will be able to start in other states. We have a Volunteer Wings Director in Ohio and a woman who would like to start Wings in Colorado and another in Indiana. We need funding to help provide some of the start-up expenses for them and give them a little money which will allow them to spend time on Wings instead of pursuing other careers. I know there are others called to Wings in other states too. Hopefully sales from some of the handbooks and materials will generate funding to help sustain our Albuquerque International Headquarters and allow us to grow. God keeps opening doors and He has shown time and again that He is in charge and He wants the ministry to families of prisoners to continue and to grow.

I can never thank the Hanna Family enough for their generosity and belief in the membership of CUMC to find appropriate and life-changing ministries to give their donation to. I am forever grateful to the members of CUMC for their faith in me, belief in Wings Ministry, and desire to reach outside the church building to minister to “the least of these”.

My promise to Central United Methodist Church, the Hanna Family, and to all our Wings families, volunteers, staff and future families, is to do my very best to fulfill my call and Wings mission:

- Christ’s unconditional love shared with all families of prisoners, and it remains as strong today as it was 17 years ago! Now we will have more resources, personnel, and web presence to reach even more.

This is the time of year for Thanksgiving, Joy, and Anticipation of the birth of Christ and His presence with us. I am SO very thankful! I am SO filled with joy! And I am in GREAT anticipation of now being able to share Christ’s love with even more of His children.

What a Grandmother has to say about Wings For L.I.F.E.

Wings For L.I.F.E. (WFL) has helped me a lot. It has given me a place to go and meet with people who have been there and understand. When you’re so caught up in the emotional side of the situation it is hard to be objective…Wings has steadied me—given me a base to look at different ways to handle the situation, and to help him (grandson) as much as I can. WFL has taught me to look for answers rather than looking at the problem all the time. Incarceration is not the end of the world and WFL has given me the ability to look positively to the future.

What a Warden Says about a Wings Party

On Dec. 20 CMRC was changed by an extraordinary program facilitated by Wings Ministry. This Christmas Party was extraordinary in that it was the first time we had allowed the residents (offenders) to invite their entire immediate families (wife, children, parents, whatever) into the facility to celebrate this important holiday, in as close to fashion as possible given the fact that one of the family members was incarcerated, and it occurred inside the walls.

I’ve been in the prison management business for almost a quarter century. I’ve seen plenty of special events held during the Christmas holidays within the prisons…But this was different…Wings Ministry recruited a small army of volunteers…Wings Ministry did an absolutely great job of coordinating the whole event… it was a success. This thing went off without a hitch, which clearly proved to us (often very cautious security personnel) that big things can happen safely, and when they do, they can produce grand results. The spirit of the season, of family, of being reunited, of restoration, of fun and excitement, of children smiling and singing, of people eating and talking, and the spirit of Christ, all permeated the facility. Not just the residents and their families, not just the volunteers, but even the employees and myself felt it. And this bleeds over to those residents who weren’t there, and hope to be for the next party.

Comments about Wings Parties

- Serves as an incentive because the attending inmates must remain clear of major rule violations for several months leading up to the event to be eligible. Thereafter, the offenders are held, inasmuch as possible, to the high standards that are set in order for them to participate—essentially we know that if they can do it for Wings, then they can do it all the time.
- Inmates who wish to repeat their experience understand and adjust to the fact that they must avoid internal discipline to attend the event the next year.
- Serves as a recruitment tool for our Chapel programs.
- Family involvement is enhanced due to Wings. The prison employees become “real people” to the inmate family members and the event has served as a springboard for greater family involvement in reentry planning. We believe family involvement has great value towards successful reintegration.
I spent an afternoon and evening at the Los Lunas Correctional Facility, volunteering at a Wings party. While I was not always comfortable (this was my first party inside a prison), it was a time of blessing and being blessed.

I had a hard time talking to the men at first. It wasn’t until I sat (stood) at dinner with some of the guys that I finally “connected.” We got to discuss important things, like how God has helped us through hard times and what my relationship with God is like. About 3:00 AM the next morning, I woke up with a realization that God was reminding me that not all prisons have metal bars.

There are many types of prisons, and all of us have been “imprisoned” at some point in our lives. I can think of at least four different types of prisons.

1. Physical Prison
A prison can be made of bricks and barbed wire and locks and keys. But there are other physical prisons. I work with young children who have trouble moving their bodies because their muscles don’t work right. One of my favorite kiddos is a little guy named John. He is a sweet, charming, bright-eyed 2-year-old who has muscular dystrophy. This means that John’s body, which should help him run and jump like other kids his age, has become a prison for him.

2. Emotional Prison
Many people are held captive by pain, anger, fear or a variety of other emotions. This is not the same as a physical prison. For some, it’s much worse. People may live their lives in a constant state of fear. Perhaps they are afraid of failure or afraid of an abusive relationship or afraid that they won’t be able to keep food on the table. Some people live as a captive to anger. Some people are imprisoned by guilt or shame; others by worry. All they have ever known are feelings of fear and anger and hatred and shame. These people will eventually shut down, and no longer feel anything at all.

