

Lee Elkins
June 2018 Report

To the brethren

I hope and pray that this letter finds all of you and yours well. All of your prayers and words of encouragement is appreciated while I continue to do the work of an evangelist here in Monticello. I would like to take this time to tell you about how things are going with the local work and my family.

As indicated in my previous letter, we were approved to be Lauren's sponsors through the Department of Human Services. We are very happy and thankful for being able to be part of Lauren's life for many reasons. She is now able to have somewhat of a normal life for a short amount of time before she goes to college but this will also give her a stable environment to come back to when she has breaks from school because her sister lives in Jasper, Arkansas. We are doing our best in transitioning our family setting with the addition of Lauren. I cannot say that it has been perfect because she is getting used to our schedule of how we do things and the same is true for us regarding her. We are doing our best to be patient while at the same time holding ourselves and her accountable for what is right. We have already been able to accomplish more for her within the past two months than any of her previous placements have combined. The sad reality for children, especially teenagers, within the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is that most, if not all of them are viewed as means for financial gain. Most group homes will take in these children under the premise of providing care and support that will help them function and teach them normal everyday life skills. The reality? None of this occurs. After working in the DCFS and DYS group home setting, I can vouch that many of the kids who leave these types of group home settings are not prepared at all for normal, everyday life. I can also say with certainty that these same kids also do not have access to their social security cards, birth certificates, etc. Which is very problematic. It took us several days to get Lauren a regular State of Arkansas identification card because she did not have a social security card and her birth certificate was in her Vera Lloyd file that they were refusing to give to us. We were finally able to get her birth certificate so that we were able to her a State I.D. We also worked with her so that she could go take her drivers permit test because they did not do that for her either. She is 18 years old just for the record with no family in the area. This may not seem like a big issue but looking at the bigger picture, this was going to be a massive headache for Lauren because she has no family. Once she starts college, she was going to lose her placement at Vera Lloyd here in Monticello and they would no longer be required to take her anywhere since she would no longer be under their care. Just these two things alone should have been taken care of years ago. When we started this entire process of trying to get Lauren to live with us, Vera Lloyd quickly turned on us and began to make things extremely difficult for Lauren. Lauren's caseworkers eventually caught on to what they were doing and began an internal investigation through DHS on Vera Lloyd. This is one of the main reasons why DHS ruled in our favor so quickly because they determined that Vera Lloyd's actions were based upon the premise of them losing funding for keeping Lauren so her best interests were not considered. Only the fact that they were going to lose funding for keeping her was their only motive for fighting the process. This whole situation really opened my eyes regarding children that stay in these group home settings.

In other news regarding our family, things are continuing to go well for us in general. As previously mentioned in my last update, we found out that my wife, Sarah, was pregnant. She has not had any problems and her doctors are very pleased with how things are going so far. She was working part time at a local store called "The Marketplace" but she is now staying at home since she is pregnant and does not need that additional stress on her. Our boys, Logan and Nathaniel, are both doing well. Logan is preparing to go into the 4th grade and Nathaniel will be going into Kindergarten this coming August. At one point, we did have some concerns with Nathaniel regarding his hearing and vision, but everything checked out fine. All his hearing and vision tests were normal. I have been doing very good health wise. I

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have lost about 30 pounds since February and I am continuing to work on trying to lose more weight. Working in the community as a firefighter and evangelist is something that is allowing me to be even more active.

The local work here has been doing good. Since it is summer, we have had some of our members go on vacations but that is very typical during this time of the year. I am still working on the 52-lesson series regarding the Christian's Attitude. The format that we have been using has worked extremely well for us. On Sunday evenings, we can further explore the things that I would preach about that morning. This has helped me in so many ways and it gives some of our men an opportunity to teach as well. It is very encouraging to have some of the other men reach out to ask if they can teach on Sunday evenings to give another perspective on a subject. We also continue to go out to Chapel Woods Rehabilitation Center in Warren, AR on the first Sunday of every month at 2:00pm. We always sing, which is what most of the people enjoy out there, and then we do a short Bible study as well. I recently preached a funeral for one of the members of the church who lived out there. It was sister Evelyn Jennings who began worshipping in Warren for many years. She then lived in Pine Bluff for several years and worshiped at the 28th Ave Church of Christ before moving to Chapel Woods due to her failing health. She would always do her best to attend our singings and studies when we would go out there. I am hoping that I can keep in contact with the rest of her family to encourage them to come back to the local church. Unfortunately, she was the only person who remained faithful in her family as the rest of them had all left the church. I believe her youngest son was the only one who never obeyed the gospel and he took her death very hard. I have been able to talk with some of them after the funeral off and on, but I am praying that they will begin to attend or agree to have a study soon. We finished up our study in 1 Corinthians on Sunday mornings, so we are now in 2 Corinthians and we are almost done with Exodus on Wednesday evenings.

I ask that you all continue to pray for my family and the local work here in Monticello. I am very thankful for all the support that you all have been giving to me. I pray that your efforts continue to go well and that you all continue to grow as we all continue to preach the Gospel.

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