

# CHURCHES WITHOUT PEWS: *Ministry Beyond the Walls*

By John Simmons

**W**hat comes to your mind when you hear the word “chaplain”? Many people associate the word chaplain with the armed forces because our military chaplains have stood with our soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and coastguardsmen throughout our nation’s history. Chaplains have secured religious freedom for the members of the military and brought the message of faith, hope, and encouragement on the battlefield, in the barracks, and to the families of our brave young men and women who defend our liberties day by day.

Nonetheless, chaplains also minister in hospitals, correctional facilities, law enforcement agencies, fire departments, disaster relief organizations, care facilities, professional sports teams, airports, industries, and businesses. Meet several Open Bible chaplains who faithfully share the gospel with people beyond the walls of the church.

## **CH (COL) Timothy Samorajski**

CH (COL) Timothy Samorajski, a chaplain with Vitas Innovative Hospice serving the greater Milwaukee, Wisconsin, area, began his chaplaincy in the army. He received his Army Chaplaincy call in 1983, after his unit was deployed to the National Training Center at Ft. Irwin, California, near Death Valley. “It’s no exaggeration to say that the moon has a more desirable landscape than that place,” he said. Temperatures routinely ran over 100 degrees in the shade.

After training, his unit went back to their base camp – turning in vehicles, cleaning equipment, and generally hanging out until they could board planes for home. They lived in “tent city,” row upon row of pup tents.

The evening before their departure Timothy was in

his tent reading his Bible when he observed groups of soldiers milling around with nothing in particular to do. He came to Matthew 9:36-38 (NASB), where it describes a similar scene: “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.’”

Timothy heard the quiet voice of the Lord say, “How about you? Will you shepherd My sheep?” Thus began a seven-year process that eventually led to ordination and a branch transfer from the Field Artillery to the chaplaincy. There Timothy began his tenure as an Army Reserve Chaplain as a young Captain. He remembers arriving at his first unit and reporting to the Commander, a large man with cold, glaring eyes.

“After offering a smart salute,” Timothy recalls, “I was struck by the fact that he declined to offer me a seat. He looked up from the stack of papers on his desk and simply said, ‘I have no idea what to do with a chaplain, but since you’re here, try and do something useful.’”

The commander returned to the papers on his desk and Timothy concluded that his “interview” was over.

“Despite that frosty greeting, the admonition to go out and ‘do something useful’ was pretty good advice,” said Timothy. “In the 17 years since, I’ve tried to do just that.”

One memory in particular stands out. A few years ago, Timothy learned a soldier from his unit was killed in action in Iraq. The notification officer wanted a chaplain to tag along. With a sense of dread, Timothy agreed. “The experience of walking up the driveway, ringing the bell and seeing the expression of the soldier’s parents when they realized what we were about to tell them is something I’ll never forget,” he said. “Yet, even in that tragic situation, the peace of Christ was just so obvious and comforting.”

## **Rev. David Henderson**

After retiring from a career in the heating and air conditioning temperature control field, and

moving to Tucson, Arizona, in October 2002, Dave Henderson was ready and eager to serve the Lord through country gospel music. God had

other plans. Before Dave and Sharon, his wife, even unpacked, Dave suffered a heart attack. He then underwent open heart surgery and a quadruple bypass. While he

was recovering at Tucson Northwest Medical Center, the visiting chaplain commented that David knew as much or more about the Bible than she did. Dave mentioned he was a pastor, and right there and then God opened the door for him to become a chaplain – in the same hospital in which he had been a patient.

After serving two years at Northwest, Dave was asked to become head chaplain at the new Northwest Medical Center in Oro Valley, northwest of Tucson. Starting out while the hospital was still under construction, Dave gradually built a select staff of more than 20 hospital chaplains. The team now ministers to more than 200 patients every week.

Dave had given his heart to the Lord at Valley Open Bible Church in Spokane, Washington, and studied to become an Open Bible pastor. He graduated from INSTE International (Institute of Theology by Extension) in June 2002, becoming a pastor at age 61.

It is not uncommon for David, wearing cowboy boots and a big silver belt buckle, to pray for a patient and watch him or her get healed. Recently the husband of the hospital’s volunteer services manager was rushed to the emergency room with what was thought to be a heart attack. It turned out it was not, but the medical team did

discover a serious spot on Rick’s lungs. Dave prayed with Rick in the emergency room. When the final tests came back, they could not find anything.

Dave also travels and sings in churches and serves monthly as a chaplain to the Pima County Jail in Tucson.

