



2024 in review

by Dave Gritters

I suppose it is normal to review a year, looking back and reflecting on some things.

God has given us time to use as a marker—a boundary line so to speak—and a year is a big marker!

To look back at New Life in 2024 is to see how God has been faithful to the New Life congregation, a flock that is formed by incarcerated individuals, returning citizens, and regularly serving commissioned members and volunteers.

2024 brought wonderful worship!

2024 brought amazing testimonies of faith and journeys!

2024 brought tears of repentance, tears of sorrow, tears of frustration, and tears of joy.

2024 brought sadness following the passing of some members, as well as sharing in that grief with each other.

2024 brought over 500 individual prayer requests from our members and the opportunity to collectively pray for these requests.

2024 brought the excitement of visibly answered prayers and the praise and celebration that come with that.

2024 brought the opportunity to be encouraged in the “not yet” response to a prayer.

2024 brought, “Thank you for coming,” “Thank you for praying with me,” “Tell me more about being a Christian,” “I am new to church and I love this,” “This is exactly where I needed to be tonight,” and “I feel so loved here.”

So as we close out 2024 and look forward with anticipation toward what God will do in 2025, we just want to thank every one of you for your prayers, your participation, your support, your thoughts, and your wisdom. We look forward to seeing what God will do in 2025 and will be excited to share that with you.

And to kick things off ... Lord willing the 17 men who have signed up for a baptism service will see that service take place in January!

Prayers & praises

by Dave Gritters

We give thanks and praise for:

- The testimonies of God’s work this year.
- The men who were just baptized.
- Tricia De Haan, our outgoing Deacon, and her service the last three years.

We ask for prayer for:

- Incoming council members Marv Goodyk (Deacon) and Sheldon Starkenburg (Governing Elder).
- A larger room to meet in.
- Many more lives to be touched in 2025!

We look forward to sharing in all the things God will do in 2025!



Elder Dave Gritters

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Contributions may be sent to: **New Life Prison Church, 408 Maple St., Pella, IA 50219**

You can also make an online gift: <http://www.newlife-prison.org/donate>



Christmas worship inside the razor-wire fence

by Marv Goodyk

I wish each one of you could have been at the Christmas service at Newton Correctional Facility to see what I saw, hear what I heard, and feel what I felt.

It was exciting to see the guys lined up by the door going into the gym, waiting eagerly for their turn to sign in for worship on a Thursday morning. It had been a long while since this many could come together and worship with their Christian brothers. Seeing the joy and excitement on their faces was a great start to the day. It only got better from there.

The service was bilingual, so we heard it in both English and Spanish. As I listened to two inmates sing "Silent Night" in Spanish, I could only sit back and truly feel like I was part of the song. I could not understand a word they sang, but since I know the song, it was easy to worship with them and know what they were singing. Those two men accompanied themselves with guitars and sang with the most beautiful harmony. I wanted to record it so I could share it with you (but that is not allowed). The only recording is in my memory.

Listening to the men joyfully sing familiar carols as they were led by two keyboards and several guitars was pure bliss. Several of the inmates are so willing to share their gifts and leadership skills to help lead worship. The inmates truly know how to worship. You could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in that place. The end of the hour and a half came all too quickly.

As we shared the gospel message of Christmas and had a four-week Advent liturgy condensed into less than an hour, we could see them taking it all in. Hearing their comments afterward was indeed heartwarming. I was truly blessed and honored to be a small part of this event. I sure wish you could have been there.

New Life Prison Church Outside Council

Dave Gritters
(Governing Elder)

Glenda Vander Leest
(Governing Elder)

Max Killoren
(Governing Elder)

Pastor Sheldon Starkenburg
(Governing Elder)

Linda Zuidema
(Administrative Deacon)

Marvin Goodyk
(Administrative Deacon)

Keith Van Gent
(Administrative Deacon & Treasurer)

Return to prison

by Glenda Vander Leest

For most people, getting locked out of prison is wonderful. But some of us New Life volunteers are excited about our *return to prison!*

In 2011, New Life Church went into the prison for the first time, and I was part of that very first service. I went in with some trepidation because I had a distorted view of prison from movies and television. It was nothing like I expected. I found people very much like me, who'd made bad choices ... and been caught. I loved it from the very first visit.

My husband, Dwight, and I went in regularly for many years and made friends with the men there. We prayed with them and for them as they dealt with the daily struggles and disappointments of prison life.

Then, due to prison regulations, we were not permitted to go in for some time. After COVID, Dwight and I reapplied and were again given permission to be inside the walls. After going in a couple of times, we were notified that due to a discrepancy on our application we were denied ... AGAIN!

Following the required yearlong wait, we reapplied and were allowed into the prison. What a JOY that has been! It is such a delight to see how the church on the inside is flourishing. The inmate-led services are so heartfelt and sincere, and we see so much growth. What a reminder that we are only instruments and that the Holy Spirit is doing His work.

We rejoice that God has made a path for us to be back inside and hope to continue His work in the prison for as long as we are able.

We are so BLESSED!