



OPENING DOORS®

A Prison Ministry

July/August 2006

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

A word from Deborah L. Roeger, Executive Director



I'm excited to dedicate this edition of our newsletter to Stand In The Gap,™ Ohio spiritual families & their neighbors.

It's hard to believe that it was just a little over one year ago when five of us made the trip to Tulsa, Oklahoma to learn about Stand In The Gap.™ We went there to learn about the ex-offender mentoring program God had in mind for men and women transitioning out of Ohio prisons – brothers and sisters in Christ who need to experience the unconditional love of a forgiving God expressed through the people of God. Today we have 7 spiritual families meeting twice each month. It is my hope that this edition of our newsletter will give you a glimpse at the impact spiritual families make and in so doing, I prayerfully encourage you with these words: *“for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care. Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”* ♥

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A unique way to experience family

Deborah L. Roeger, Spiritual Family co-leader

I recently read a short article about Dr. Paul Brand, a medical missionary in India. Born to missionary parents in the mountains of south-western India in 1914, Brand pioneered surgical work with those suffering from Hansen's disease, more commonly known as leprosy. He was the first surgeon to use reconstructive surgery to correct deformities caused by the disease in the hands and feet. Dr. Brand observed an unusual phenomenon with some of his surgery patients whose family members would bring hot meals to them and stay overnight often sleeping on the floor under the family member's hospital bed.

“ This unique form of “family therapy” brought the warmth and care of home into the unfamiliar ”

When the patient awoke during the night in pain, the family member would give them a gentle massage until they went back to sleep. As a physician, Dr. Brand's first impulse was to think about the family member's involvement as inappropriate and unsanitary. Interestingly, however, he noticed over time that the patients who received this type of loving care from family actually needed less pain medication. This unique form of “family therapy” brought the warmth and care of home into the unfamiliar place of the hospital. As I read the article I couldn't help think about what I've experienced in the Spiritual Family that my husband and I co-lead. The sharing of one another's burdens in the family circle through discussion and prayer has a unique way of easing the pain of life's burdens. We've shared laughter and we've shared tears as we face life together. We have learned first-hand that God hears and answers our prayers for each other. ♥

Behind The Scenes

The Need: When God made clear His desire that SITG become the model for ex-offender mentoring in Ohio, we discovered we had some work to do. The depth and breadth of the needs and concerns presented by formerly incarcerated neighbors created some unique challenges to be addressed.

The Answer: An advisory team began to meet and discuss best practices for safe group mentoring. We bring to the table a combined wealth of expertise and experience addressing the needs and concerns of ex-offenders *and* a heart to serve these we have been called to assist. During our monthly meetings we hammer out tough issues such as neighbor screening and mentor matching.

Meet The Team:

Pat Hurley: employed by Ohio Dept. Rehab and Corrections, with former experience as a Deputy Warden and Warden.

Teresa Minney: employed by Adult Parole Authority with practical, valuable experience addressing ex-offender needs.

Deborah Roeger: Executive Director of Opening Doors, attorney, 6 yrs experience serving offenders.

Neil Salyer: a SITG neighbor and SITG program coordinator.

Pat Scholz: a Christian counselor who has been screening neighbors for SITG readiness & supporting Spiritual Families

Shari Wolf: employed by Ohio Dept. Of Youth Sevices with expertise in youthful offender programming.

The Desired Result: a “best practices” model for highly effective faith-based ex-offender group mentoring

The name "Stand In The Gap Spiritual Family" warms my heart.

Marilyn Lichtenberg, Spiritual Family member

Hope in Him that can overcome any despair in our lives. I am so thankful to be a part of this spiritual family because they surround me with consistent reminders of His Grace. It is very clear that God hand-picked each person that is included in our group. I am impressed with the specific gifts and experiences that each one of us brings to the group. For me, I have to say that growing spiritually has been a process ~ a process of having the courage to allow God to remove the unhealthy layers of my tarnished emotions one by one. I am learning that this takes much courage as I leave each layer behind.

“The most important impact it has had on me is really experiencing God differently than I would on my own.”

God blesses me daily with the courage that I need to continue this journey. This family gets to know each other and know ourselves even more. The most important part and the most impact it has had on me is really experiencing God differently than I would on my own. Somehow weaving us all together and bringing our burdens and then our Praises to God together is a feeling that is not replaceable. I am excited for all the healing that God has planned for our group and for the relationships in our lives that this will impact as well. I joined this spiritual family to help someone else, but I am surprised to find out that I am gaining much more than I give. ♥

*The
spiritual
family that
plays
together
stays
together.*



Photo taken July, 2006

What is it really like to be in a Spiritual Family?