## **Rev. Dwight Baldwin**

Dwight Baldwin of Fairmont, West Virginia, became involved with hospital chaplaincy 30 years ago as a pastor volunteering in a local hospital. Later, during another bi-vocational pastorate, he was employed as a hospital chaplain and was afforded educational opportunities. His interests and gifts directed him to his current work in hospice care, where he provides spiritual care to 140 patients and their families. His ministry spreads over four counties.

Hospice promotes and maintains quality care for terminally ill persons and their families. Since care is holistic, chaplains are well received. “It is both an honor and humbling to be part of people’s lives at this most sacred time,” Dwight says. “The work is an exciting adventure daily orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. Motivated by the gospel, transported by my Mercury, and directed by God’s Spirit, I’ve at times felt like Philip the Evangelist. I’ve been invited into hallowed hearts as a sacred stranger. Realizing my own need of God’s awesome grace and mercy, I marvel at God’s invitation to serve in this way.

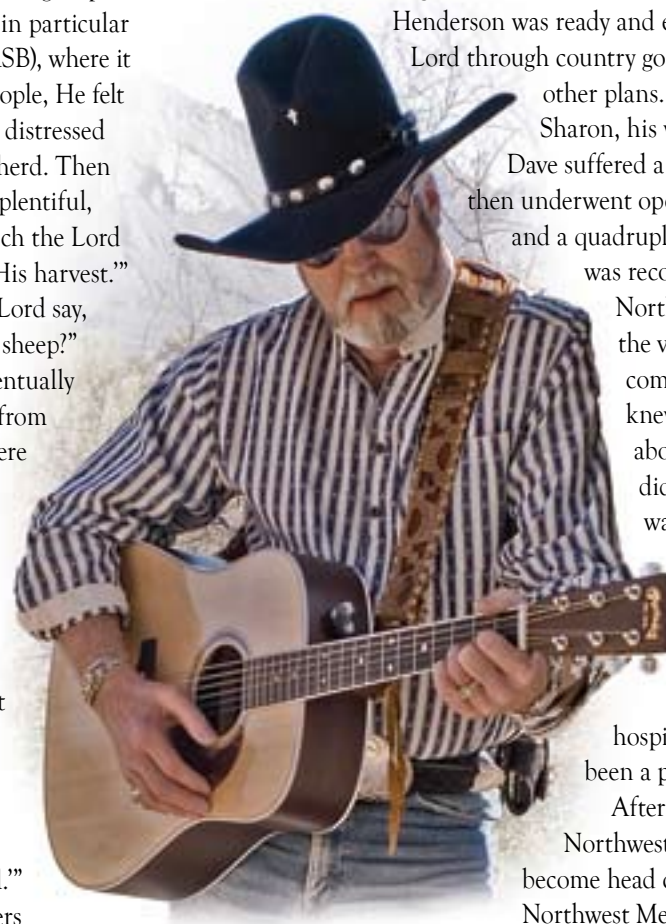
“I have been permitted to share my personal faith with [people of] all faiths, creeds, races, and stations of lives.

To witness heart changes at this point in life is to be aware of God’s heart full of grace and to behold the ultimate miracles: salvation, peace, and assurance.”

