

# New the Person



Drew and Lisa Weidner long for their family to be reunited again.

## Helping ex-offenders build new lives

### New Person Ministries

#### Staff

Executive Director

**John Rush**

Administrative Assistant

**Pat Antosy**

House Manager

**Gary Benjamin**

Case Manager

**Travis Cravey**

**New Person Center offers transitional help to selected newly released male prisoners. During this very needy time the very basics for survival like shelter, food, clothing, gainful employment and supportive care are the focus. New Person Center serves at several locations and is an entity of the faith-based New Person Ministries, Inc.**

### Save the Date!

12/3/11 Awareness Breakfast at Old Country Buffet, Wyomissing, 8-10 am  
RSVP at 610-777-2222

3/6/12 Spring Banquet at Conestoga Mennonite Church, Morgantown, PA  
Speaker: Judge Scott Lash  
6:30 pm

## FAMILY SEPARATED BY SYSTEM

Drew and Lisa Weidner were just regular community members. Married since 1994, they had five young children, as well as Lisa's two young adult children. They owned their own home, and Drew owned his own business, an estate and retirement planning firm. Things looked good, at least from the outside. Then, in August 2007, Drew, who struggled with an adult pornography addiction, was arrested after being caught by an internet sex sting.

It was a police sting operation; Drew never had physical contact with any person, nor did he have even verbal contact with anyone other than a police officer. Drew was charged with felonies related to pedophilia. In repeated "chat room" emails, a police officer, pretending to be a woman in her thirties, had proposed that they meet at a diner. She indicated that she was open to the possibility that, perhaps, at some point, her minor-age daughters could be seen by him. When Drew arrived at the diner to meet the woman, he parked his car, entered the diner, ordered a cup of coffee, abruptly changed his mind about meeting the woman, exited the diner and was arrested in the parking lot. Drew never had direct interaction or contact with any children or teens. He never asked for pictures of any children and had no child pornography on his computer. Drew was sentenced to three to seven years in prison. He entered prison in

June 2008 and was paroled in May 2011, after serving the minimum sentence.

When Drew was first arrested, someone reported the family to Children and Youth Services (CYS). CYs arrived at their home and did evaluations of the children and of Lisa. The children showed no signs of abuse whatsoever, and Lisa was deemed to be a fit and protective parent. Drew, while out of prison on bail, was evaluated by a forensic psychiatrist who reported that Drew had no characteristics that are typically present in a pedophile. He reported that Drew was no danger to his own children nor to any children around him and that no precautions needed to be taken at all. Eventually, CYs closed the case.

**He entered prison in June 2008 and was paroled in May 2011.**

Nonetheless, when Drew started his three-year term at the State Correctional Institute at Camp Hill, he was not allowed to have contact visits with his children. As Lisa put it, the children would have to "see him in a cage," with a screen between them. Lisa advocated for him by writing to the superintendent, and eventually contact visits were granted. Drew was able to hold his children on his lap and read them stories again. Then, unfortunately, Drew was transferred to another prison in Forest County, which was a five-hour drive for Lisa. There, the privilege

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of contact visits was taken away. Lisa, who couldn't afford the cost of staying at a hotel or paying a babysitter, was able to visit him only once during the 14-15 months he was there. The children didn't see their father at all during that time. However, they had regular contact through phone calls and letters.

This May, after serving a total of three years in prison, Drew was considered to be a "minimal risk to the community" and granted parole. Not allowed by the Parole Board to go home, he was released directly to New Person Center. He says, "It has been a blessing to have NPC to come to because it's next to impossible for a person with a sex offense to find a way out of prison." Fortunately,

## **Unfortunately, Drew is not allowed to live with his family, see his children, talk on the phone with them, or write them letters.**

Drew found a job rather quickly, no small feat for an ex-offender, and was able to begin to support his family again. The reasonable program fees at NPC have helped him to survive financially, and the moral support of NPC staff has been invaluable. "John and the others here have been very supportive. It's been great," Drew says.

Unfortunately, Drew is not allowed to live with his family, see his children, talk on the phone with them, or write them letters. He's also not allowed to relay any messages to them through Lisa or anyone else. "I can't let my children know that I care about them at all," Drew says ruefully. On Father's Day, the children were not even allowed to say, "Happy Father's Day, Daddy". Since his release from prison on May 27, 2011, to the present, the end of October, Drew has not had any contact with his children. Drew, a devout Catholic, is also not allowed to attend Mass at his home church, even though his pastor welcomes him.

