



OPENING DOORSsm

A Prison Ministry

October 2005

I Have Placed Before You An Open Door (Rev. 3:8)

A word from Deborah L. Roeger, Executive Director



I am very excited to introduce a new monthly feature. "God Is The Open Door At The End Of Our Broken Dreams" is a devotional thought which will be written by one of

our brothers in Christ -- men we have met in prison through the work of Opening Doors.sm We are aware that some in the church are skeptical of so-called jailhouse conversions. But didn't Christ say it is not the healthy who need a doctor? (Matthew 9:12) We invite you to meet these authors through the messages they share. As you open your heart to them, you will be blessed. While God never calls us to judge another person's heart, I think He is smiling on these who know Him as Father and is pleased to call them His own. I know they have been a blessing in our lives.♥ Our warmest thanks to each author and to The Rev. Canon Richard A. Swan for organizing this effort on our behalf.

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Opening Doors Through The Eyes Of

I was recently in prison [for 3 days]. Mansfield Correctional Institution, or ManCI, to be exact. ManCI is a Level 3 facility (just below maximum security) housing about 2400 inmates, including 190 death row inmates, from across the state of Ohio. For three days, I met with about 18 inmates as part of a prison ministry teaching conflict transformation skills—Opening Doors.sm Leading the group in activities was a team of four trained facilitators, two outside facilitators paired with two inmate facilitators. A few of the inmates knew one another, but for the most part, we were all strangers at the beginning of the program. Information about Opening Doorssm travels only by word of mouth. I learned about the program through my husband who is a volunteer facilitator and coordinator for the ManCI program. The inmates learn about it from other inmates, often from the inmate facilitators.

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During the last 30 years, I have been involved in several prison visitation programs, worked as a mediator, and completed a doctorate in Peace Studies, so I wasn't expecting to learn a great deal. I was mistaken. The inmate participants in Opening Doorssm were men with humble spirits who offered deep spiritual insights as our group worked to develop trust and community over the course of three days. The inmates were not here to impress others. Most of them are born-again in the truest sense of the word. Jesus directs us to visit those in prison, for when we do so, we encounter Christ and receive a blessing from him.

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Our Incredible Volunteers

In this second edition of our Newsletter we are delighted to recognize the many volunteers who have contributed time, talent, prayers and hard work to lay a solid foundation for the work of Opening Doorssm in the Ohio prisons. Our best estimates are that over the past 5 years at least 22,000 hours of volunteer time have already been given to this work! We praise God for the tremendous blessing each one of these volunteers has been to us and to the Ohio prisons. Each hour sacrificed has truly been a labor of love. Over the coming months we want you to meet our volunteers and hear some of their stories. Last month you met Encouraging Ellen. In this edition you have the opportunity to meet Dr. Patricia Burdette in our feature “**Opening Doors Through The Eyes Of...**” We can’t wait for you to meet the many others whose talent is beyond our own and whose vision and hard work have blended with ours to minister to those who are incarcerated and in some cases to minister to the staff whose mission it is to keep inmates safe and secure. These volunteers will say they are not extraordinary people, maybe they’re right? Perhaps they are just ordinary people giving their time and making an extraordinary difference in the lives of others! ♥ [It is really easy to become an Opening Doorssm volunteer. Some of our current needs are listed on page 3. Do you know of anyone who might be interested in learning more? If so, please encourage them to contact Opening Doorssm so we may answer their questions and provide helpful information.](#)

Why a lawyer, a robotics engineer, a minister, a warden & an ex-offender traveled to Tulsa

God answers prayer in the most unexpected ways. Volunteering behind Ohio’s prison walls for the past 5 years has lead to much prayer seeking answers to meet the needs of offenders transitioning back into Ohio communities. One of those answers was recently found in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Two Opening Doors Board members, a Methodist pastor, an ex-offender who is now employed as a prison reentry coordinator and the warden of Ross Correctional visited Stand In The

Gap,TM Tulsa. SITG has developed a unique model that can bring a “spiritual family” around a Christian ex-offender and help them transition successfully back into the church and into the community. The results of their work is nothing short of miraculous. Opening Doors and SITG,TM Tulsa have agreed to enter into a cooperative working relationship to introduce the spiritual family model in Ohio. Taxpayers in Ohio will save on average \$67,000 for every ex-offender successfully aided by this new work. Families will be restored, churches will be made stronger and communities will be healthier. ♥ [Watch for more details in our next Newsletter.](#)

God Is The Open Door At The End Of Our Broken Dreams

Connected

For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building 1 Corinthians 3:9