When we decided to commit ourselves to being a member of the Spiritual Family for Neil, we were very focused on Neil and our energies to help him. But our Spiritual Family has become much more than that. It's a unification of family members to allow the Holy Spirit to direct and guide each of our lives. It fosters healing within our family community, it provides direction and discussion about "everyone's" concerns and accomplishments. Each member has a unique and different perspective, but all have the same unified attitude towards our experiences with our Spiritual Family. Here are some special highlights from each of our family members:

Neil: *Before having a Spiritual Family, I hoped that my prayers would be answered, but now I'm confident that my prayers will be answered.*

Dave: *It's been a joy to share our challenges in life with each other and see God's plan for our lives revealed.*

Peggy: *I especially love our meaningful prayer time.*

Dan: *Working through our Spiritual Family has helped me and everyone else make better decisions.*

Ellen Ann: *When we started I thought the focus would only be on Neil, but I was pleasantly surprised when I realized that we would ALL be sharing our spiritual needs.*

Sandy: *We know what a "spiritual family" is from reading scripture. It would be wonderful if our biological families would work as well as our Spiritual Family.*

Kay: *I look forward to the interaction, the soul searching, the divine intervention, and, of course, the great food and fun at each meeting.*

Not only has Neil benefited, but the whole family has been positively affected. We have evolved into lasting relationships that care and help each other through stressful situations. Through unity we continue to grow and look forward to our meetings together.



Neil Salyer's Spiritual Family

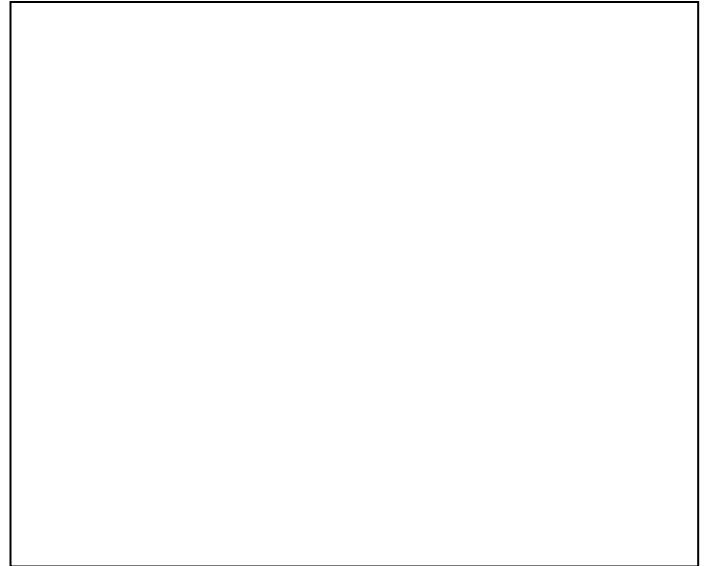
Standing from left to right: Dave, Peggy, Kay and Dan
Seated from left to right: Ellen Ann, Neil, Sandy

A page from the Stand In The Gap,TM Ohio Family Photo Album

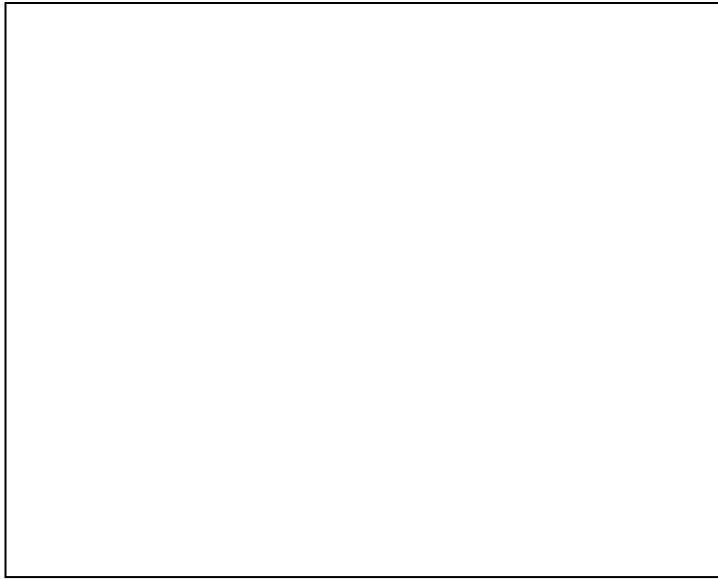
"We are very excited about you coming to talk with us about "Stand in the Gap." There is great potential for restoring people to "normal life" and experiencing Christ all at the same time."

Everyday People Ministries

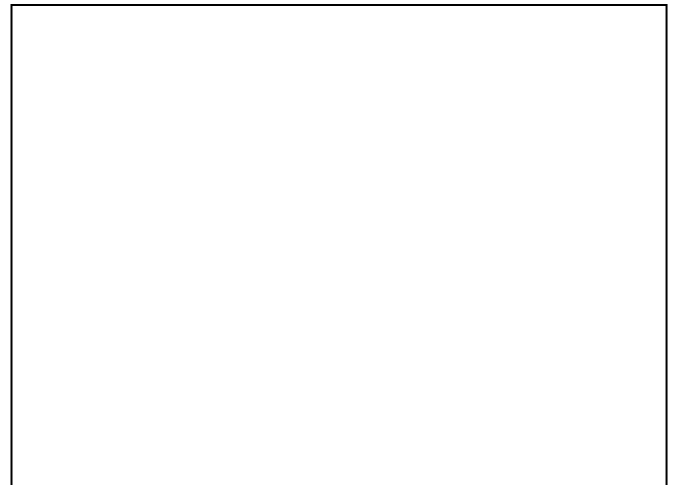
(Began two new spiritual families recently in the Columbus area.)