3. Intellectual Prison
An intellectual prison is seen in a person who searches for truth by reasoning alone. God is not part of their equation for a healthy and fulfilling life. However, Jesus said that if we know the truth, we shall be “free indeed”. Only in God do we find the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Even Christians can get distracted and take their eyes off of Jesus, when they try to limit God to only what they can understand or explain. We are assuming an awful lot to think that our finites brains can wrap around an infinite God.

4. Spiritual Prison
Every person ever born in this world has been in spiritual prison. The Bible tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” I believe that God loves and adores every single one of us, not as “humanity,” but as individuals. God watches over you and cares for you, whether or not you believe He exists, whether or not you care about Him in any way. All are born into spiritual prison, some choose to leave it.

I think I can safely assume that all the men I met would rather live outside their physical prison. But I know if they leave that physical prison, and stay in a spiritual prison they will have missed out on the greatest freedom they will ever know.

Freedom in Christ is called salvation. Imagine you are standing outside a home on a frosty fall afternoon, just as the sun is going down. As you look in the window, you see a table all set for Thanksgiving dinner. The people you love are gathered around the table, just getting ready to sit down and dig in. They have set a place for you. Are you going to just stand outside and watch? I wouldn’t! It’s the same way with God. Why stand outside in the cold, observing Him from the outside, when you can knock on the door and say, “Please, Jesus, let me come in and enjoy the love that you want to give me?”

Since God adores us, everyone is invited to the feast. But Christians are sometimes seen as exclusive. We say that if people want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, they need to accept Christ’s payment for their sins. And some people see this as the “strings” attached to that great Thanksgiving meal. This is the way I explain it to some mid-school kids I work with:

God is like a glass of cool, clear, pure water. If you lift the glass, you can see right through to the other side. On the other hand, my glass is cloudy with all those little bits of dirt, dust, germs and so forth. They all represent my sins, because I am not pure and holy like God. Don’t get me wrong. I am about as straight-laced as they come, but I have spoken harsh words that have cut a tender heart. I have made selfish decisions that have hurt others. I have ignored the needs of my neighbors. God counts all those as sins. What happens when I (the dirty water) want to be together with God (the clear water)? If you pour the dirty water into the clear water you just have 2 glasses of dirty water, and neither one is good for anything. God made a way to purify my heart so that I could become pure, and come into the house of God, and be with Him. Jesus paid for my sins on the cross. He took the punishment I deserved, and washed me as clean as snow. Or as a glass of pure, clear, cool water. Now I can join up with God, enter into God’s house to join that Thanksgiving feast, and be filled to overflowing by the love and goodness and mercy of my Father.

God wants us to be free from our intellectual prisons. He is a rational God, but He is not limited by our rational abilities. God wants us to be free from our emotional prisons. He desires to heal us from the things that have hurt us and caused us to live in constant fear or anger or guilt or worry. God wants us to be free from physical prisons. I desperately want to see each man, each woman, each child I met in Los Lunas when I get to heaven, so I will pray for these people daily.
Inmates Begin Endowment Fund for the Wings Ministry!

On October 19, 2002, the first Wings Ministry “Party/Event” in a prison was held at the Los Lunas Minimum Restrict Facility in Los Lunas, NM. Inmates from the Crossings unit, a special Christian unit for inmates, invited their family members to join them in this historic event. Chaplain Paul Collins led us in a providential Bible study – building our faith on a firm foundation. One of the most powerful comments from one of the inmates was, “The highlight of the party was having my family see me worship and pray to God for the first time!” He had become a Christian in prison and his wife and children had never seen him pray before. Everyone present that day had his or her lives forever touched in a special way. But I never dreamt that those inmates would touch the Wings Ministry and me even more profoundly.

A few weeks ago I received a call from Helen Carr, the NM Corrections Family Liaison Director. She had met with inmates from the Los Lunas Prison Crossings Division. The inmates had collected $350 amongst themselves and they wanted to make a donation to an organization(s). Helen suggested several worthy organizations and yet when the men got back to her she said they had voted to donate all $350 to the Wings Ministry!

This is a VERY large amount of money for inmates to donate, as inmates only earn $.11 per hour. $350 took at least 3,182 hours of labor, or if one inmate worked 8 hours per day it would have taken him 398 days to earn $350! Those same 3,182 hours of labor at minimum wage of $5.15/hour would have been equivalent to a gift of $16,388.00! I was brought to tears by their generosity and positive endorsement of the Wings Ministry. Apparently we have made a difference in their lives and they showed their belief and support of Wings through their generous donation!

Interest earned from their money will allow us to purchase pizza for future parties in the prisons and in various communities wherever we are called. We will use interest from their money for brochures to help spread the vision of Wings around the country, and to attend future training events and conventions and produce workshop materials.

Their $350 check will be the first money donated to the Wings Endowment Fund. Those inmates, believing in something that made a difference in their lives, will now support the firm foundation of a ministry that is beginning to grow and expand. Only God knew that the Bible study about “building a firm foundation” shared in October with the inmates would now be the first building block to the Wings Endowment fund. With a grateful and humble heart I thank each of the Los Lunas inmates for their support. Their belief in Wings encourages, lifts us up, and helps us to continue to proclaim the Good News that Christ is here for ALL of us!

In His Service,

Ann Edenfield, Wings Ministry Executive Director