Before prison, I thought and lived as if I was an independent, free-thinker – not needing anyone. Prison changed me. I suddenly needed to belong. Thanks to the power of the intercessory prayers of some of my family members, and by the Grace of God, I made some healthy choices. I participated in chapel services, Bible studies, choir, Ministry of Theater and helped tend the Chapel Flower Gardens. I was blessed and mentored by wonderful Godly role-models such as Chaplain (Fr.) Furey and my friend and co-worker Lanny P. One program which helped re-shape my awareness of self and others, was “Opening Doors”. The activities gave me new insight into who I am in community. One particular activity involved locating and identifying items, with my eyes closed. A fellow participant guided me. The rules dictated he could only answer “yes” or “no” to guide. I really did need others to help me see things I couldn’t see. Later I, in turn, helped someone else. In another activity, one person held the end of a ball of yarn and threw the ball to another. In the end, we were left holding a part of this very long string. We were all connected. This program exposed the “lie” that I don’t make a difference. God made a way for my release after 15 years, only after I had found true forgiveness in my heart for others and for myself. As our Lord tells us in Matt. 5: 25; I had to settle that issue in my heart. I’ve

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COMING UP IN OUR NEXT NEWSLETTER:

- ♥ More about Stand In The Gap,tm Ohio – a new ministry of Opening Doors of Ohio, Inc. for ex-offenders and the church
- ♥ Introducing Prayers For Prisoners

PRAYER REQUESTS:

- † New funding sources
- † Program Directors for:
 - Stand In The Gap,tm Ohio (SITG)
 - Opening Doors prison programs
- † Contractual Relationships with Licensed Professionals to support SITG,tm Ohio
- † Cooperative partnership with corporations to expand Opening Doors In The Workplacesm
- † Expansion of prison prayer teams and Prayers For Prisoners ministry

VOLUNTEER NEEDS:

- ◆ Program facilitators for inmate and staff programs
- ◆ Prayer partners
- ◆ Administrative support
- ◆ State-wide coordinator for inmate prayer requests

Yet, often we visit those in prison with a feeling of self-satisfaction or even self-righteousness, entirely missing Jesus and the blessing that Opening Doorssm enables us to receive. To encounter Christ in others requires that we develop a relationship with them. This is challenging when one party is incarcerated. From my experience, it is often difficult and quite time-consuming to build the level of trust and connection that develops so quickly in Opening Doorssm as we are lead through many engaging, hands-on, fun, experiential learning activities. As we analyze the activities and what we learn from them, we come to see that there, but for the grace of God, is where we as a “free” person would be. This is humbling, and at the same time, a profound spiritual blessing from Christ whom we dramatically encounter in this setting.

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Opening Doorssm is not a Bible study, it is not a program of proselytization, and inmates do not have to be Christians to participate. Everyone agrees at the outset to respect the faith beliefs of others and not to attempt to induce others to believe differently about issues of faith. But as the program unfolded, many of the inmates revealed the depth of their own Christian faith. I kept being reminded of the old Johnny Cash song that goes, “Inside the walls of prison my body may be, but my Lord has set my soul free.” As I saw Christ in the humble spirits of these deeply spiritual men, I learned there are many ways to be free and many ways to be imprisoned. I came away with a deeper understanding of what Paul means when he talks about the freedom we have in Christ, no matter where we find ourselves. And God blessed me. ♥ Editorial Note: following her experience, Dr. Burdette became a volunteer facilitator for Opening Doorssm at Mansfield Correctional.

This article, authored by Dr. Patricia Burdette, OSU Professor, is reprinted with permission from the August 2005 issue of *Ohio Evangel*.

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never forgotten those life-lessons. Upon my release, I sought mentors in major areas of my life – Spiritual, Emotional (12-Step Sponsor), Financial, Relationships and Career. That led me to an Emmaus community weekend, and later, into a Men's prayer small-group with whom I meet every Friday morning. I now realize I **do** belong. Father God, in Jesus name, through the Holy Spirit, use me to Glorify Your name. *Amen*

- Ron Ambrosia

Scripture References: Ecclesiastes 15: 11-20 Psalm 119:
1-16 Matthew 5: 21-16 1 Corinthians 3: 1-9

Ron Ambrosia was a former Chaplains' Clerk at M.C.I. He has written for: *Prisoner to Prisoner Daily Devotional*, "Chicken Soup for the Prisoner's Soul", and "Hope from the Inside". He is a graduate of MCI Kairos, the Horizon Program and Opening Doors. Upon Ron's release he was an instructor for Cleveland's Job Readiness Workshop. Currently Ron is a Marketing Rep. for Abstracting Services, facilitates the Alpha Program and is active in Western Reserve Walk to Emmaus. Ron says that he became involved because "I witnessed first-hand the power of the 'Opening Doors' program to change hearts and minds. I have a passion to help others make life changes and successfully re-enter society. I'm blessed to have this opportunity."

HEARING FROM YOU

If you have suggestions or questions for us or if you know of someone else who would appreciate receiving our Newsletter, please e-mail me at the address below. Because we believe good stewardship of our resources is important, please inform us should you decide you no longer want to receive our Newsletter. We will honor your request by removing your name from our mailing list.

Deborah L. Roeger,
Executive Director

P.S. For our continuing readers, please keep us informed of any address changes so that you won't miss future issues of our Newsletter. Just knowing you are there and you care is a great encouragement to us and our growing group of volunteers.

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Watch for an announcement of our new e-mail address

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