A new spiritual family in training.



A SF enjoying a Saturday afternoon together celebrating a neighbor's birthday



A SF co-leader and a neighbor ...acting just like brothers

"Both my wife and I feel that one goes into the Spiritual Family experience expecting to support the ex-offender and spouse, which certainly happens; but along the way we have also been supported in a big way as have all the other family members as well. Thanks"

Jack Mumma, SF co-leader

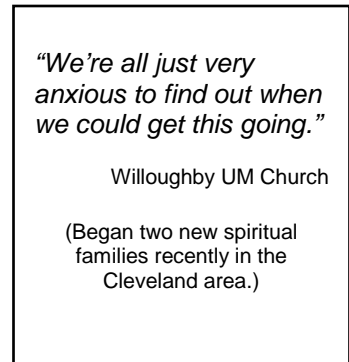


A new SF co-leader just relaxing to the music.

"We're all just very anxious to find out when we could get this going."

Willoughby UM Church

(Began two new spiritual families recently in the Cleveland area.)





Opening God's Word

"I" Statements

"And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Luke 24:49

Before Opening Doors® I was my father's "angry" son, bitter at my mother for being in prison for what seemed my whole life. Arriving to prison was the perfect place for me because it was fueled by people angrier and more bitter than I was.

My personal transformation came when I was taught "I-statements." That is when we all grabbed a picture and said how it made us feel. That was the first round, the second round we told why we felt that way. For a long time I thought men weren't suppose to cry. Through I-statement exercises in Opening Doors I understand now that my feelings are important. Not only that, but letting people know how we feel is just as important as well. My personal motto was to punch now and suffer the consequences later; that was how I was taught to "deal" with my feelings and if I didn't live by that code I was soft! I would find out through I-statements that telling people how we feel can hurt worse than a punch any day. I-statements helped me think outside of the box. I know now that men don't hide their feelings. Opening Doors also taught me how to transform power, instead of just getting angry. When I'm ready to fight now I look for something good or God in people and I never go wrong. Looking for bad only causes bad situations and bad reactions. All in all, Opening Doors taught me how to resolve my conflicts with positive reactions.

When I begin to let people know how I feel without placing blame, then I will begin to heal my past. I said at the beginning I was my father's "angry" son and bitter at my mother. No more; I used I-statements with both my parents and we're on better terms. I state who I am now, I-statements saved me from many angry days. I first thank God for the changing of my life and then thank Opening Doors for showing me my thinking. I never gave myself credit for being a thinker, but look at me now, I'm a college graduate.

- Antravene Cash

About the Author: Antravene Cash has been a resident at Marion Correctional Institution for over five years. During that time he has received his G.E.D., completed the college program, and is now learning computer animation under the instruction of Ohio State alumnus Jerry Lucas. He is an Opening Doors facilitator and a member of the MCI Silent Choir.

Scripture References:

**Psalm 47 * Acts 1:1-11
Ephesians 1:15-23 * Luke 24:49-53**

Stand In The Gap thru the eyes of our Licensed Professional

"The set-up, model and process that takes place in these groups (called spiritual families) is exactly what I believe is the kind of "family group" God wants us to participate in, whatever church we are connected with or ministry we are involved in. The Spiritual Family provides a loving, grace-filled and accountable atmosphere to help everyone who is participating connect as brothers and sisters in Christ and grow as a Christian."

Pat Scholz is a Christian counselor practicing with WellSpring Counseling, our SITG ministry partner. We are grateful for her expertise and support.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

- † Wise grant stewardship of all funds awarded under Ohio Strengthening Families Initiative
- † Facilitator training Aug. 24-26
- † Funding / Volunteers for SITG
- † Corporate partnerships to do more prison staff programs
- † Expansion of Opening Doors into juvenile prison facilities
- † Additional New Funding to Pay For What the Grants Can Not

PRAISE REPORT:

The growth of SITG

We have begun to serve our first families in Opening Doors In The Family

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**Celebrating a Stand
 In The Gap
 neighbor's birthday**

When Stand In The Gap surrounds a neighbor, sometimes it is hard to tell the members of the spiritual family from the neighbor's family of origin! They blend together as one to surround the neighbor...

and it's even harder to tell the neighbor from the other spiritual family members.

Photo taken July, 2006 *Neighbor's birthday celebration with family members & spiritual family*