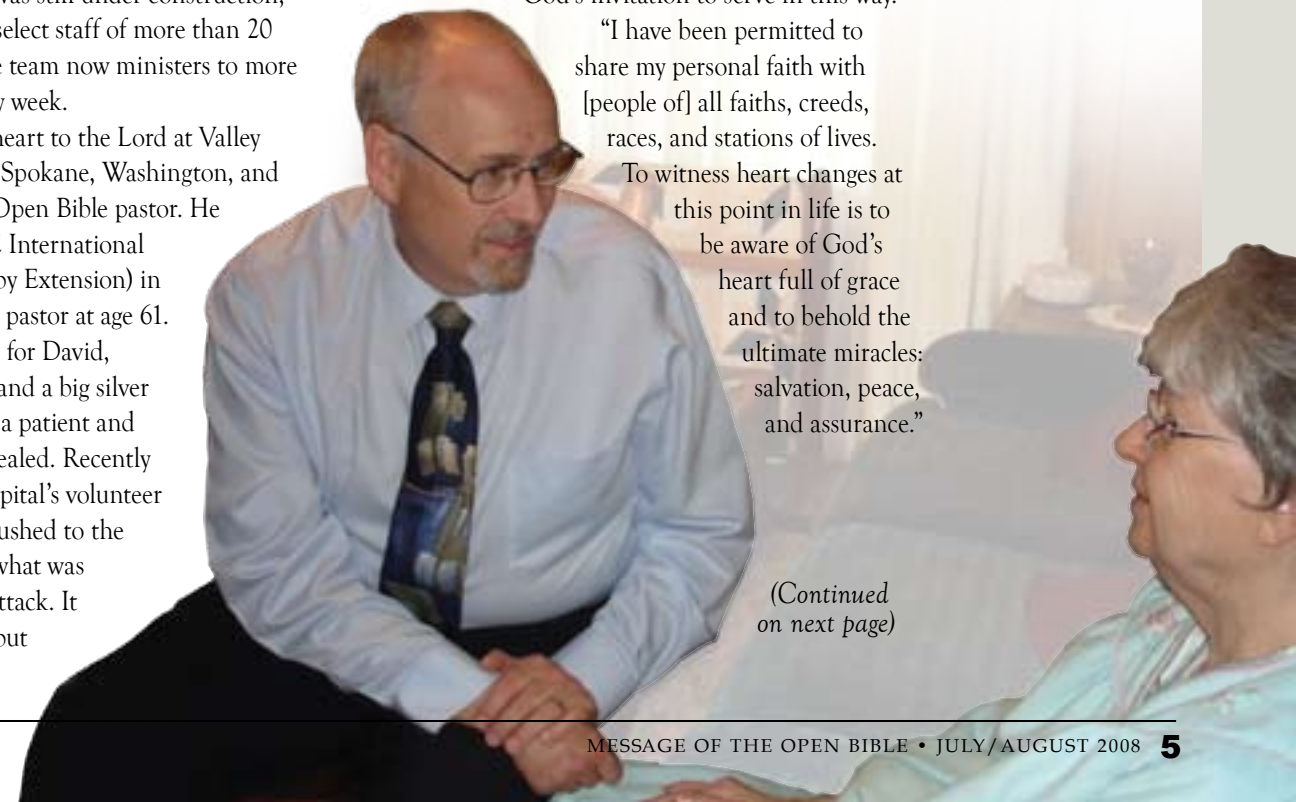
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John Simmons, a retired Air Force Chaplain, is the Director of Chaplain Ministries for Open Bible Churches. He and Nadine, his wife, recently completed a cross-country trip in their RV visiting, praying with, and encouraging many of our Open Bible Chaplains. If you are interested in chaplain ministry, please contact Chaplain Simmons at obc.chap@comcast.net



(Left) Timothy Samorajski  
(Center) Dave Henderson  
(Below) Dwight Baldwin



(Churches Without Pews... continued)

### Rev. Nancy Monfort

Thankfulness for the opportunity to minister is a recurring theme with chaplains. "Each day, I awake with a grateful heart for the ministry God has called me to," says Nancy Monfort, Manager of Interfaith Chaplaincy Services at Sutter Delta Medical Center in Antioch, California. Nancy has worked at Sutter Delta over 30 years, serving the first 22 years in an administrative job.

In the spring of 2000, Nancy was challenged by her pastor at the time, Mark Wood, to begin asking the Lord what He was calling her to do. She notes, "There is a huge difference between seeking the call of God upon your life versus asking God to bless what you think you should do!" She fervently sought God. Through a series of events, God called her to resign her administrative job and opened the door for her to become the hospital chaplain overseeing the chaplaincy services. What a life-changing prayer!

Another INSTE graduate, Nancy and her team of approximately 70 pastors and lay ministers from many denominations work together to provide spiritual care to patients, families, physicians, and staff. Through this ministry, chaplains are available to minister nearly 365 days a year. Besides overseeing and coordinating the volunteer ministry, Nancy primarily ministers to families in crisis – those facing a decision regarding whether or not to remove life support, those whose loved one comes into the emergency department "Code Blue," and loved ones of victims of accidental drowning, suicides, or children's deaths. Most families do not have a local pastor to support them, so Nancy often officiates at funerals for patients and staff members.

Nancy's husband, Robert, faithfully prays for her. "It definitely is not something I do in my own strength," she says. "When God calls you, He equips you. Daily I see God's unconditional love reaching to the lost and many times have the privilege of leading them to the Lord," she said.

### Rev. Jerald Bernhardt

One such person who needed the Lord is Otto. Otto is one of the many reasons Jerry Bernhardt from Des Moines,

Iowa, does what he does. The picture of Jerry and Otto (bottom photo) was taken right after Otto "found his faith again."

"This is real life happening right now," Jerry says. "Job 11:18 tells us, 'You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety.' For many who come to a crisis of faith it can be life changing or very devastating. I know God has placed me where I am for a very specific reason: to show that He loves and cares, and there is hope in Him, even in the most trying of times."

Jerry has ministered in his role as hospital chaplain to the patients, families, and staff at Mercy Medical Center in Des Moines, Iowa, for over 12 years. "I'm proud to be associated with a religious

organization whose mission statement includes a real dedication to the healing ministry of Jesus Christ," he said. "The setting of hospital ministry at Mercy is basically one on one, where we can lead people to a closer walk with Christ."