## **"Aren't there enough fatherless families without creating more?"**

—Lisa Weidner, wife of NPC resident Drew Weidner

Drew is not sure if there is an end in sight. He weekly pays for group therapy and complies with whatever he is told to do, but is not given any promise that anything he does will allow him to reunite with his family. "Every step I've taken in this process has put me further behind in my ability to have a relationship with my family," Drew reflects. He may be looking at another nine years of seeing this facilitator--four years on parole and five on probation. Meanwhile at home, Drew and Lisa's four-year-old, who was two months old when Drew was arrested, begs for his daddy. Lisa says, "Aren't there enough fatherless families without creating more?"

The situation is grim, but Drew and Lisa see God's hand at work. Importantly, Drew had a conversion experience upon his arrest. Everything was laid bare and all pretenses were gone. "I had nothing but God," says Drew. "For the first time in my life I wanted to be done with this behavior (the pornography). I wanted to give it

up at all costs." Previously, he had been a practicing Catholic but now he came to a new heart-level faith in God. "In my head, I had accepted the teachings of the church, but I didn't have a personal relationship, and I wasn't a Christian in my heart."

Drew and Lisa say their marriage relationship has been strengthened by this ordeal. Drew says, "There has been tremendous healing and a lot of joy and reparation of a marriage...and all kinds of good stuff has come out of it too."

Lisa says, "We pray a lot, and our hope is in God. God parted the sea when it looked like [the Israelites] had nowhere to go." For now, the Weidner family faces hardship, but, as Lisa says, "God will part the waters when it's time."

*Jeanette Christophel*

## **Clergy Corner**

### **What Some Were**

My wife and I attended a twenty fifth wedding celebration recently. The husband testified that he was a mess in his first marriage. To his grown children he apologized anew for unfaithfulness to their mother and harshness as their father. With deep emotion he expressed gratitude for Christ's forgiveness and theirs. With awe he thanked them for accepting his second wife, now of twenty five years.

The confessions of this husband made me think of the composition of the Corinthian Church as Paul outlines in I Cor. 6:9-11. These members had experienced radical transformation for Paul to write "that is what some of you were."

As with the society in which Paul ministered, our communities are filled with people in bondage to sin. Some churches give no welcome to "such characters". Praise God Jesus and the Apostles acted differently. All who are washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus qualify for Paul's declaration that they are now "saints".

Mystery! Marvel! Gospel! Praise God.

*Pastor Bob Petersheim,*

*Conestoga Mennonite Church*



*Pastor Bob Petersheim*

#### **Interested in Mentoring?**

**New Person Ministries and Yokefellowship Prison Ministry co-hosted a successful Mentoring Seminar October 28-29. If you missed the event but are interested in mentoring, contact us at 610-777-2222.**

# Public Policy Affects Families



Jean M. Bickmire

The family structure is fractured when one of its members is sent to prison, often broken irreparably, contributing to divorce, poverty, homelessness, and single parent or parentless children. The ensuing sense of hopelessness often results in further crime in our communities.

When perpetrators go to prison, we forget the collateral damage inflicted on their families. "Great!" some say,

because the defendant is getting what he or she deserves. However, before current public policies are revised, a comprehensive criminal justice study should be required that would assess the impact on the community and families overall.

Mandatory minimum sentences, many directed at drug offenses, require longer prison sentences. Rather than exacerbating overcrowded prison conditions with little positive impact, courts should emphasize individual assessment and treatment

## Children are traumatized when a parent is arrested and goes to jail.

programs with demonstrated success. Even though treatment programs have been shown to be more effective and less costly, some legislators still call for "tough on crime" laws that do not enhance public safety.

*For instance, a young mother had gotten involved in drugs when very young but had changed her life through continuing education, avoidance of bad influences in her life, and family counseling. Unfortunately, she was targeted by a convicted drug dealer who was working with police to obtain a lesser sentence by incriminating his former clients. The young mother then faced a mandatory minimum of two years in prison despite the fact that she quit using drugs years ago. Despite these efforts, and ignoring advocacy on her behalf by numerous character witnesses, and the children who depended on her, prosecutors would not reduce her sentence solely because she would not implicate other drug dealers.*

Children are traumatized when a parent is arrested and goes to jail. Children feel shame, depression, stigmatization, and low self-esteem, thereby leading to bad behaviors, school dropouts and higher chances of involvement in crime. The ramifications are severe, with an estimated 2.5 million children having a parent in prison in our country. Many end up in foster care because no relatives are able to care for them. Privacy issues and lack of data have made it difficult for community groups to reach out to help these children with support systems, thus contributing to their

isolation under severe psychological conditions.

More laws have emerged that regulate conditions affecting sex offenders upon release from prison. These laws also have negative consequences for families. The victim is frequently a family member who is unable to have contact with the offender, thereby not allowing therapeutic interaction that could help bring understanding, treatment and closure to the victim and the larger family unit. Although the rights and safety of victims are required, circumstances should indicate the best courses of action in individual cases.