When one patient's family member asked how Jerry can be around death and grief so much and still have a smile on his face, he said this was one of the most rewarding ministries in which a person could be involved. "I minister to people of all faiths and backgrounds, and see people in crisis. At these times their spiritual needs increase and they look to the chaplain or clergy for a sense of God, peace, and stability. It is awesome to see God work in the hearts and lives of people who are hurting." Jerry has also led some to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and he has seen many find a church home and reconnection with their faith.



### Rev. Timothy Skelly

While health crises can cause life change, incarceration, too, can also cause people to reevaluate their lives. Thus jails are a crucial place for ministry. After Timothy Skelly, senior pastor of Gateway Faith Center in Roseburg, Oregon, served as a chaplain for seven years at the Douglas County Jail, Sheriff Chris Brown asked him if he would be a chaplain for the sheriff's office. There was a catch, however. If Tim were to ride in the squad cars, Brown wanted him fully trained as a back-

up officer, so he needed to go through the Police Reserve Academy.

After much prayer, Tim "went for it" and found he loved it. He graduated from the academy in June 2004. The following October, Tim attended

an extensive Law Enforcement Chaplains Academy and became a licensed chaplain for the Douglas County Sheriff's Office and the local Roseburg Police Department. Later, he stopped working for the sheriff's office and went full time as a police officer while continuing to pastor. Eventually Timothy scaled back and decided to serve as a part-time reserve officer – on call 24-7 as a chaplain for the Roseburg Police Department. He also serves as a part-time criminal justice instructor at Umpqua Community College.

Timothy has experienced unique ministry opportunities out on patrol. He does most of the death notifications for the city and some for the county. The congregation at Gateway loves the arrangement. They have seen several officers come to Christ and been able to pray for situations most of the city knows nothing about. Church members have given food, clothes, cars, jobs, shelter, and other items to people in crisis moments, resulting in several commitments to Christ.

"Our church has become very giving, very community minded, and has a growing passion for the lost – directly or indirectly because of my chaplain work," says Timothy. "If they don't, I just yell 'Taser, Taser, Taser! and send 50,000 volts through their bodies!'"

### Rev. Terry Reilley

Another person who leads his congregation into evangelism by example is Terry Reilley, senior pastor of

Creekside Open Bible Church in Martinez, California. The saying, "Shepherds don't reproduce sheep; sheep reproduce sheep" made biological sense to Terry, but it did not ring true for him theologically, especially when he spoke about being "out there and open to sharing your faith or story." During one of those talks, Terry was the one most convicted. He had no problem telling his story when the opportunity came up; he was just not intentional nor in the marketplace enough to have the opportunity. He explains, "I was a shepherd asking the sheep to reproduce sheep."

"In the past year," he said, "I've asked the Lord to lead me into opportunities that would make me more intentional about being out there in the marketplace. You know – be more like one of the sheep! About three months ago, out of the blue (right!), I was contacted by Marketplace Chaplains U.S.A. to see if I'd be interested in joining their chaplaincy team."

Terry now visits a local engineering firm two to three times a month to meet, greet, and talk with the employees. After his first visit, by the time he returned to his office just a few minutes away, someone had called asking for help in dealing with serious life issues. For the next two weeks Terry worked with this person and shared the love and hope of Christ. Although to date, the person hasn't become a person of faith, ground has been tilled and seeds planted.

Terry has experienced the highs and lows of "out-there marketplace ministry." In the 35 people he meets with, he's met only two who express any ongoing faith experience, but comments, "It's a joy when people warm up and open up to you over time because relationship is being built and trust established." He's also sensed the same feelings others experience in their workplace when they face subtle rejection of those who want to keep the spiritual person at arm's length. "No problem," he responds. "I'm a guest and will continue to pray and give them space while investing in the value of building relationship on their terms."

Revealing his heart, Terry says, "What a joy to be in the marketplace again! You know what? Jesus is the Great Shepherd and His mission was to seek and save the lost. Although I'm privileged to be an under-shepherd to the Great Shepherd, I'm still a sheep in His pasture! My mission, like Jesus', is to be out there!"

*Wherever chaplains serve they are engaged in the exciting ministry of being present with people, of taking the message of Jesus beyond the walls of the church. Here the nearest thing to a pew might be a foxhole, a ship's deck, a slab of cement where a house once stood until disaster hit, a hospital bed, a locker room, a prison cell, or a work station.*



(Above) Nancy Monfort  
(Below) Jerry Bernhardt with his friend, Otto  
(Center) Tim Skelly  
(Far right) Terry Reilley