Harsh sentences, which are intended to dissuade offenses, may have the opposite effect. Victims who are family members sometimes choose to allow the abuse to continue rather than reporting the crime and destroying the family unit. We know offenders who want to seek treatment but are afraid since they will go to prison. An alternative may be the practice of restorative justice in which offenders realize that their actions are inappropriate and have consequences, but yet consideration is given to victims and families in restoring a healthier family unit in the long run.

Laws in our society are enacted in order to have a sense of safety and justice for its citizens. However, people do not exist for laws but laws for people. Therefore, our criminal justice system needs a more comprehensive review that would address direct victims of crime as well as *indirect* victims, the offenders' families. Only in this way will our country seek a better solution than perpetuating the continual revolving door of crime.

**Jean M. Bickmire**

Legislative Director - Justice & Mercy, Inc.  
[www.justicemercy.org](http://www.justicemercy.org)

## Three Ministries Share Common Mission

Hope Rescue Mission, Freedom Gate Ministries and New Person Center came together for a breakfast on October 8<sup>th</sup>. The men at Hope Rescue Mission cooked up a special breakfast for about 25 people.

Leaders of the three groups gave words of encouragement for the mission that all three groups share. This mission is to house, feed and bring the word of God into the lives of the many men struggling every day to make a better life for themselves. In any year, hundreds of men go in and out of the doors of the three Christian programs. All three ministries are hoping to join forces more to care for the many homeless that are seeking help. We would like to come together several times a year to share fellowship and expertise to accomplish our common goals.

**Pat Antosy**

# Returning Citizens Need Local Church

Churches need to change their culture from the model of feeding just the saints, to a model of being a healing community for all. The call is not only to start prison and reentry ministries, but to be a community of reconciliation, redemption, and forgiveness for all persons. The returning citizens or ex-offenders and their families need a healing place to be and to belong.

Healing communities of empathetic compassion reject the stigma and shame associated with incarceration. They seek to forgive, which means giving up the need for revenge and unending punishment, and to give ex-offenders an opportunity for another chance at life. This is not condoning the offending behavior or denying the harm done by their offenses. They are not to forgive and forget, but to forgive and remember differently. Restorative justice seeks to enable the returning citizen to take responsibility for their own decision making, which leads to reconciliation.

The thoughts, feelings, and needs of Christian returning citizens are expressed well in the text of a song written by Randall G. Schieck entitled "Will You Help Me". The lyrics read: *Some may never notice/ and some have never heard/That I've been here in prison/Just praying and reading God's Word./I need a reason to go on living./I need a friend that will never fail./I need someone who will do more than sign to pay my bail./ I'm looking for love beyond these walls./I'm looking for support so I won't fall.* (used by permission)

Returning citizens or ex-offenders face a myriad of challenges from the moment they are released. They struggle with finances, housing, employment, medical and social issues, relationships, self-esteem, and the need to make right decisions. Inmates who have made a decision to follow Christ do not need to face these difficulties without help from the church and community. The patience and love of local congregations and individual Christians are crucial for ex-offenders to remain free.

Christian prison aftercare ministries, such as New Person Center, help ex-prisoners to become self-sufficient and responsible, while providing structure and stability. These ministries can discourage destructive habits and support the formation of new ones. The healing of emotions and relationships damaged while incarcerated can be significantly assisted by Christian aftercare ministries and local congregations. The ex-offender needs to find a loving church with a caring worship environment." **-Donald Murphy**

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Executive Director  
John Rush

### BB & B

No, we are not promoting Bed Bath & Beyond...although we might like that store.

Behind Behaviors lie Beliefs!

Beliefs matter. Years ago I heard this bit of wisdom: careful what rut you choose to drive in, for each leads to some destination. Before paved highways, wheels often forged deep ditches in dirt roadways causing ruts to influence the path vehicles advanced in.

We see the Bible as God's Word, a reliable revelation for guidance on the issues of life. In Jesus Christ we see God most clearly. We choose to respond in loving obedience and receive blessing instead of negative outcomes. Transformation in the lives of NPC residents and staff depends largely upon our consistent application of God-honoring beliefs, held high as the primary standard of living.

Let's give a "shout out" to the many wonderful Christian volunteers who regularly come to NPC to share their friendship while teaching the Word that can give life, if received with a willing heart and mind. We also thank those mentoring and our faithful partners who pray and donate unselfishly. Thank you for enabling this ministry to assist, in Jesus name, many who are needy. This is an act of worship that honors God and will have His reward for certain!

### Board

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